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ABSTRACT

Religion and dance are the foci of the essays in this publication. There are four major sections to the volume. The first section provides an overview of the history of dance and religion. The first essay provides an historical review up to the Middle Ages and describes dance as a "catalyst for religion" during this era. Other essays discuss dance and the Catholic church during the Middle Ages, describe the gradual acceptance of dance, particularly sacred dance, up to the present time, and examine dance among the Plains Indians of America. The second section, "Dance and Organized Religions," contains essays that examine the role of dance in selected religious denominations, including the Mormons, Southern Baptists, and Jewish denominations. The third section discusses the use of dance as spiritual expression and as prayer. For example, one essay describes dance as a spiritual experience with elements of movement, form, rhythm, and meaning. One author humorously examines his return to organized religion through a physically toned and tuned body. The fourth section examines "Dance in Places of Worship." For example, one essay discusses how as the dancer's training goes on, the dancer becomes aware of the perfection of God's creation. Another essay argues that out of this new technique and awareness of purpose; new forms of dance should evolve to better serve the purposes of sacred dance. (RM)

Focus on Dance X: Religion and Dance

edited by Dennis J. Fallon and Mary Jane Wolbers

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Introduction

A study of dance and religion reveals the fundamental nature of humanity, that is, our continual search for beauty, truth, and goodness. Throughout time and through various cultures, we have sought perfection in life and happiness after death through dance and religion. This collection of essays continues that search. Hopefully, this volume will link the past with the present and enable us to understand life's simplicity in the midst of multi-cultural complexity.

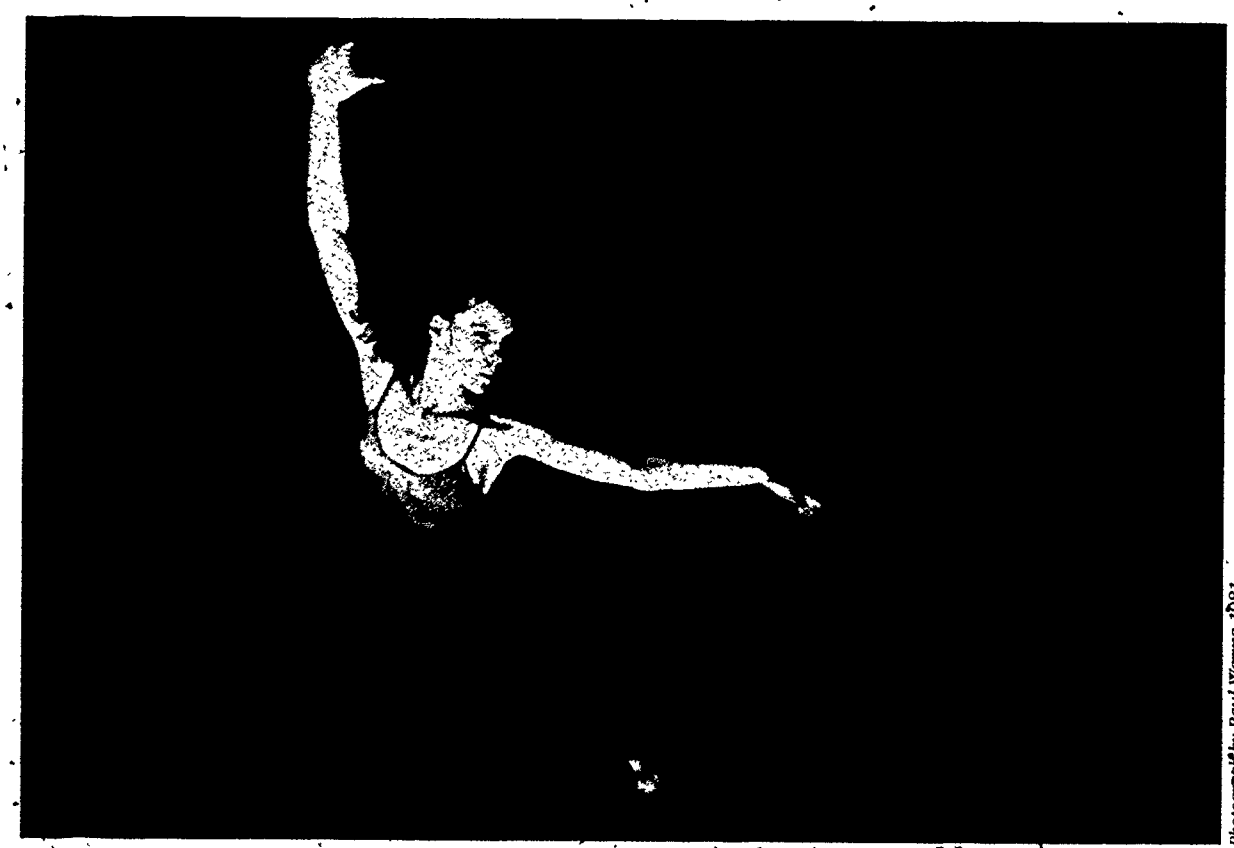
The first section of this volume provides an overview of the history of dance and religion. Chadwick provides a historical review up to the Middle Ages and describes dance as a "catalyst for religion" during this era. Brooks discusses dance and the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages and contends that although the Church condemned dance officially, it actually contributed to the growth of dance in medieval Europe after the tenth century. Schmitz's article describes the gradual acceptance of dance, particularly sacred dance, up to the present time when "we have come almost full circle in the use of dance as a means of religious expression." Smith looks at dance among the Plains Indians of America where much of their culture, enriched and enlivened by dance, has vanished.

The second section of this work, "Dance and Organized Religions," includes several authors who examine the role of dance in selected religious denominations. Fallon's article presents a parallel overview of religion and dance in America and argues that our failure to explore and develop the role of dance in aesthetic education has left society ignorant of our capacity for human experience. Arrington proudly proclaims that the Mormon Church is the "dancingest denomination" which seeks "to develop in the secular as well as the spiritual realm." Thomas presents a historical overview of Southern Baptists' views on dance and suggests that a more moderate view is evolving. Catmull recounts the significance of Jewish dance in religious observances and Ingber offers brief commentary on reviving biblical festivals in Israel. Fr. Coppinger relates several experiences with sacred dance and feels "a new and growing awareness in the Church of the need and ability to pray not only with the lips, but with one's whole being." Rock concludes the section by boldly asking religious people to explain dance theologically.

The third section discusses the use of dance as spiritual expression and as prayer. Herrera and Murphy describe dance as a spiritual experience with elements of movement, form, rhythm, and meaning. Pruett discusses Duncan's aesthetic for the use of dance in religion where man's concept of beauty grew from his understanding of the human body. De Sola declares that "dance draws its strength from the living flow of the universe." Wheeler humorously examines his return to organized religion through a physically toned and tuned body. Adams and Rock examine the modern dance-form as prophetic which reveals some of the truths about ourselves.

The fourth section, the most practical for those who would dance in holy places is concerned with a variety of problems with this presentation. Wolbers questions whether "to dance or not to dance" and feels that by dancing we are proving our humanness. Beach describes her early initiation into dancing in churches but states "dance can effect in the heart and mind some new vision, a vision of moment, a vision that turns us around." Cochran states that as the dancer's training goes on, the dancer becomes aware of the perfection of God's creation. Deitering argues that out of this new technique and awareness of purpose, new forms of dance should evolve to better serve the purposes of sacred dance. Ferguson explains the need of sacred dancers to have adquate training to support their desire for expression in movement. Finally, Shuker explains in great detail the most practical and appropriate ways to use dance within a Catholic Liturgy.

The History of Dance and Religion



Photograph by Paul Wamg 1981

Judith Rock in "Incantation"

1
Dance: an Agent of 'Ekstasis'

Ida F. Chadwick

From a historical perspective, religion must be considered among the most powerful of cultural forces. Every group of people has developed a system of religion. These religions were not always sophisticated but were powerful and suited to each group's knowledge of itself and its world. Throughout the evolution of these religions, from the earliest, and unrecorded, immemorial beginnings of the human race, the religious dance has vividly portrayed the manner in which people have perceived and sought to deal with the mystical and supernatural aspects of their world.

It has been postulated that dance and religion evolved as one entity;[1] recorded history leaves no doubt that the two were united for thousands of years. During this time, the religious dance served many purposes and took many forms. Among the most fascinating and potent of these is the dance that induces the extreme ecstatic state for the performer. Ecstasy may be defined as an "abnormal state of consciousness in which the reaction of the mind to external stimuli is either inhibited or altered in character."[2] In the more restricted sense it is almost equivalent to a trance, but any self-induced excitement may be referred to as a kind of ecstasy.

In all cultures throughout history, human beings have demonstrated an innate tendency to pursue some means of exalting the consciousness above the mundane level of daily existence and experience. The methods used to produce this state of mental rapture are numerous. The drinking of Kava by the Polynesians, the inhalation of tobacco smoke by the North American Indians, the use of hashish by millions of Asiatics and Africans, the use of opium by the Chinese, and the spiraling use of narcotics and hallucinogens in modern cultures, are some of the means used to alter the state of consciousness and to produce pleasurable sensations. Other methods include fasting, flagellation, hypnotism, and dancing. The latter is considered by many to be one of the most pervasive of all. Crawley expressed this view as follows:

> *The powerful neuro-muscular and emotional influence, leading to autointoxication, is the key both to the popularity of dancing in itself and to its employment for special purposes, such as the production of cerebral excitement, vertigo, and various epileptoid results.*[3]

When ecstasy is associated with religion, the state of dissociation is explained by assuming that the soul has established communication with spiritual beings. The soul goes out of the body to the land of the spirits or the spirit takes possession of the soul. This was the literal and primitive meaning of the Greek *ekstasis*.

> *In ekstasis the soul is liberated from the cramping prison of the body, it communes with the god and develops powers of which, in the ordinary life of everyday, thwarted by the body, it knew nothing. Being now a spirit holding communion with the spirits it is able to free itself from Time and see what only the spiritual eye beholds—things separated from it in time and space.*[4]

In every part of the world there are people who regard this ecstatic exaltation as the only true religious act that renders one capable of communicating with the spirits. These people base their religious performances principally upon those means that have proved most capable of inducing this ecstasy. The means most commonly adopted by such people is a "violently excited dance."[5] Sometimes great groups of people attain this state of religious exaltation. The cult of Dionysos, through the "virtiginous whirl of the dance" became possessed by the god.[6] The dervishes of the Orient whirled around in their violent dances until stages of excitement and exaltation were attained. The Shakers of New England danced themselves into trances; God was said to speak through their mouths. The most fascinating of all were the dance manias which broke out in Europe, especially during the Black Death of the fourteenth century. The people were driven by an uncontrollable impulse to dance, and bystanders were irresistibly drawn into their midst. As the malady spread by contagion, great numbers of dancers made their way to various churches where they performed before special saints.

The impulse to unite with a god through *ekstasis* and therefore through the dance has a long and involved history. It is as complicated as man's religious experiences, from the animism and dynamism of primitive people, to the gods of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, and finally to the God of Christianity.

Primitive Peoples

Even though cave drawings and other artifacts have enlightened our understanding of early man, a great deal of the knowledge that we have regarding his way of life is derived from studies of existing primitivistic cultures The studies indicate that his religion has been explained in terms of animism and dynamism. Underlying both these religions is the belief "that conscious volition is the ultimate source of all Force."[7] It is through the ecstasy of the dance that primitive people invoke the supernatural to act according to their will.

Accounts of primitive people's ecstatic dancing comes from all over the globe and is so pervading that a complete account is impossible In the following summary an attempt has been made to relate the purposes and characteristics of such dances and to provide insight into the states of consciousness of those who attain the extreme ecstatic state In describing the role of dance in primitivistic cultures, Sachs provided the following view

> *The dance becomes a sacrificial rite, a charm, a prayer, and a prophetic vision It summons and dispels the forces of nature, heals the sick, links the dead to the chain of their descendants, it assures sustenance, luck in the chase, victory in battle, it blesses the fields and the tribe It is creator, preservor, steward, and guardian* [8]

For whatever purpose the dance is performed, the dance which produces the extreme ecstatic state is generally described as being out of harmony with the body [9] Numerous accounts refer to the movements as frenzied, hysterical, spasmodic, and uncontrolled. They are characterized by extravagant gestures, grimaces, and are extremely vigorous. They require the sustainment of exhausting effort and are continued until the desired ecstatic effect is attained Brown's account of the war dance of the Maoris captures the essence of many of the dances.

> *The Maoris often turned their faces into close imitation of their demon-like carved images But the thrust out tongue, the wild rolling eyes standing out of the head, the fierce grimaces, and the quivering hands and fingers, with the accompaniment of deep drawn cries and the stamp of the foot, had all the advantages of living movement to add to the terrifying effect. It is difficult to efface the deep impression that its massive energy and furious, almost epileptic passion makes on the mind when produced by hundreds. It surpassed in fury anything that Kava or any other drug or fermented liquor could have given to the harmonious movements of a mass of warriors* [10]

Dancers who attain the ecstatic state transcend the human and the physical Spirits possess them and render them capable of feats unknown to ordinary people. They locate sorcerers,[11] receive instructions from the spirits concerning sacrifices and observances of the tribe,[12,13] heal the sick,[14,15,16,17] and propitiate the spirits of the dead, of hunting, fertility, and vegetation.[18,19,20]

The ecstatic state is often accompanied by a loss of sensory perception and extreme modifications of behavior Self-mutilation without evidence of physical pain is not uncommon [21,22,23,24,25] Other behaviors include the drinking of blood,[26] eating foreign matter,[27,28] evidence of vertigo and nausea,[29] exposure of the sex organs,[30,31] and apparent loss of volitional consciousness [32,33,34]

Cruickshank provided the following observation of a novice Fetishman of the Gold Coast of Africa who had attained the ecstatic state through dance.

> *They excite themselves by this exercise into a perfect frenzy, until the Fetish takes possession of them, when they lose all accountability, and toss themselves about wildly, trembling all over, and staggering like a drunken man In frightful convulsions, with eyes rolling, mouth foaming and every indication of total unconsciousness of all around them, they perfectly confirm that they are no longer self-possessed but are under the influence of the Fetish, who guides them whithersoever he will.* [35]

Dances which produce similar results have been observed in primitivistic cultures all over the world As evidenced by their widespread popularity and their longevity, they must be considered among the most powerful and indispensable elements of the religious experience.

Ancient Egypt

Oesterly is of the opinion that the ecstatic dance was unknown to the ancient Egyptians since it is not evidenced on the inscriptions or in Egyptian texts.[36] Yet a brief review of the religious life of these people would indicate that they indeed did know of the ecstatic dance and performed it on certain occasions

The Egyptologist makes no attempt to account for all the peculiarities of the Egyptian religion in one classification and usually discusses the facets of animism, anthropomorphism, and polytheism. Among the greatest Egyptian deities were those manifested by natural phenomena. The sky was the goddess Nut whose arched back was the support; the earth was the god Geb; the sun, Re; the Nile, Hapi.[37] Perhaps the most renowned of the gods was Osiris who was considered the god-king, thus part god and part human He was the god of fertility and also the god of the dead, of resurrection, of the funerary cult, and judge and king of the underworld Each god had his own calendar of days on which feasts and festivals were held in his honor It is in these festivals that there are indications of the use of dance to produce the state of dissociation Among the most famous of these festivals were the Osiris festivals at Abydons. According to legend, Osiris was a good and wise ruler. His brother, Set, became jealous of his popularity, killed him, and cut his body into fourteen parts. Isis, the sister-wife of Osiris, found the parts, reassembled them and enabled the god's resurrection. At the festivals, the death and ensuing resurrection of Osiris were depicted in a Passion Play, in which symbolism, mystery, music, singing, and joyous dancing were

used "to stimulate the deepest religious emotions and fan the flames of ecstatic joy."[38] Although the temple was open to everyone, only the initiated were allowed to take part in the reenactment of the drama. The initiates were assured that their participation would allow them, like Osiris, to be victorious over death and thus to become immortal.

Spence stated that three types of dances were performed at these festivals. The Dance of Lamentation was performed in imitation of the sorrow of Isis, an armed dance by the men had as its purpose the protection of the god from further destruction, a fertility dance by both sexes sought to transfer strength and vitality to the risen god.[39] The movements used in these dances varied from slow, rhythmic movements to those of "abandoned ecstasy."[40]

We are told that the aristocratic Egyptians did not indulge in the amusement of the dance either in private assemblies or in public. However, that they were familiar with the ecstasy of its power is evidenced by the following statements.

> *Fearing lest it (the dance) corrupt the manner of a people naturally lively and fond of gaiety, the Egyptians forbade those of the higher classes to learn it. They dreaded the excitement from such an occupation, the excess of which ruffled and discomposed the mind.*[41]

In contrast to the aristocratic class, the peasants were avid dancers who are thought to have performed fertility rites which included harvest and rain dances.[42] Wilkinson stated that the taste of the dances depended upon the rank of the people performing them and that the dance in the temples differed from that of the uncouth peasantry. He indicated that the latter preferred a lively style and danced with a spirit that was more in the manner of the Europeans than of Eastern people.[43]

China

De Groot stated that animism was the religion of China in the dawn of her history and that animistic beliefs extend into the twentieth century.[44] This animism centers on two classes of spirits: those of natural phenomenon, those of the dead.[45] The basis of Chinese religion is an animated universe. The regulating power of the universe is called Tao, or Order of the World. Tao is composed of two souls, the Yang and the Yin. The Yang represents light, warmth, production, and life, the Yin is darkness, cold, death, and the earth.[46] The Yang and the Yin are divided into good and evil spirits, called shen and kwei, respectively. All that is good in the world is attributed to shen, and all that is bad is caused by kwei. The two classifications of the spirits are engaged in a perpetual struggle with each other. The purpose of Chinese worship is to induce their gods to protect them against the evil spirits, to subdue the kwei and to stimulate the shen.[47] These processes involve a highly developed system of magic in which exorcism played the greatest part.

Exorcising processions are mentioned in Chinese texts from the time of Confucius, and the myths which account for them would indicate that they were prevalent even before that time. The processions, called "no," were sanctioned by the state and had as their objective the averting of disease.[48] Great numbers of people, particularly boys around the ages of eleven to fifteen years, donned devil masks and the masks of gods and spirits, wore brightly colored embroidered coats and dresses, and armed themselves with spears and banners. They would parade through the streets and houses and expel the demons with their noisemaking. The male and female wu, dancing to drums and cymbals, would become possessed by a divinity who would speak through them.

Although the "no" ceased to be a ritual of the State after the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618—907), DeGroot observed that these processions persisted into the current century.[49] The processions were organized by the parish temples. In some parts of the country, the temple god gave orders for the details of the procession through a possessed medium who was ordered to carry his image in the procession. These processions of the people were elaborate and colorful. Hundreds participated in them, and all carried some object to divert the evil spirits. During the course of the procession, a temple god descended into the "wu."

> *The specialists of Wu-ism, who act as seers, soothsayers and exorcists by the power or spirits which possess them, have been observed engaged in processions which are organized in times of epidemic, stripped to the waist, dancing in a frantic or delirious state, covering themselves with blood by means of swords and prick-balls, or with thick needles thrust through their tongues, or being seated or stretched on nail points and rows of sword-edges. On such occasions, they stick daggers into their arms and cheeks and have been seen carrying heavy pewter lamps, fastened by hooks thrust through their arms. By frightening and intimidating the specters by so great a display of divine power, these men support and complete the work of the "sai kong" who move in the same processions.*[50]

The sai-kong were those who had shen or divinity in them. They were by nature frail, nervous, and hysterical and were therefore susceptible to the ecstatic state. Especially at religious festivals these young men would begin to "hop, dance and waddle with wild or drowsy looks and nervous gestures of arms and hands."[51] These acts were an indication that the god or spirit was entering the youths and that they would soon have intercourse with it.

DeGroot's accounts of the processions were based on his observations of these events during his visits to China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[52] More recent accounts are less descriptive, and although dance is cited as an integral element of these rituals, it is unclear if the more extreme ecstatic dance remains.[53,54] The frequent mention of dragon and lion dance teams gives some indication that professional dance has become a feature of the processions and has perhaps replaced some of the more spontaneous and ecstatic dances.

That dance continues to play a role in the diverse Chinese religions is supported by the fact that the Taoist priests must possess skill in the performance of ritual dances [55] This dance skill, along with performance of the mudras, acrobatic tumbling, and the ability to climb a blade-side-up ladder, contributes to the priest's magical powers and thus to the demand for his services This requirement of dance skill might date back to the Emperor Shun (in Chinese chronology, 2258—2208) According to legendary history and folklore, Emperor Shun was the first man to be accredited with making a magical flight in which the soul left the body Eliade stated

> *a perfect sovereign must have the powers of a magician" "Ecstasy" was no less necessary to the founder of a state than his political virtues, for this magical ability was equivalent to an authority, a jurisdiction over nature The step of Yu the Great, Shun's successor, does not differ from the dances that induce trance in sorcerers The ecstatic dance forms part of the procedures for acquiring a power of command over men and nature* [56]

Dance has a long and involved history among the Chinese, but because of the diversity of the social systems, the vastness of the country, and more importantly, the variations of the folk religions, a complete review of dance as it relates to the religious rituals is impossible This problem is compounded by the lack of documentation or the inaccessibility of accurate records

Greece

Homer's Iliad and "Odyssey" and Hesiod's Theogony are important sources of information about Greek religion Homer's epic poems indicate that by 800 B C the Greeks had attained a mature and well-articulated polytheism, and Hesiod added a seemingly inexhaustive list of deities and spirits of nature which demanded and received the allegiance of the god fearing Greeks The evolution of all the gods and goddesses is intricately interwoven in a complicated Greek mythology All of them, according to Hesiod, had a genealogical relationship to one another It was also noted that, as in Egypt, the deities were anthropomorphic

According to Mylonas, the Greeks worshipped the gods of their choosing [57] The favors of the gods were obtained by rather simple ritual acts and sacrifices performed by small family groups Additionally, each Greek state held its own festivals in honor of its most highly esteemed deities [58] Besides the state religion to which every Greek automatically belonged, there were certain religions known as mystery religions These differed in many details from the official religion of the state Membership was personal and voluntary rather than automatic To obtain membership, people had to be willing to undergo specified purifications and initiations and pledge not to reveal the secrets of the rituals The mystery religions were made up of symbolic rites whose aim was to provoke in the initiate a mystic experience which led him to regeneration and redemption, to union with a god It is in these rituals that the ecstatic dance of the Greeks becomes most evident

The most popular of the mystery religions was that of Dionysos which is thought to have originated in Thrace [59] The rites of the Thracian cult were orgiastic in character Rohde's account was as follows

> *The festival was held on mountain tops in the darkness of night amid the flickering and uncertain light of torches The loud and troubled sound of music was heard, the clash of bronze cymbals, the dull thunderous roar of the kettledrums, and through them all penetrated the maddening unison of the deep-toned flute Excited by this wild music the chorus of upshippers dance with shrill crying and jubilation We hear nothing of singing, the violence of the dance left no breath for song These dances were something very different from the measured movement of the dance-step in which Homer's Greeks advanced and turned about in the Paean It was in frantic, whirling, headlong eddies and dance-circles that these inspired companies danced over the mountain slopes They were mostly women who whirled round in these circular dances till the point of exhaustion was reached, they were strangely dressed, they wore bassarai, long flowing garments, as it seems, stitched together out of foxskins, over these were doeskins and they even had horns fixed to their heads Their hair was allowed to float in the wind, they carried snakes sacred to Sabazios in their hands and brandished daggers In this fashion they raged wildly until every sense was wrought to the highest pitch of excitement, and in the sacred frenzy they fell upon the beast selected as their victim and tore their captured prey limb from limb Then with their teeth they seized the bleeding flesh and devoured it raw* [60]

The objective of these festivals was to induce a mystic experience through excessive stimulation of the senses The worshippers became possessed by the divinity and entered into direct communication with the spirit

This ecstatic worship of the Thracian cult bore no resemblance to the Greek religion during the period of the Homeric poems and was probably considered by the Greeks as savage and barbaric Yet the Greeks recognized that in this type of enthusiastic religion there was an element that appealed to the nature of mankind, gradually, though it had to overcome many obstacles, the cult of Dionysos triumphantly spread over both mainland and islands of Greece [61] Here the god became Hellenized and humanized He was considered the god of life and death, of vegetation, of fertility, and during a later period, the god of wine. Although undergoing Greek refinement, the *ekstasis* of the Thracian cult was not lost. In addition to the cheerful daylight festivals of Dionysos in Athens, there remained the old ecstatic rites in which men and women danced over the mountains in nocturnal revelry [62] The drinking of human blood, the eating of raw flesh, and all the signs of outward frenzy and possession came to be regarded as the Hellenic form of the worship of Dionysos

Orphism, another of the mystery religions, made its appearance in the Greek world around 600 B C [63] According to the Orphic myth, Zagreus, who was the son of Zeus and Persephone, was slain by the Titans His body was torn to pieces and devoured Athena rescued his heart, which was then swallowed by Zeus Zagreus was reborn as Dionysos, child of Zeus and Semile The Titans were destroyed by the lightning of Zeus, and the human race evolved from their ashes Thus is derived the dualistic conception of the body and soul Because of the murder committed by the Titans, the Orphics believed that people inherit an original sin from which the divine soul must be freed Although this could be accomplished only by death, it could be temporarily experienced through participation in the mystery which "delivers the soul from its bodily prison and brings it in touch with divine essence" [64] Rohde stated that the Orphics adopted the Dionysiac forms of worship and indicated that Orphic rituals were ecstatic and enthusiastic, although some of the more barbaric acts were eliminated.[65]

> *The great step that Orpheus took was that, while he kept the old Bacchic faith that man might become god, he altered the conception of what god was, and he sought to obtain that godhead by wholly different means The grace he sought was not physical intoxication, but spiritual ecstasy, the means adopted not drunkenness but abstinence and rites of purification* [66]

There is little doubt that the dance was the means employed to attain the spiritual ecstasy to which Rohde referred Macchioro stated that the ancient traditions and writers always connected the dance with the mysteries, and the Orphics themselves believed that the mystery dances were invented by Orpheus. He further stated that "the mystery was nothing but a magic dance," in which the initiates reproduced the deeds of the god and by this means became part of the god [67]

Another of the mystery religions was that of Eleusis. This cult dates back to prehistoric times and was based on the mythology of Demeter, Persephone, and Hades.[68] The earlier rituals were performed to assure abundant harvests. In later times it became a mystery cult with widespread popularity

Rome

The earliest recorded history indicates that the Romans were a simplistic people whose lives centered on agriculture and closely knit family groups Religion was a family affair, directed toward the propitiation of those spirits who were deemed responsible for their welfare. Around the sixth century B C , Roman religion came under the influence of the Etruscans and Greeks Many of the foreign gods were adopted, and during the period beginning with the Republic (about 500 B C), the Roman religion was embellished with mythology, anthropomorphism, temples, and images and statues of the gods The mystery cults of Eleusis, Dionysos, Isis, and Attis and Cybele, aimed at the redemption of the individual rather than the protection of the old kingdoms, provided a new type of religion at a time when there was disillusionment with the old

In comparison with the Greeks, the Romans seemed to have had fewer ecstatic religious experiences This may be attributed to the distrust of religious emotion by the Roman authorities and the regulation of religion by Roman laws and customs Oesterly was of the opinion that, while the ecstatic experience among the Greeks was to bring unity with the gods, among the Romans, it was a matter of sacrificing their blood to the goddess of fertility for the purpose of securing abundant harvests [69] He specifically referred to the festivals held in honor of Attis and Cybele who became divinities of Rome around 204 B C

Cybele, considered the Mother of the Gods, was the Asiatic goddess of fertility. Some consider her to be the virgin mother of Attis, while others say that she was his lover [70] Two accounts are also given concerning the death of Attis One is that he was killed by a boar, and the other is that "he unmanned himself under a pine tree and bled to death "[70] This self-mutilation would account for the castration of his priests upon entering the service of the goddess

The main festival of Cybele and Attis was celebrated in March The third day of this festival was known as the Day of Blood, the Archigallas or high priest stabbed his arms and presented his blood as an offering to the divinities, as did other members of the clergy.

> *Stirred by the wild barbaric music of clashing cymbals, rumbling drums, droning horns, and screaming flutes, the inferior clergy whirled about in the dance with waggling heads and streaming hair, until, rapt in a frenzy of excitement, and insensible to pain, they gashed their bodies with potsherds or slashed them with knives in order to bespatter the altar and the sacred tree with their flowing blood* [71]

This alien religion gradually increased its popularity in the Roman world and was incorporated into the established religion of Rome by Emperor Claudius Its powerful and rapturous excitation of the emotions must have been very appealing since the festivals survived until the fourth century of this era.[72]

Another goddess whom the Romans worshipped in ecstatic rites was Atargatis These rites were much like those of Cybele and Attis in that "men danced themselves into a frenzy and then lacerated and mutilated themselves unsparingly."[73]

Among the gods who were indigenous to Rome and who survived the influx of foreign gods were Mars, generally considered the Roman god of war, and Saturn, the god of sowing and harvest This survival stresses the importance that the Romans placed on military virtues and their longstanding devotion to the gods and spirits of agriculture and family

Both Mars and Saturn had dancing-priests called Salii The sacred processions of the Salii in honor of Mars took place in March and October and lasted for as long as three weeks

Headed by trumpeters and dressed in full battle apparel, they marched through the city, at all the altars and temples they halted, and solemnly danced the war dance in three measures, singing at the same time [74]

Frazer stated that the Salii also danced to invoke Saturn

As the Romans sowed the corn both in spring and autumn, and as down to the present time in Europe superstitious rustics are wont to dance and leap high in spring for the purpose of making the crops grow high, we may conjecture that the leaps and dances performed by the Salii, the priests of the old Italian god of vegetation, were similarly supposed to quicken the growth of the corn by homeopathic or imitative magic [75]

The worship of Saturn and Mars and the rituals of the Salii remained popular well into the era of Christianity. The Salii were not only to be found in Rome. Similar groups of the dancing priests existed in many cities of ancient Italy. The superstitious rustics to which Frazer referred were to be found all over the country, dancing for their gods in the pursuit of health, fertility, protection, and abundance.

The Christian Church

In order to conclude the rule of the ecstatic dance as an indispensable element of the religions of the European world, it is necessary to trace its history into the era of Christianity. It is here that its power was to be reckoned with by the Church leaders.

When Christianity was introduced into the Greco-Roman world, it was confronted with the problems of how to contend with and triumph over the religious beliefs and customs that were deeply rooted in the history of the masses of people. The mystery religions were flourishing, and people had grown to expect and demand the dramatic and mystical rituals which offered the ecstatic experience of union with the deity. Their worship of lesser gods, goddesses, and spirits was less ecstatic, but the frequent rituals, festivals, and processions held in their honor were considered essential for everyday needs and protection. It was in this atmosphere that the Church Fathers sought to convert the masses to Christianity. The methods chosen to contend with these existing religions were: synthesis; violent opposition.

In the first century after Christ, becoming a member of the Christian Church was a relatively simple matter. Membership was available to those who would express belief in the basic creed. Consequently, converts entered the Church with little or no real knowledge of its doctrines and, more importantly, without relinquishing their allegiance to their old gods and their faith in their old rituals [76]. The extent to which the conversions occurred is evidenced in Acts 2:41 where it is stated that about 3,000 people were baptized in one day.

With the realization that the converts would not subscribe to a religion without rituals, the Church began to include in its services some of the ritualistic elements with which the pagans were accustomed. A speech of Clement of Alexandria (150—216) indicated that the ritualism of the mystery religions had penetrated Christianity.

I will show you the Word and the mysteries of the Word and describe them for you as an image of your own fate. This is the mountain beloved of God. On it rejoice God's daughters, the most beautiful lambs, which reveal the reverent festivals of the Word to the accompaniment of constantly repeated choral dancing. By righteousness man may take part in them. Whilst torches are borne before me I perceive the heavens and God. I am led into the service of God. Thou, also, if thou wishest, mayest let thyself be led. Then shalt thou dance in a rug, together with the angels [77]

These words leave no doubt that dancing occurred when the mysteries of the Church were revealed to the novitiates. There is also evidence that, in the second century, children's choruses played musical instruments, sang, and danced as a part of the services and that the people danced at the end of prayer as well as in connection with baptism.

These attempts at appeasement were not totally satisfactory, and the intense and spontaneous faith of the people posed numerous problems for the leaders of the Church and often caused the theologians a great deal of embarrassment. It was frequently necessary to admonish the people and remind them that the Church dance was a blessed dance. However, the pagans were not inclined to relinquish their old ways, and their enthusiasm for their dance often caused them to disregard the admonishments of the Church. Typical of the descriptions of their dancing is the one of Basileios (344—407) who condemned the dance at the celebration of the Resurrection.

Casting aside the yoke of service under Christ and the veil of virtue from their heads, despising God and His angels, they (the women) shamelessly attract the attention of every man. With unkempt hair, clothed in bodices and hopping about, they dance with lustful eyes and loud laughter, as if seized by a kind of frenzy they excite the lusts of youths. They execute ringdances in the churches of the Martyrs and at their graves instead of in the public buildings, transforming the Holy places into the scene of their lewdness. With harlots songs they pollute the air and sully the degraded earth with their feet in shameful postures [78]

Approximately a hundred years later, Caesarius (470—542) declared that dances before the churches of the saints were a relic of paganism. He stated.

There are especially unfortunate and miserable people who do not fear or blush to execute dances and hop before the churches of the saints, and although they come to church as Christians, they return as heathens. [79]

The dance came under more severe condemnation with the beginning of the sixth century, and from that time on prohibitions of the dance multiplied. There are several factors which may have contributed to the cause of these prohibitions and to the necessity of their longevity.

The early Christians had lived with the expectation of the return of Christ and the conviction that the world might end at any moment. When these were not realized, there was an ensuing lapse into the seeking of satisfaction of physical needs. This caused the Church to intensify its conviction that the physical body was the source of all moral and spiritual problems. The world-rejecting aspects of Christianity were underscored, and a strong and fanatical distrust of the body was encouraged. The writings of the Church authorities on the dance during this period indicated that dance was thought to contribute to the abnormal intensification and to the fulfillment of the sensuous in mankind. Those who danced were threatened with excommunication, and a common confessional question was "Have you danced and hopped, as the Devil taught the pagans to do?"[80]

Another reason for the increase in prohibitions against dance was the dance "mania" as revealed in the dance epidemics of the Middle Ages. At no other time in history has the power of the dance been more profoundly demonstrated than in these epidemics. With few exceptions, the dances were performed in the churchyards during the festivals of various saints, despite the commands from the Church authorities, the dancers were either unwilling or unable to cease their dancing. Especially during the fourteenth century when the Black Death swept over Europe, the dance epidemics reach an intensity that rendered the ecclesiastical councils helpless in their opposition to them.[81] Outbursts of these dance epidemics occurred as late as the seventeenth century.

Backman's descriptions of the dances of the epidemics bear a marked resemblance to those of the mystery religions and other primitive rituals. The dancers were accused of being possessed (by the devil rather than by the god), they danced in order to be healed and protected and to cast out demons, they sometimes demonstrated masochistic behavior, and some danced themselves to death. The dances were accompanied by songs, the music of drums, and all the outward frenzy of the old ecstatic rites.

Further historical study of dance and religion would include such medieval highlights as the "Festival of Fools," the Children's Festivals, and the Bergerette. These and various other Church dances continued to be performed throughout the Middle Ages in European countries. The dances of the clergy were eventually unable to withstand the repression by the authorities, but the dance of the people endured until after the Reformation.

Afterword

The ecstatic dance is a religious phenomenon that has contributed immensely to the brilliant and fascinating history of dance. Although it is only one small thread of the totality of dance and religion, it provides an excellent medium for establishing the very powerful and enduring role of dance in the evolvement and expression of religious beliefs throughout the world.

The most amazing aspect of the ecstatic dance is its ability to endure despite the numerous antagonistic forces it has incurred, especially since the advent of Christianity. Since the beginning of beliefs in spiritual beings, primitivistic cultures have embraced the religious dance. Today, many of these cultures remain as they were thousands of years ago, unaware of the God of Christianity and steadfast in their belief in the power of dance. In the very ancient country of China, the processions that date back to Confucius, are still performed today, and they seemingly have lost none of their magical overtones. The mystery religions of the early Greeks and Romans endured hundreds of years of condemnation by Church authorities, even though the old gods and their ecstatic festivals were eventually abandoned, masses of the European people did not relinquish their dance. The manias of the Middle Ages covered a span of nearly one thousand years, and historians consider the great dance epidemics to be one of the most fascinating psychological and religious phenomena of modern history.

The ecstatic dance did not end with the Middle Ages, as evidenced by the dance of the whirling dervishes of the East, the Khlysty of Russia, the Shakers who came to America from England during the latter half of the eighteenth century, and various other sects such as the Holy Rollers. However, under the curious and critical eyes of onlookers and Church authorities, the old abandoned ecstasy that characterized the rituals of these more modern sects eventually disappeared.

Today, the once ecstatic, powerful, and indispensable dance is rarely witnessed in the religions of modern cultures. Despite attempts to revive the religious dance, this form of worship remains on the perimeter of Christian worship. When it is included, one feels that something is missing. Viewed in the light of dance history, that something must be that only a fragment of the ecstatic element, the becoming one with God through the dance, remains.

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2

The Catholic Church and Dance in the Middle Ages

Lynn Matluck Brooks

The course of the history of theater and dance was shaped and colored by the philosophy, laws, and rituals of the Christian Church Although many historians tend to recognize only the restrictive influence of the Church on dance, a closer look at these secondary sources themselves, with support from primary sources, reveals that the Church actually created a context for new flowerings of social, theater, and religious dance.

Philosophical Influences

Christianity was subjected to all the prevailing religious influences of the messianic period, among them Judaism Old Testament aspersions on dance, e.g., the legend of Moses and the Golden Calf, and Isaiah's condemnation of women "mincing . . . and tinkling with their feet" (Isaiah, 3:5), were echoed in such New Testament stories as Salome's supposedly lewd dancing before Herod St. Paul, a converted Jew who espoused a particularly severe doctrine of the sins of the flesh, attempted to root out such sects as the Gnostics, who had an apocryphal text in which Christ leads his disciples in dance.

The pervasive Greek influence on Christianity which began with Aristotle and Plato led eventually to the Christian duality between spirit and flesh and good and evil.[1] According to Taylor, Neo-Platonism, which developed in Egypt circa 270 A D, further inflated the theme of the evils of the senses as opposed to the loftiness of the mind.[2] Later contributions of Neo-Platonism to Christianity included an expanded interest in the spirits and magic of popular superstition.

The moral decay of Rome itself was such that Christians sought to purify it by expunging all traces of paganism, such as existed in the theater.[3] The Roman Empire officially adopted Christianity in 378 A D but as early as 300, the Church refused baptism to entertainers and by 398 threatened to excommunicate any Christian attending the theater on a holy day In the 5th century, a monk was killed trying to halt a gladiatorial contest, and from that point on, the Church's suppression on theater was unremitting. No recorded dramas survived and only itinerant entertainers continued the performing tradition

The great early Church fathers, St. Jerome, Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville, and St Augustine, vigorously preached against the theater.[4] Infusing Platonic and Neo-Platonic dualism with an overwhelming sense of sin, they furthered the degradation of the body and influenced the entire medieval period in this respect

Ascetic trends appeared early in Church history and continually cropped up throughout the Middle Ages. The proponents of these trends condemned wealth and luxury and preached celibacy, vegetarianism, fasting, self-mortification, and iconoclasm Although these sects were at first persecuted by the Church, their beliefs had popular appeal and eventually affected official Catholic doctrine Martyrdom or severe austerities became a prerequisite for sainthood.[5] Devoted men and women found such ingenious means of battling the flesh as wearing scratchy horsehair shirts, standing barefoot in ice, and sleeping on cold stone floors In a religious ambience of this nature, such pleasures as dance and other entertainments were hardly encouraged.

The fall of Rome in 476 A.D left Europe without a centralized power The Church stepped in to become the only arbiter of morality, law, education, and social structure The Roman belief in the authority of institutions above that of individuals lent to the Church an added element of strength

The Clergy Condemn Dance

According to Coulton, medieval theologians were nearly unanimous in their condemnation of dancing as immoral.[6] The devil himself is accused of being the "inventor and disposer of dances and dancers" and those who dance are seen to have "the devil's bell" bound to their necks.

The devil is the most famous medieval dancer, playing the role of the lively, acrobatic, lewd trickster in popular entertainments. Clerics decried the fact that dancing took place on pilgrimages, in cemeteries, churches, taverns, castles, and town squares. Many texts record the stories circulated by clerics of God's wrath at dancers: He cut off their feet, condemned them to dance until they died of exhaustion, rooted them to their dancing ground, or set them aflame.

Bishop Durand of Mende (circa 1311) complained that the holy days saw the most abuse, with people seeming to care more "for songs, jests, dances, capperings, or foul and unhonest chants" than for divine sentiments.[7] "Noxious

games and vanities making the house of mourning and funeral prayer into a house of laughter and excess" were bewailed by the Bishop of York [8]

Ordinances against fools and minstrels attempted to destroy these evil influences but were rarely enforced Even miracle plays, based on Christian themes, were said to "delighten men bodily" and so to hasten damnation [9] The Church also denounced tournaments and associated festivities, especially women who disguised themselves during the parades According to Henry Knighton, a fourteenth-century commentator, these women rode along "debasing their bodies with folly and scurrilous wantonness He further noted that God showed his disapproval of these practices by visiting the tournaments with thunder and lightning [10] Dance, masking, and miming were clearly seen as the devil's work, and much to the Church's chagrin, his following was legion

The Trend to Humanism

After the fall of Rome, there followed about four centuries of warfare, invasions of Christian lands by barbarians or barbarian lands by Christians, and intense missionary activity that eventually spread Christianity throughout Europe. There was little time or encouragement for original thinking as the Church struggled against schisms and heresies in an effort to metamorphose its newly-converted populations into a cohesive Christian unit Education depended on the writings of early Church fathers and on Latin translations of Aristotle and Plato Since the Church maintained the only schools in existence in the Middle Ages, as Taylor has noted, it is much to its credit that education in the Greek and Roman classics was continued.

By the eleventh century, the Church had consolidated its power and established its supremacy in Europe. The passing of the Millenium relieved the medieval fear of Doomsday and allowed for a spirit of confidence in life. A coalescing of the antique and Christian cultures ensued, leading to the growth of humanism in Western Europe.

The renewed vigor of the human spirit also led to an increased religious emotionality, exemplified by such men as St. Bernard and St. Francis of Assisi. Their personal letters reflect their love for humanity, their religious warmth, and their personal interest in life. A new concern for popular education, exemplified by the use of the vernacular in texts, developed. A stress on such romantic elements of religion as love for God and man was paralleled by a secular interest in the courtly ideals of love As well as allowing for economic expansion, the Crusades (1100—1300) brought to Europe Moorish and Oriental influences in art. This secularization of interests and the flow of money into hands other than those of the Church, freed resources for investment in popular entertainments.

The Church Contributes to Dance

Although the Mass is a worship-centered rather than entertainment-centered ritual, it contains the seeds of dramatic elements, e g , the singing of the Mass, the elevation and consecration of the host, processions of clergy to the altar, antiphonal chanting resembling dialogue, the "plot" or story of sacred history, the often colorful costumes of the clergy, and the church's architecture which created a stage/audience separation. These features, while not constituting drama themselves, served as focal points for dramatic developments

Arius, a 4th-century Alexandrian priest, proposed an overtly dramatic interpretation of the liturgy which included hymns, pantomime, and dance [11] His work was considered heretical and was suppressed by the Church According to Bevington, a Spanish noblewoman of the 4th century reported witnessing a Palm Sunday procession in Jerusalem which used the actual locations of Christ's passion and resurrection in a dramatic presentation.[12] The Easter week liturgy was generally the first portion of sacred history to receive theatrical form, being dramatically interpreted in Europe as early as the 7th century, according to Kirstein [13]

Amalarius (780—850), Bishop of Metz, urged exploiting the dramatic potential of the Mass through dialogue and gesture [14] Clergy enacted roles of figures in Christ's life, and the altar served as a tomb, a table, or some other religious prop. Despite its tremendous popularity, this dramatic Mass raised the ire of the Church because of its exaggerated emotion and use of movement.

Many texts on medieval dance or drama[15,16,17] include the unusual story of the German nun, Hrotsvitha, who found a copy of the plays of Terence in her convent library at Gandersheim Her abbess was of Byzantine background, where theater had flourished far longer than it had in the West, and from these two sources, the volume of Terence and the stories of her abbess, Hrotsvitha was inspired to write six dramas based on New Testament themes. It was not until about two hundred years later, however, that medieval theater had developed to the point where her plays could be performed.

There were isolated instances of sacred dancing in the middle ages within the Church itself: in 7th-century England under the Abbot Meletius; in Paris under the senior canon and choristers; in Seville and Toledo with the performances of Los Seises. The Regularis Concordia, presented after Matins on Easter morning in England circa 965—975, showed consciousness of such dramatic elements as the clergy's costume and movements, the possibility of portraying emotions and using props, and antiphonal dialogue

Honorius of Autun, in his Genima Animae (circa 1100) wrote in support of the Mass as a theatrical presentation, referring to the celebrant as a "tragedian" and to the church as a "theater."[18] Texts from the eleventh and twelfth centuries reveal an increased use of dramatic presentation in church at such peak points of the year as Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, and the Feast of the Innocents While many of these texts were extra-liturgical, all had religious themes. "The Holy Resurrection," presented in England, and "Adam," of English or French origin, each made use of scenery, characterization, stage and move-

ment direction, and emotional, portrayal. "The Play of Daniel" from Beauvais, France, calls for eight processionals, music, and even "ritual dancing."[19]

Beginning in the twelfth century there was an extensive use of Saints Plays, also known as Miracle Plays. These displayed a romantic, even sensationalist, slant, and were performed in the vernacular outside of the church building itself in an area established as a theater-in-the-round. More and more, in the reading of these plays, directions for movement and emotional expression were included in the texts.

English craft guilds, with Church support, presented the famous Corpus Christi Cycle of plays from 1378 to the sixteenth century. Also called Mystery Plays, these plays were performed two months after Easter and involved pageantry, Bible stories, and legends of miracles. Actors were often paid, minstrels were employed, and elements of farce and comedy were included. The increasing independence of drama from Church liturgy and control was becoming clearly evident.

In the late fourteenth century, the Morality Play developed, a theatrical genre wholly outside of the Church itself. These plays told the story of a single Christian life in allegorical terms, based on the conflict between good and evil. The devilish figures once again contributed humor, slapstick, and satire, with the Church itself often the butt of their mimicry. Official doctrine condemned these dramas in the Middle Ages, although Bevington notes that by the time of the Reformation, conflicting religious factions propagandized by means of the Morality Plays.[20]

Aside from these dramatic works, other instances of dance associated with the Christian Church attest to the growing freedom with which dance was regarded in the later Middle Ages. Sachs records a French legend of about 1200, "Del Tubleor Nostre Dame," which tells of an old minstrel who could no longer sing.[21] In order to pay homage to the Virgin, he danced, (skipping, running, and jumping) until he fell down from exhaustion. Pilgrims often hired musicians to accompany them on their journeys and to sing and play as they passed through towns. Even holy people danced by the 13th century. Mechthild of Magdeburg wrote an allegory of the Soul and God in which the Soul "strives to follow in festal dance the example of the prophets, the chaste humility of the Virgin ... Then comes the Youth and says, 'Maiden thou hast danced holily, even as my saints'"[22] A French nun was described by Jacques de Vitry as being "seized with ecstacy five-and-twenty times a day, in which state she was motionless, and on returning to herself was so enraptured that she could not keep from displaying her inner joy with movements of the body, like David leaping before the Ark."[23]

Less virtuous associations of the Church with dance include records of payments by convents to minstrels, despite the prohibitions of Church authorities against "luting and dancing" among nuns and friars.[24] More wanton clergy even confessed to leading the dances at parties or weddings.[25] With or without Church sanction, by the last Middle Ages, dance was clearly beginning to flourish.

Medieval Dance Survives

Pagan influences on religion and superstition continued throughout the Middle Ages. Cutts records one abuse of Christian worship in Scotland, where a priest led his parishioners in a dance around a Priapus idol.[26] Such pagan feasts as the Floralia, the Saturnalia, and Halloween became transformed by the Church into Easter, Christmas, and All Soul's Eve. Curt Sachs claimed that the juggler's acts were "profanations of old religious dances," and that popular folk dances, such as caroles and morrises, continued pre-Christian themes of courtship and revels.[27] Dancing in the churchyards, the sources of many a cleric's tirades and warnings, was another pagan-influenced practice. Cults of the dead, evident in so many pre-Christian cultures, were not easily suppressed by the Church and the allure of the graveyard continued in full force during much of the Middle Ages.

A manifestation of the continued appeal of cults of the dead was the Dance of Death, which was originally represented only in poems and pictures. The concept of death as the great leveller, the destroyer of social and economic imbalances, was tremendously popular. After the Black Death in the mid-thirteenth century, there was an upsurge of the Dance of Death, with grotesque parodies of funerals and frenzied dance outbursts such as the famous St. Vitus' dance and its Italian version, tarantism. These danseomanias as they were called, erupted periodically throughout the Middle Ages in all parts of Europe, as early as 750 A.D. and continuing through to the seventeenth century. Frequently, the manias took the form of masses of people dancing frenziedly from town to town, begging food and money, and sweeping up new recruits as they went. In 1260, flagellants appeared in Germany and Italy. Seized with the compulsion to expiate their sins, processions of repentants travelled through Europe making public displays of whipping, scourging, and other mortifications of the flesh. These manias were targets of the Inquisition, although their persistence throughout the Middle Ages attests to the futility of any attempts at suppressing them.

There was a lighter side to medieval dance and the minstrels and jesters provide good examples. Minstrels, travelling entertainers who sang, danced, played instruments, and recited verses, were often of noble birth and were popular at fairs, inns, and castles. In the late Middle Ages even the Church employed minstrels, who after playing at the Mass would step right out of the chapel and into the dance hall.[28] Clergy patronized minstrels for their own entertainment and for celebrating holy days. In the mid-thirteenth century, court jesters appeared, enlivening the castles with their dance, games, songs, and wit.

Conclusion

The early Middle Ages were a time less concerned with the arts and education than with political struggles, warfare, economic survival, culture clashes, and the spread of Christianity. The overwhelmingly negative attitude of the Church toward the human body and to earthly pleasures

brought about the decay of theater and the widespread condemnation of any sort of dance during the period from 400— 1000 A.D , despite the clandestine activity of certain clergy and itinerant entertainers.

By the tenth century however, Christianity had finally established a strong political, cultural, and moral domain. Through Church influence and investment, classical education and the arts once again began to flourish, leading to the small bloom of twelfth century humanism, and then to the great flowering of the Renaissance, when ballet was born. The Church's attitude toward dance, although *officially* and sometimes in practice negative, can actually be seen to have contributed to the growth and encouragement of later medieval European dance, as evidenced in the development of liturgical dramas and the evolution of social and professional dance forms.

If we are to believe the secondary sources, supplementing our inquiry with direct references to the writings of medieval commentators, then a revision of our view of the Catholic Church and dance is in order For it appears that, perhaps much to its own surprise, the Church became the foundation from which European theatrical dance forms were built. This view awaits further validation through a more thorough study of the primary sources themselves.

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3

Who Dances Not Knows Not the Way of Life: the Changing Relationships of Dance and Religion

Nancy Brooks Schmitz

Western civilization's relationship with sacred dance has changed with the evolving theology of Christianity and its interpretation of Biblical sources. The first five centuries of Christianity firmly established ritual church dance as a way of expressing joy, a way of salvation, and a way of praise. The most common acceptable form of sacred dance was in imitation of the angels although other forms did exist. Early Christian dance served as a living experience of the mysteries of the faith and of the joy involved in its revelations. However, the period in Church history between the sixth and fifteenth century was marked by ambivalent attitudes toward sacred dance and dance in general. This ambivalence survived into the religious traditions of modern times. It is only within the twentieth century that dance has begun once again to find an acceptable and welcome entry into religious worship.

In the fifth century, dance and theatre in Rome had degenerated to a spectacle of brutality and eroticism. Early Christians having suffered under these Roman excesses condemned the Roman way of life. Because dance was an integral part of Roman life, dance as a spectacular entertainment was condemned by the Church fathers.

The Church became the only power that remained unaffected by the collapse of the Roman Empire, by the ensuing loss of faith in the existing institutions and cultural traditions, and by the loss of hope in life. Therefore, it was Christianity that became the revolutionary force in European civilization. G. G. Coulton stated that it was Christianity which took more men out of themselves, and took them farther than any other recorded event in Western history.[1] By whatever process, Christianity fused into one single wire the main strands of pre-existing thought. Roman State Religion; Philosophy; Judaism; the Oriental Cults. From the first it took its impressing ceremony and system of government, from the second, higher speculation, from the Jews their monotheism, and from the Cults their mystic exaltation.

As the Church's authority grew as a spiritual leader, teacher, and lawgiver to the West, it started to regulate all forms of activity. This included legislation on dance. This legislation first concentrated on theatrical dance and religious dances which had degenerated or which had become excessive.

Sacred dance was a form of expression that the people appreciated and needed. It also served as a way of enticing pagans into Christianity. The motifs of pagan dance were often so similar to Christian sacred dance that only new symbolism needed to be associated. Also, the early Christian missionaries won converts of the pagans readily when they incorporated the established worship forms of the pagans, including their dance, into the Christian worship. Lewis Spence writes that:

> *When a religious system is suppressed and another takes its place and official status, the customs associated with the older faith are not easily discarded by the folk. The sanction of tradition keeps them alive. The Church might thunder at the peasant or appeal to him to desist from the practice of his antique pagan rites. But the peasant was taking no risks. He had a lively dread of the elder gods and no mind to offend them.*[2]

Often old rites were secretly maintained, the time inevitably arrived when the origin and meaning of the ritual were completely forgotten by the people whose ancestors had celebrated them. Once the significance of a custom was lost, its progress and development discontinued. Therefore, the observance of the custom became merely mechanical or misunderstood as being an amusement or pastime.

Two different sacred dance traditions developed during the Middle Ages in the Christian Church. The first sacred dance tradition was a dance performed by the clergy as part of the service. The second tradition of sacred dance developed was connected with church ceremonies or festivals. In this tradition, the dances were performed by the congregation with approval and guidance of the church. These were known as popular sacred dance.

Movement was ritualized in the sacred dance performed by the clergy. In most cases the dances were performed in conjunction with saints' days, Christmas, or Easter. These dances either followed processional form or round dance form. The movements were symbolic of the theology of the church. The congregation were merely spectators of a ritual act.

During this particular period, the Mass developed. The Mass actually was a disciplined sacred dance. There were

definite movements and postures for the participants This was especially true for those active in moving the ritual articles, such as the candles, books, or censors Margaret Fisk cites the *Catholic Encyclopedic Dictionary* as the source for a statement concerning dance. "Some of the movements of the ministers in sacred ceremonies such as celebrant, deacon and sub-deacon at High Mass are in the nature of a formal dance."[3] Other sources find the Mass similar to David's dance before the Ark, performed in slow motion.

The second tradition of sacred dance was also performed most often in processional form, however, round dances were also popular. Dances usually took place not only in the church, but in the churchyard and surrounding countryside as well These dances took place during religious festivals, saint's days, weddings, or funerals. This type of sacred dance became difficult for the church to regulate since its popularity was so great. Because of the nature of the dances and the occasions upon which they were performed, the dancers were often spontaneous in their movements. The very nature of the dances such as the rhythmic stamping and hopping steps often caused an uncontrollable ecstasy. These dances were also accompanied by feasting and drinking. Probably all of this contributed to the excesses frowned upon by the Church.

Prohibitions against religious dance intensified during the sixth century. But while the church hierarchy issued edicts against dance, the priests and monks were reluctant to enforce them. This was probably because the writings of the Church fathers were the principal object of study in the monasteries and in the training and education for the priesthood. Since the Church fathers had often written of the meaning of sacred dance, and had not opposed it, the priests and monks could not concur with the prohibitions. Therefore, in most cases they continued to ignore the edicts.

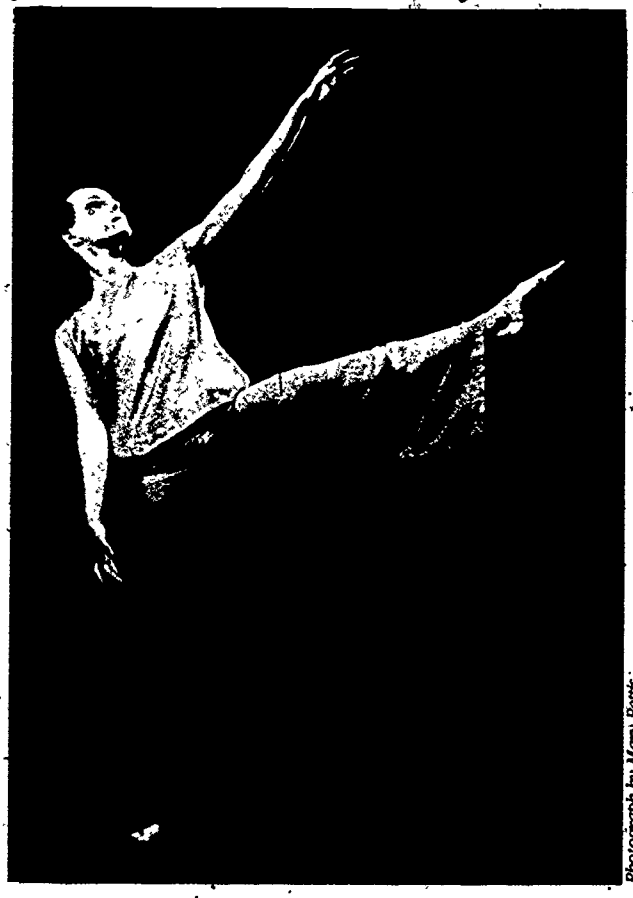
At first these edicts were aimed at controlling excesses during the dance festivities or at dancing taking place at inappropriate times. During the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries numerous religious councils ordered the discontinuance of dancing during the nightwatches on the eves of saints' days. In the seventh century, edicts were issued to ban the Festival of Fools from the church and to prevent indecent songs from being sung at festivals.

Gradually, the number of prohibitions multiplied. Prohibitions were not only aimed at excesses, but at all sacred dance. However, this was not consistent. This can be seen in the edicts of the Council of Toledo. In 539 A.D. the Third Council of Toledo issued a warning forbidding dance in the churches during the vigil of saints' days. In the next century, the Council forbid the Festival of Fools with its music and dancing. In that same century the Council suggested that Archbishop Isidore present a ritual rich in sacred choreography. This ritual became part of the Mass known as Mozarabe. It was used in the seven churches in Toledo and in the Cathedral of Seville. The dance involved became known as Los Seises. Its practice continued into the present century despite all opposing edicts. In fact, in the fifteenth century Pope Eugenius II ordered this dance to cease. However, the choristers or choir boys were brought to Rome where they performed before the Pope who remarked, "I see nothing in this children's dance which is offensive to God. Let them continue to dance before the high altar." Backman writes that this dance most probably symbolized David's dance before the Ark. He also states that interpretations do exist which indicate that the dance represents the dance of the angels as well.[4]

Numerous edicts were aimed at preventing women from dancing and singing in the church or on the church porches. Also prohibited were "devilish" songs which were popular to sing for the dead during the night. Backman speaks of threats of excommunication at the beginning of the tenth century for those women who visited graves in order to beat drums and dance round dances.[5]

These edicts occur concurrently with the changing theologies of the church. Coulton explains that stress was laid upon the fall of man with the idea of the body as evil in contrast to the divine soul.[6] In conjunction with this, the pleasures of the body were denied. Gaiety, laughter, joy, singing, and dancing were viewed as not befitting to the Christian. Festivity and dancing was considered pagan. Instead of aiming the prohibitions toward the excesses which accompanied the dance, e.g., drinking, singing obscene songs, and wearing of masks, dance was prohibited altogether. Thus beginning in the thirteenth century and continuing into the sixteenth century, complete prohibition of sacred dance was ordered.

Judith Rock in "Breath Given to Clay"



Photograph by Mary Fetts

Reasons for these bans were based not only on perceived excesses, but also upon such ideas as one should listen in silence to the Word of the Lord, dancing and singing were the work of the Devil, dancing lowers the dignity of the church, dancing desecrates the church and churchyard, ring dances disturb divine service and reverence for them Backman cites the Council of Narbonne which attacked church dance in the severest terms.

> *Since to the dishonor of the Christian name, and in contempt of holy things, there are performed ring-dances and hop-dances and other three-step dances, as well as other improprieties, the Council desires to root them out entirely, so that henceforth nobody will dare to dance in a holy temple or a churchyard during service* [7]

Sacred dance by the clergy eventually stopped, but the Church remained unsuccessful in suppressing popular church dances. The numerous edicts only served to push religious dance out of the church, into the churchyard and cemetery, and eventually into the streets. It is evident that the church fought long to abolish dance with little success. It was the Reformation which ultimately succeeded in suppressing sacred dance.

There were moral, doctrinal, economic, and political causes of the Reformation which began in 1517. The leaders of the Reformation were highly critical of traditional church customs They fought to suppress the use of images and the worship of saints. They also sought to suppress pilgrimages and processions. The Reformation was an attempt to revive the democratic outlook of primitive Christianity and its concern for social reform, equality, tolerance, and freedom. But much of this ideal was lost in the course of pushing the Reformation forward. It also intensified the major struggle of Christianity, asceticism vs humanism or the soul vs the body. The Reformation preached the renunciation of the world. It was totally unappreciative of dance and other arts, as well as all worldly pleasures. The mind was considered all important The body was thought of as without value in religious growth and worship.

The growing Protestant movement used the new invention of the printing press to issue tracts against dance. These tracts were often based upon misinformation or misinterpretations. The reasons cited against dance were: that Christ's preaching was of the spirit, not the body; joy and amusement was in conflict with the Church, the body was the temple of God .It is interesting to note that these same reasons had been used earlier in favor of religious dance. The Protestants based their theology upon *The Holy Bible*. It was the fault of the interpreters that *The Holy Bible* was believed to forbid joy and happiness.

Tracts repeatedly cited that dance was accompanied by drunkenness, murder, lewdness, divorce, and nakedness. Because of this association, it was considered to be the work of the devil These tracts based their defense of their views upon the Biblical story of Salome. In this scripture Salome's dance is accompanied by feasting and drinking. Herod had married his brother Phillip's wife. Salome's dance was interpreted to have been enticing since it was said to have pleased Herod so that he gave her anything she desired which was the head of John the Baptist. Therefore, Salome's dance is associated with the evils of gluttony, drunkenness, adultery, and murder. By way of association dance was, therefore, evil.[8]

Another Biblical source often cited was the dance of the Golden Calf. Since this dance was performed around the idol and God was angered, the interpretation was that God disapproved of both the idol and the dance.

Some of the intensity of these tracts can be seen in the following excerpt from a booklet at Utrecht which Van Der Leeuw cites.

> *The heathen are the inventors of dance. Those who cultivate it are generally idolators, epicureans, good for nothings, despicable or dishonourable comedians or actors, as well as souteneurs, gigolos, and other dissolute, worthless, wanton persons Its defenders and followers are Lucian, Caligula, Herod, and similar epicureans and athiests With it belong gluttony, drunkenness, plays, feast days, and heathen saints' days* [9]

A new reason was added to the growing list against dance. This was based upon the seventh Commandment which was interpreted to forbid not only adultery, but all sins of impurity such as unchaste looks, words, jokes and whatever violates modesty or leads to impurity. It was therefore taught that one must avoid curiosity of the eyes, vanity, and immodesty in dress. It was also taught that one must avoid indecent dances and contact with the opposite sex. Thus the idea of the connection between the body, dance, and eroticism is brought into the open. It is for this reason that the real disapproval of sacred dance by Christianity was generated. Van Der Leeuw suggested that dance even in the simplest and most proper form brings out the glory of the body and attracts the opposite sex.[10] Harvey Cox stated that dance both uses the body to celebrate and also celebrates the body.[11] In its teachings, Christianity has been the outspoken enemy of the body and all the sensual pleasures, none of which are believed to be innocent. It taught not to find glorification in the body. It left only guilt which was passed on from generation to generation. It preached the ideal of virginity and mortification of the flesh. Van Der Leeuw writes that:

> *It is obvious that a view of life that shrinks from the body cannot stand for beautiful movement, that a religion which exalts virginity above all must hate the enticements of the moving body, that the hope for release from the body of this death expects no benefits from any ex[redacted]n of feeling, and certainly not from any exp[redacted] the holy, through dance.* [12]

Thus, it was [redacted] Counter Reformation that the Catholic Church [redacted] to return to a purer form of Christianity by putting greater emphasis upon the cessation of all religious dances. In addition, the church insisted upon a liturgical unity without any creativity in worship. There-

fore, with the increasing pressure to cease all religious dance and no possible way for creative revival, religious dance either disappeared, survived in a few isolated places, or in certain religious sects changed into folk expressions at weddings and funerals or remained reminiscent in the Mass.

Dance barred from the church, and the churchyard, began to manifest itself either as a theatrical entertainment or as a folk art. It was only in isolated areas that dance remained a part of the religious worship of the people. Thus it was that the dances of "Los Seises" in the cathedral of Seville or the processional dance around the altar at Echternach, Luxembourg which existed into the present century as remnants of medieval Christianity.

Even before the sixteenth century, religious dance had become so severely ritualized that its very life and feeling had been squeezed from it. Only in the popular religious dances did spontaneity, creativity, and honesty in feeling continue to persist. However, with increased pressures of the church, civil authorities, and finally the Reformation, these popular dances became more sedate and ritualized until finally they too disappeared. What was left to Christianity then was an anti-festive, joyless spirit.

Expression through dance turned toward the theatre or the village square. It became a source of light entertainment and a means of socialization and unification. The continuing urbanization of the population took the people farther and farther away from the greatest source of religious inspiration—nature. The new culture of the cities was based not only upon Protestant and Roman Catholic influences, but also upon scientific investigation, the intellect, and industry.

The culture so focused upon the processes of industrialization that the people lost contact with their bodies and consequently with their spirit as well. Alienated, therefore, from his identity, man became an image without personal humanity. He became part of an alienated society, a society which treated man as a replaceable machine.

It was from this type of society that the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, commonly called the Shakers, separated themselves in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Strangely enough, this religious sect developed from Huguenot sects whose ideas descended from a dualistic religious movement of the thirteenth century. It is notable that the dualism, the spirit versus body, of the Shakers was to manifest itself in a totally unique manner. Instead of opposing dance, the Shakers used the dance as a vehicle for greater spirituality. In 1776, under the direction of Ann Lee, a small group of believers established a community in New York. According to Edward Andrews this

> *fellowship followed the example of the primitive apostolic church; men and women living together in celibate, confessing and forsaking all fleshly practices, working industriously with their hands, holding all goods in common, speaking and singing in unknown tongues, worshiping joyfully, preaching that Christ had actually come to lead believers to a perfect, sinless, everlasting life—the life of the spirit.*[13]

This sect rapidly gained converts. Gradually the relatively simple elements of Mother Ann's mystic faith were developed into more elaborate beliefs. By 1808 the doctrine of a dual Diety, or masculine-feminine Godhead, similar to that of the Hindu religion, was formulated. The seven principles of the church (duty to God, duty to man, separation from the world, peace, simplicity of language, right use of property, and celibacy) formed the practical and external law of the life of the Shakers by 1823.

The songs, music, and dances used in Shaker worship were inseparable forms of expressing praise, joy, need, or union with God. Originally, their dance was not an organized form of worship. The first meetings were often form without structure. Andrews relates from Shaker records.

> *After assembling together and sitting for a while in silent meditation, they were taken with a mighty trembling ... at other times they were affected with a mighty shaking, and were occasionally exercised in singing, shouting, or walking the floor, under the influence of spiritual signs, shoving each other about—or swiftly passing and repassing each other, like clouds agitated by a mighty wind.*[14]

Meetings became a scene of trembling, whirling, shaking, quivering, sighing, groaning, crying, screaming, jumping, turning, stamping, and falling.

Andrews quotes contemporaries of the Shakers as sources for information concerning how these worship services appeared to outsiders. From a source concerning Heavy dances he quotes that it was performed

> *by a perpetual springing from the house floor, about four inches up and down, both in the men's and women's apartment, moving about as thick as they can crowd, with extraordinary transport, singing sometimes one at a time, and sometimes more than one.*
>
> *The elevation draws upon the nerves so as that they have intervals of shuddering as if they were in a strong fit of the ague. They sometimes clap hands and lead so as to strike the joists above their heads. They throw off their outside garments in these exercises, and spend their strength very cheerfully this way.*[15]

Another source, Daniel Rathbun, is quoted.

> *Everyone acts for himself, and almost everyone different from the other; one will stand with his arms extended, acting over odd postures, which they call signs; another will be dancing, and sometimes hopping on one leg about the floor; another will fall to turning around, so swift, that if it be a woman, her clothes will be so filled with the wind, as though they were kept out by a hoop, another will be prostrate on the floor, another will be talking with somebody, and some sitting by, smoking their pipes, some groaning most dismally, some trembling extremely, others act-*

ing as though all their nerves were convulsed, others swinging their arms, with all vigor, as though they were turning a wheel Then all break off, and have a spell of smoking, and some times great fits of laugh ter [16]

The Shakers termed this experience labouring. Its purpose was mortification, the debasing of pride and self in spirit through humiliation of the body. All the movements of the dance, the shaking, falling, rolling, and whirling were a means to loosen the bodily ties, the sins, and the faults to cause a purification and simplification of the spirit Therefore, through the ecstasy of the dance a means of cleansing the spirit was established which the Shakers believed was an acceptable work of God, manifestations of a superhuman will to which they had to submit Dance, which had originally been an involuntary reaction to their emotion was integrated as a voluntary duty of religious worship

The Shakers had to justify their use of dance to the outside world which had learned to frown upon dance To the Puritans who lived near the Shakers, dance was the work of the devil, certainly not a fitting means of religious expression. The Shaker worship service aroused intense prejudices among these neighbors. Often these prejudices led to persecution. Therefore, tracts were issued which listed scriptural references to dance. They pointed out that since not a single passage spoke against dance as a means of sacred worship all opposition was unfounded. Edward Andrews points out that the Shakers argued that the excesses ascribed to some in the dance should not obliterate the dance's function in divine worship. Andrews cites Wells and Green, authors of *A Summary View of the Millennial Church*:

> *God has created man an active, intelligent being, possessing important powers and faculties, capable of serving himself according to his needs and circumstances, and he is required to devote these power and faculties to the service of God Since we are blessed with hands and feet, those active and useful members of the body shall we not acknowledge our obligations to God who gave them in our devotions to him?*
>
> *This attitude of the body should be such as to express outwardly and assist the inward reverence of the soul.* [17]

By the end of the eighteenth century the nature of the Shaker dances changed. As the society established itself into a more formal organization, the mode of worship including songs and dance became more organized. There were several reasons why this occurred. First, the fanatical zeal and energy of the community was slowly diverted into building the society. Secondly, and probably most importantly, the Shaker leaders realized that their success as a community rested upon their acceptance by those living around them. Therefore, as they began to open their meetings to others, modifications and ritualization of their form of dance were affected. Set dances movements were introduced. Father Joseph Meacham introduced the square order shuffle which he claimed to have learned from a vision of angels dancing before God. This shuffle gradually became executed in a most slow and solemn manner with no deviations or "gifts" enlivening it. Father Joseph's successor, Mother Lucy Wright, around 1804 envisioned the angels in heaven joyfully skipping Gradually, the speed of the shuffle accelerated to what was called the skipping manner. "Gifts" once more enlivened the service Even the old manner, "back," or "promiscuous" manner of ecstatic dance was occasionally revived. However, by 1815, with the advent of anthems, and written music, worship became once again more ritualized. Hand gestures were prescribed for certain songs. Maneuvers were established. At first these maneuvers consisted of single file ranks moving in forward and backward steps. Soon ring-dances and the four-square form were introduced. More complex movement patterns were introduced such as the hollow square, mother's star, mother's love, square and compass, and walking the narrow path. These patterns came to assume special significance. According to Andrews, they were symbolic of the travel of the soul heavenward.[18]

It is significant to note that during those periods of emotional stress which recurred throughout most Shaker history, the ritual form of worship was forsaken. In these highly excited "awakenings" as these periods were called, the old manner of "back" or "promiscuous" dance manifested itself However, as the number of Shakers declined after the Civil War, the worship form slowly lost its inner vitality of spirit Indeed they still believed in their cause and type of worship; but lacking the freshness of new impetus from inside the sect, their dance became more and more sober. Without spirit, their worship form became a mechanical repetition of the old forms long before the Shaker communities had ceased to exist.

The Shaker religious worship form is important to understand especially since it is not far removed in history from the present. Even though its vitality lasted a little over a century, the pattern of its development and demise was the same as was followed by all religions. At first there was a period of intense, child-like mysticism This mysticism led to a spontaneous, creative, emotional worship in which ecstatic dance played an irreparable role with song and tune. As the religious beliefs became more elaborate, the dance gradually became formalized and separate from tune music Whenever there was a brief period of new religious impetus, the dance again became spontaneous, and emotionally charged As the impetus and vitality of the religious movement ceased, devotion to the form of worship continued, but the practice was devoid of spirit and merely a lifeless repetition of ritual.

It is notable that even the justifications for dance in the worship service of the Shakers followed the same patterns as did those for dance in the development of Christianity as a whole. In the first ecstasy of emotional response, worship was so integrated that no justification was needed or given. It was only after the elements of religious expression begin to separate and ritualize that justifications were

given Therefore, the dance was rationalized according to scriptural references which mention dance specifically and then later to interpretations of religious beliefs

Religious dance at the beginning of the twentieth century was nothing more than a relic of the past and a hesitant awaiting of the future To most people dance was inconceivable as an expression of the holy Elements of dance appeared in the church preserved only as relics of the past These elements were rituals devoid of real meaning In fact, life itself, so fractionalized between the spirit, the mind, and the body, was devoid of meaning With this disintegration of the personality, man had lost an important key to happiness—his humanity. The dualism of medieval Catholicism and the Reformation churches had given the impetus and energy to the development of a higher, more refined culture at the expense of the individual personality Modern man was a hollow shell, his body, mind, and spirit were no longer connected; he was dehumanized and isolated not only from others, but also from himself Thus the man of the twentieth century strongly yearned for unity of life for harmony It was this search for unity which helped rediscover the true essence of the dance as an expression of the spirit

Dance as a form of the religious expression of the twentieth century did not receive its impetus from religious groups Instead, it received not only its impetus but its rebirth as a means of escape from the existing theatre dance, classical ballet It was the art of Isadora Duncan which caused dance to once more become something of the spirit and the mind. Duncan hoped to bring about a renaissance of religion by means of the dance as expression which stemmed from man's inner self, his emotions Her autobiography expressed her feelings that dance could be a "holy pursuit of highest beauty" and could help people develop spiritually. Duncan's own life lacked the discipline necessary for implementing these beliefs However, her dance and beliefs did inspire others to work in this direction.

It was the work of Ruth St Denis and Ted Shawn in the second and third decades of this century which truly gave impetus to the rebirth of sacred dance, first upon the concert state, then in churches. Ruth St Denis sought to symbolize the spiritual truths found in the religions of the world in her choreography for the concert stage. Margaret Fisk quotes Ruth St Denis' statement of vision for dance that it might leave "the lowlands of mere aestheticism and entertainment for the clear austere summits of spiritual revelation " Ruth St Denis is quoted as describing sacred dance as a "dimension of the free moving of our divine selfhood in any direction, in any posture, in any gesture or rhythm that releases our highest and most harmonious existence."[19] In 1947 she established the Church of the Divine Dance in Hollywood which provided a place for experimentation in sacred dance. It was her vision that this experimentation might bring about a vital understanding between the church and the arts.

Ted Shawn believed the dance was the first and finest means of religious expression As early as 1917 he presented entire church services in choreographic form in over thirty cities His writings, his speeches, and his choreography promoted the idea of sacred dance This intense belief in a higher purpose of dance was transmitted to the many pupils of Denishawn, the school which was founded by Ruth St Denis and Ted Shawn It was this vitality of spirit which inspired their students not to a particular tradition of movement, but to a sincere belief that dance not only could but must reveal man's inner soul, his passions, his sorrows, his needs, and his yearnings Thus dance once more became more than an amusement It could serve the spirit of man, helping him to transcend his humanity and causing him to grow toward love, courage, goodness, and greatness. The style or styles of movement which evolved from this rediscovery were based upon each artist's individual quest to find a movement source which could serve not only the body, but the mind and the spirit, too These individualistic styles became known as modern dance.

Modern dancers and choreographers have revealed to us over the past fifty years that dance motivated by the spirit can create a tremendous impact upon the spirit of the observer, awakening and intensifying his awareness of life Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Martha Graham, José Limon, and others have shown through their dance that spiritual themes can reflect life and that life itself can reflect spiritual themes. They have revealed to us that dance has religious meaning, but that it does not only express religious feelings. For as Van der Leeuw states

> *all feelings, from the most solemn to most frivolous, find their expression in the dance The religious is not a particular sensation alongside other sensations, but the summation of them all Thus the dance can also serve a purpose which we too, would call religious.*[20]

More than anything else, modern dancers have helped contemporary society to discover that the body is a beautiful, expressive, and holy instrument. The shame of the body created by the dualism of Christianity is now being replaced by a celebration of the body. This celebration is intensified by man's inner need to integrate each of the areas of his identity, body, spirit, and mind and the areas of life (prayer, work, and play) into a whole.

Only when all men learn once more to dance will a general consciousness of life be created. Dance must become a natural and healthy expressive medium once again. It is through dance that the body, spirit, and mind can become integrated and man can once more become humanized. As is stated in *Lord of the Dance.*

> *Dancè—is an expression of the whole being and wholeness is of the essence of Christianity, which calls for the devotion not of the mind alone, but of heart, soul, and strength.*[21]

Dance can be the unifying action in life. It can be not only amusement, but it can also be a useful and holy action. It is, as Havelock Ellis States, "the loftiest, most moving, the most beautiful of the arts, because it is no mere translation or abstraction from life, it is life itself."[22]

Judith Rock and Tom Martin (Body and Soul Dance Company) in "Common Ground" by Diane Koelln

The time has come when dance is once again welcome in many churches. One organization, the Sacred Dance Guild, has done a considerable job in reestablishing the ties of dance with the church It has encouraged inclusion of modern dance and rhythmic choirs in religious services.

Dance in religious education today is based upon the idea of a living experience of God By dancing this experience, religion becomes a part of or a living thing. Bruce and Tooke state that:

> *Unlike some other forms of knowledge, religion can never remain on a purely or even mainly, intellectual plane, as a static fact or doctrine It has to be translated into the being . .* [23]

Margaret Fisk writes that dance creates a stronger base for loyalty to the church through participation rather than intellectualization. She also suggests that participation in dance creates a sense of belonging and a feeling of significance.[24]

A much greater effect will be felt if dance in religious services is allowed to be the deeply felt, spontaneous, and creative act it once was. Man needs the opportunity to uniquely respond to his feelings without the need to verbalize or justify his reactions. Maxine Sheets believes that dance is literally thinking with the body.[25] A dance can be a true expression without thought in words or images taking place. Throughout history, dance as a means of religious experience has followed the same patterns of development. These patterns of dance expression reflect the pattern of the religion and vice versa.

We have come almost a full circle in the use of dance as a means of religious expression. It is clear that, as Havelock Ellis states, "Dancing . . . cannot die out, but will always be undergoing a rebirth . . . it perpetually emerges afresh from the soul of the people."[26] Even when seemingly repressed, dance periodically must break out through all restraints.[27] It is as if dance responds to an inner need so basic as to transcend all cultural overlays. It is from primitive times that movement has denoted life. It is even in our time that the mysticism of life is manifested in dance. Dance is Religion. For in dance, man succeeds in transcending this world, becoming one with the infinite or divine.

Footnotes

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4

Religion and Ritual:
Dance of the Plains Indians

Karen Lynn Smith

The American Plains Indians are the inhabitants of a large cultural area that extends from Texas to Saskatchewan and from the Mississippi to the Rockies, including the land that was once the rolling American prairie. Dancing was such a frequent amusement of all tribes that the ceremonies themselves were called "dances" by the Indians. Dancing, Catlin said, entered into their form of worship and was a way to appeal to the Great Spirit, to pay devotion to medicine, and a way of honoring and entertaining strangers of distinction in their country.

> *I saw so many of their different varieties of dances amongst the Sioux that I should be disposed to denominate them the "dancing Indians." It would seem as if they had dances for everything. And in so large a village, there was scarcely an hour in any day or night, but what the beat of the drum could somewhere be heard. These dances are almost as various and different in their character as they are numerous—some of them so exceedingly grotesque and laughable, as to keep the bystander in an irresistible roar of laughter—others are calculated to excite his pity, and forcibly appeal to his sympathies, whilst others disgust, and yet others terrify and alarm him with their frightful threats and contortions.*[1]

A brief description of some of the most important dances with religious significance follows.

Sacrifice to the Morning Star

In this dance, a Pawnee warrior would capture a young maiden from a neighboring tribe; her body was painted red and she and her male captor were dressed in costumes from a special medicine bundle. The ceremonies lasted three days; on the fourth a scaffold was erected. The right half of the captive was painted red; the left half was painted black. She wore a fan-shaped eagle-feathered headdress. At the rising of the morning star, warriors rushed toward her as if attacking the enemy and her captor shot an arrow through her heart with a bow and sacred arrow. Every male in the tribe then shot an arrow into her body. Feasting and dancing followed for three more days. The victim represented the evening star and the ceremony the renewal of life on earth. This ceremony "to the death" was eliminated after a warrior who loved the sacrificial victim rode to the scaffold and rescued her.

Dance to the Cardinal Points

This was a ritual of prayer for long life for the participants and the entire Sioux Nation. Stones and turtles (the symbol of long life and fertility) were alternated to form a wheel with spokes. Four couples advanced and retreated, turning to face each of four directions. Men were painted with grey mud; their hair was loose and had mud rubbed into it. The women wore white dresses, painted their faces yellow, and marked a red cross on the forehead; they carried sage and four eagle feathers.

The War Dance

This ceremony began with the striking of a post by the Chief in the village center and reciting his brave deeds; others similarly struck the post and recited while joining into the dance which included pantomimic representations of incidents of border warfare by warriors, leaders, and great men—allusions to heroic deeds or subtle stratagems of themselves or ancestors or descriptions of threatening danger or violence about to be perpetrated. The war dance was not graceful amusement nor healthy exercise. It was ceremony, not recreation, and was conducted with the seriousness belonging to an important public duty. Victor Tixier in 1839 described the "striking the post" dance of the Osage in this way:

> *The warriors made maniacal contortions, jumping and capering like madmen. These people, so serious and so composed the day before, looked as if they were possessed of the devil. They were making such faces that they seemed to be on the point of dislocating their jaws, rolling their eyes wildly and twisting their limbs about, mumbling indistinct words, and uttering the war cry in a low voice, beating drums or blowing the reed flutes; some took up a warlike song which they accompanied by striking their fans on some pieces of wood. The dancers, out of breath and covered with perspiration, began to eat.*[2]

Victory and Scalp Dances

These were the most universal of all dances. To the Plains Indian, warfare was a game of tag in which he fought to distinguish himself in his tribe's eyes as reckless, daring, and exciting. The rewards were honor, glory, and prestige. Sioux victory dances lasted from several nights to fifteen nights and were a combination of rejoicing and exulting over vanquishing the enemy and mourning his loss as a brave man. They preferred to fight other Indians, because they considered the white man an inferior and an adversary. Victory dances included a parade to exhibit booty and trophies obtained during a raid, a give-away of booty and clothing of the warriors, the warrior's dance to recount coup and portray his part in battle, the women's dance with scalps and other trophies, general or social dances in celebration of the victory, and a feast furnished by the families of warriors in honor of their safe return.

The Green Corn Dance

This was a celebration of the new year in which gratitude was expressed through elaborate rituals of thanksgiving, purification, and sacrifice. Old clothing, pottery, and utensils were destroyed, fires were extinguished, and new ones lit to symbolize renewed health, life, vigor, and spiritual power. From Canada to Mexico, the East Coast to the Rockies, it was a time of amnesty, where hatred was forgotten, crimes and injuries forgiven, and when openheartedness and friendliness became the order of festivity.

On the first day of the celebration a decoction (called the black drink) was made and followed by prayer and purification; on the second day the Ribbon Dance was performed; on the third day the Feather Dance was given; on the fourth day a game of stick ball was played which preceded feasting. Both ritual and social dancing culminated this event.

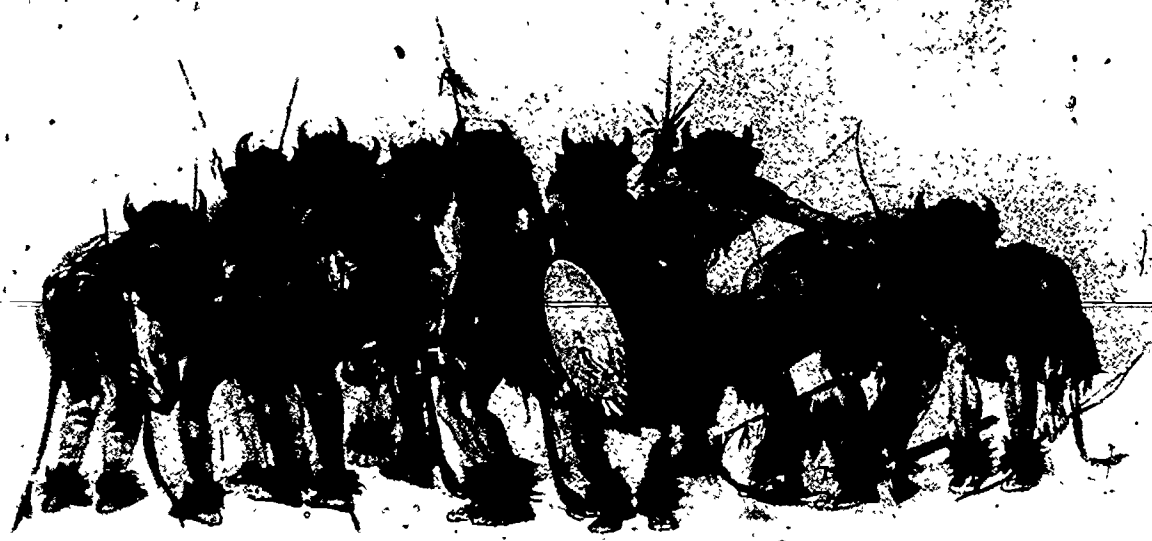
Calumet and Eagle Dances

The Pipe (Calumet) Dance, and the related Eagle Dance, served to greet strangers, create ceremonial friendships, bring success in hunting or war, bring good luck, oppose bad luck, cure sickness, and make peace between warring tribes. Pipes were sacred objects and were handled in ritualistic ways—fashioned of a stone bowl, reed stem, and a fan of golden eagle feathers. The eagle was revered everywhere as the ruler of the air and creatures of the air—powerful, fierce, and fearless, the symbol of purity. The ceremony consisted of a parade, a pipe dance, a discovery dance, the striking-the-post dance, a surrender of personal articles to others, smoking, and feasting. It was a time of adoption of "ceremonial" children (adults), and ear-piercing.

Movements were like those of the eagle—soaring, swooping, falling back, and advancing against the wind. The Jesuit, LeSueur, tried to prohibit the "pagan" ceremonies by forcing the Indian to choose between Christianity and the calumet, the Indian chose the calumet. This dance was much a part of Indian life, in fact, that he would dance regardless of adverse conditions; one account tells

George Catlin's "Green Corn Dance of the Hidatsa"

Photograph courtesy of the National Museum of American Art (formerly National Collection of Fine Arts), Smithsonian Institution



[photograph courtesy of the National Museum of American Art (formerly National Collection of Fine Arts), Smithsonian Institution]

George Catlin's "Mandan Buffalo Dance"

of a Cree Indian in 1848 who danced naked except for breechcloth at -40° F.[3]

The pipe dance was a contest dance which included slow movements and pauses during which the dancer was required to hold his position and not permit his bells to sound. At the end of the song, the dancer was to leap over the fire, snatch the pipe, and raise it exactly when the last beat was heard. Judges awarded prizes to the winning dancers. The best attempt to describe the Sioux Calumet Dance was made by Father Louis Hennepin between 1675 and 1681. The Sioux had just had a feast of bear's meat and were preparing to send out a war party. Hennepin observed:

> *After the repast, these Savages having all of them certain Marks in the Face, and their Bodies painted with the Figure of some Beast such as everyone fancy'd best, their Hair being also annointed with the Oil of Bears, and stuck all over with red and white Feathers, and their heads cover'd with the down of birds, began to dance with their hands all upon their hip, and striking the soles of their feet with such violence against the Earth, that the very Marks appeared During the Dance, one of the Sons of the Master of Ceremonies, made them all smoke in the pipe of war, himself shedding abundance of tears during the whole action.*[4]

The Sun Dance

The Sun Dance was called by various Plains tribes the Sun, Thirsting, Sacrifice, Offering, Medicine Lodge, New Life Lodge, or Lodge of the Generator Dance. It was held in June or July for a period of eight to fifteen days and dramatized the entire spiritual and emotional life of the people—good overcoming evil, supplication for future help and strength, thanksgiving, and blessing. It was a sacrifice or self-torture dance that was a vow by the brave to overcome the forces of nature, it was thanks given for divine deliverance from great danger. A central pole symbolized the enemy and was struck by dancers while "counting coup" (recounting their glorious deeds). Participants gazed at the sun while dancing, apparently never suffering eye damage. The ceremony began with tribal singers and drummers accompanying social dances and special dances by warrior societies. In some tribes the sacrifice was a matter of "victims" skewered on their breasts or backs and dragged around by the sharp sticks until their flesh tore loose. In other tribes, ten to one hundred pieces of skin might be cut off by a friend. The Indian considered sacrifice of material possessions inferior, so he sacrificed his flesh and blood (called the red blanket). After offering the red blanket, the victim rejoined the dancers until he fell exhausted. He was forbidden to pull the skewers out; they would be cut out by the medicine man. This drama representational of capture, torture, captivity, and escape, proved the courage of the Indian and demonstrated complete mastery over the body.[5]

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Photograph courtesy of the National Museum of American Art (formerly National Collection of Fine Arts), Smithsonian Institution

George Catlin's "Bull Dance, Part of Mandan Okipa Ceremony"

Photograph courtesy of the National Museum of American Art (formerly National Collection of Fine Arts), Smithsonian Institution

George Catlin's "The Last Race, Part of Okipa Ceremony"

The Sun Dance is believed to have originated among the Mandans, where it was called "Okipa" or "O-Kee-Pa." It celebrated the deliverance from a flood or the induction of a youth into manhood, or was a prayer for an adequate supply of buffalo. It was held when the willow leaves reached full size. Okipa began with the bull dance. Eight buffalo dancers wearing buffalo heads danced four times a day the first day, eight times the second day, 12 times the third day, and 16 times the fourth day. The "bulls" snorted, pawed, and bellowed, and were joined by grizzly bears, bald eagles, antelopes, swans, beavers, vultures, and wolves. During Okipa, torture candidates were pierced and hung from the rafters of the earth lodge by their chests and backs, four to five feet above the ground. They were also pierced by skewers on arms, thighs, and below the knees Shields and quivers were suspended from the arm skewers, buffalo skulls were suspended from the thighs and legs When the candidate fainted, he was lowered, and the skewers were pulled or torn away from the body. When he revived, he crawled to a large buffalo skull and had the little finger of his left hand chopped off. Then he crawled to the central plaza where a pair of dancers wrapped thongs around his wrists and dragged him around the arena. Called "The Last Race" by Catlin, each victim stumbled and ran, trying to remain "alive" for as long as possible (dead being synonomous with fainting) [6] White observers were horrified and shocked by the severity of the torture. They did not understand the Indian's attitude of this poor sacrifice of offering material possessions as a token of gratitude, since all possessions came from the Great Mystery in the first place, to offer them to Him was only to give back His own. So the only sincere sacrifice a man could make was of his own body and blood.

The Ghost Dance

Around 1870 a dance cult evolved as a means of finding racial equality, providing a return to the old way of life and a return of wild game, and a hope for resurrection of the dead. Wovoka, a Sioux of the Dakotas, began to preach that given four days and nights of dancing, the old people would be rejuvenated, the dead would return, and things would be as they were in the past. The ceremony was held every six months, and the religion spread across the Plains. The dancing induced trances in converts and promised the revival of the old Indian ways, the return of the buffalo, and the annihilation of the race responsible for all their troubles. Circles with as many as three and four hundred dancers were seen by some observers. They danced fast, often in dust two to three inches deep. This was continued until one, then another, broke from the ring, staggering and falling in a trance. When the fallen dancers recovered, they related their visions to the other participants. Concerned about the possibility of an Indian uprising, the U.S. Government sent troops to put down the outbreak, resulting in the massacre at Wounded Knee in December of 1890 where 300 Indians including women and children were slaughtered. This ended the religion that had involved 30-35 tribes and about 60,000 people.[7]

Henry Schoolcraft most appropriately summed up the Indians' use of dance in 1848 in his book *The Indian in His Wigwam:*

> *Dancing is both an amusement and a religious observance among the American Indians, and is known to constitute one of the most wide spread traits in their manners and customs It is thus interwoven throughout the whole texture of Indian society, so that there is scarcely an event, important or trivial, private or public, which is not connected, more or less intimately, with this rite.*[8]

The American Indian evolved a specialized, practical ceremonial system with which to control his life. He used rituals, dances, and games as a means of controlling the unknown—to appease demons, spirits, and gods in search of continued beneficence or aid. Games and dances provided spirit which led to a sense of unity, through competitive activities and feats of skill the ceremonies of the Plains Indians developed solidarity among the tribal people. Dancing was as much a part of Indian culture as eating, sleeping, and war. It served not only as entertainment but as definite parts of religious and ceremonial activities. The Indian *danced* his religion, his social beliefs, his customs.

Footnotes

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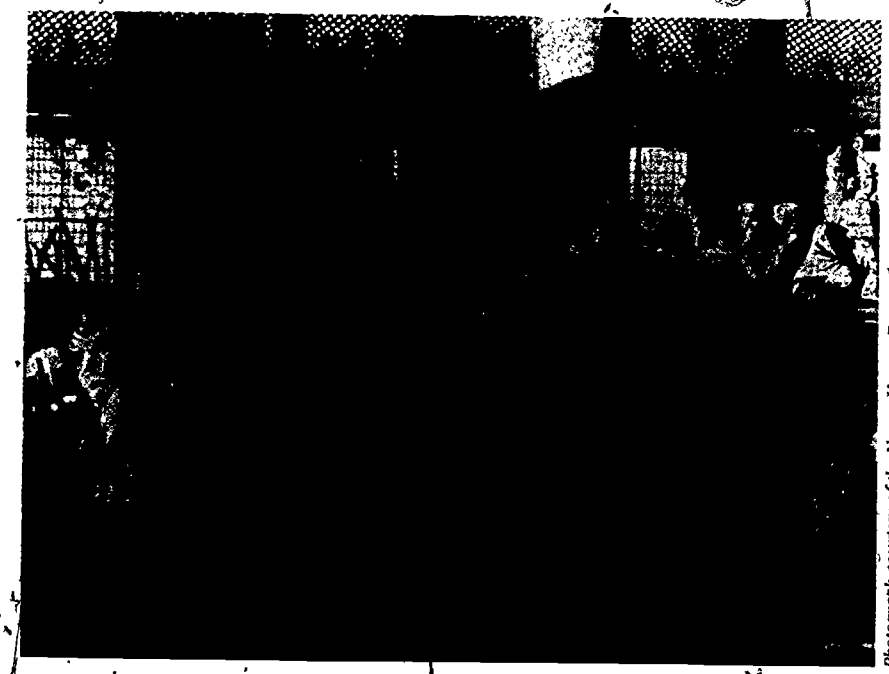
Dance and Organized Religion



Photograph courtesy of the Nancy Hauser Dance Company

5

Religion and Dance in America:

Institutions in Search of Believers

Dennis Fallon

There is an old saying, "Never discuss religion and politics with your friends!" The reasons underlying this warning are that our religious and political beliefs are personal and biased, which is to say, they are accepted with uncontested deliberation and argument. Does this warning also apply to discussions on dance? Do our beliefs about dance rely primarily upon personal experience and parochial examination? Does the American society and its institutions, e.g., religion, understand the meaning of dance? The purpose of this article is to present a parallel overview of religion and dance in America and to offer some recommendations that may resolve misconceptions about dance that narrow its acceptance and effectiveness in our society.

An Overview of Religion in America

Although the philosophy of religion is concerned with the justification of belief by means of argument, the term "religion" is vague, unclear and argumentative. It entails beliefs, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors that constitute one's relationships with the universe, with God, and with other human beings.[1] Religion is a general term that encompasses all denominations and sects; it is a term that has been stretched by some to include those who reject God and argue that a belief in the fundamental goodness of humanity is a religion. It is an institution that is interwoven within the fabric of our society and is a force of social reform and at times a bulwark of conservatism.

Early American colonists were often religious dissidents who frequently squabbled within their ranks about doctrine and social and political affairs, usually in a moral context. The flowering of the social Gospel after the Civil War witnessed an increased church membership, from 6 percent in 1776 and 15 percent in 1850 to 30 percent by 1900, 50 percent by 1920, and 66 percent by 1950.[2] Arguments between Conservative-Fundamentalists and Modern-Progressivists were frequent and gave rise to splintering religious sects. Following World War II critical voices complained about complacency within the Church and argued that although there were increases in church attendance, there were not necessarily signs of growing faith but perhaps "a reflection of the growth of the middle class and adoption by newcomers to that class of the social habits expected of them."[3]

The upheaval and radical theology of the 1960s, sparked by the Civil Rights movement of the late 50s, rested on the belief that change was the preeminent factor in modern life. Society was changing, therefore, institutions, such as religion, should change with it. The 60s and early 70s were times of protest, disillusionment and turmoil in social, political, and religious spheres. "The general trend of the new theology was away from elements of mystery and the supernatural and toward the mundane. Some of the new theologians felt it was time for man to work out his own religious destiny on earth without help of a deity."[4] All traditional structures of Christendom, particularly the neighborhood church and synagogue, were increasingly regarded as irrelevant and incapable of responding to societal needs. Rosten concluded

> *that the fortresses of faith are experiencing the most profound alterations in centuries. Church authority is being challenged on a dozen fronts. Traditional creeds are being drastically revised. Hallowed canons are being shelved. Religious practices are changing daily. Church leaders are beleaguered by new, bold, persistent demands—from their clergy no less than from their congregation.*[5]

There is evidence that a profound religious revival is mounting in the United States due in part to the Evangelical movement. A Gallup Poll in 1976 recorded a rise in church attendance with 42 percent of Americans attending a church or synagogue weekly. Gallup surveys also showed church membership on an upswing with about 70 percent describing themselves as church members. Roughly 60 percent indicated that religious beliefs are very important in their lives. Findings showed the Evangelical movement to be an increasingly powerful one and that 34 percent of the members believed that they were "born again." This figure represents nearly 50 million Americans, aged 18 and over.[6]

This growth in religious interest and activity in the United States is primarily found among young adults. According to a survey of 70 nations, conducted by Gallup International Research Institutes, this country is the most religious among advanced nations in the world.[7] This is a

unique country in that it has both a high level of formal education and it displays a high level of religious beliefs and practices Nevertheless, the influence of religion must be questioned in a society where morality is losing its influence Are churches simply filling their pews with members lacking genuine faith and commitment? Are there grounds for believing that the spirit has gone out of American religious institutions that historically have had a long, peculiar relationship with the *creed* of the democratic policy—"what has come to be called the civil religion of America?"[8]

These questions challenge the liturgy of religious denominations and sects in America where more than 80 separate groups within the Protestant Church that compose more than half of all the Christian population hold an enormous range of Protestant beliefs. The Catholic Church, the largest denomination in the United States with nearly 49 million members, is no longer a spiritual fortress, but since the Second Vatican Council in 1962, "it is a questioning and divided church, troubled by colliding purposes and visions."[9] A new age has dawned for the Catholic Church, an age of *aggiornamento,* of relevance. Catholics have been stripped of their St. Christopher medals that once proclaimed their identity. They now share with Protestants the same sacred supper.[10]

This nation's six million Jews are no longer isolated in urban enclaves, but are spread throughout our society. Today many have assimilated (primarily through intermarriage which increased from 6 percent in 1960 to 32 percent in 1972) and shed their religious identities while retaining their cultural heritage.[11]

Fifty years ago the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormon Church) with less than a million members was primarily confined to the western United States This closely bound society has grown to a nationwide membership of roughly 2.5 million. It is not an easy religion to follow because it governs the individual's total life in which work is enthroned as the ruling principle of a Church that survived persecution and adversity and now must survive success.[12]

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church with more than one million members has struggled since its inception for freedom and justice for all men, especially its black brethren It has been a catalyst in the Civil Rights movement.[13]

Recently organized religious cults, particularly the Unification Church and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, have attracted up to three million members.[14] Over six million Americans participate in transcendental meditation.[15] These new religious groups will most likely encounter the same harsh criticism that pursued such groups as the Christian Scientists and Jehovah's Witnesses because the religious and cultural majority generally regard such new religious groups as subversive, perverted, and clandestine.[16]

In a society of religious pluralism one must accept the fact that "one man's bizarre cult is another's true path to salvation, and the Bill of Rights was designed to safeguard minorities from the man-on-the-street's uncertain capacity for tolerance."[17] Minority movements need protection because they force us to look inward and examine our role within society. In this period of religious resurgence and turmoil, established religions must pause and ponder their purpose. It is a time to expel magnificent liturgical differences and regressive beliefs so that human likenesses can be recognized. Then a wealth of talent can be shared with energy and resolution for a more complete manifestation of human potential.

An Overview of Dance in America

In 1940 Margaret H'Doubler wrote, "Dance today is clearly in an unsettled state. Old forms and traditions are being given up. New ones are arising to take their place. A time of change presents a confused picture. That there is this change is proof that dance is organically vital—and much more so than it has ever before been in this country." This vitality H'Doubler claims was exhibited in the "less mature art forms," such as tap, folk, and ballroom dancing, as well as the "more highly developed forms," e.g., ballet and modern dance, all of which were stimulated by some kind of aesthetic experience derived from movement.[18] Today some people may argue that disco dance is also aesthetic movement and deserves inclusion in a contemporary definition of dance. Unfortunately the term "dance" is no less elusive and imprecise than the term "religion" in American society.

In colonial days the repressive and righteous Puritans forbade mixed and promiscuous dancing of men and women by issuing tracts against dancing, such as one entitled, "An Arrow against Profane and Promiscuous Dancing, Drawn out of the Quiver of the Scriptures."[19] Even Puritans equivocated on dance and permitted it when taught by a "grave person" who could affect due poise, composure and good manners.[20] Although resistance to dancing seemed ever-present except in the southern colonies where it was considered an important aspect of education, by the time of the Revolutionary War social dancing had become widely accepted as a form of recreation and as a means of education for both men and women.

During the 18th century other dance forms enriched American culture. Ballet attracted unsophisticated audiences of wealth, especially in eastern cities. Black dance, an expression of folklore, religious tradition, and hybrid forms of white dance, eased the trials and tribulations of slavery and segregation of a minority and provided entertainment at the will of the majority. Religious dance appeared in New England and the Midwest among an unusual Protestant sect, the Shaking Quakers. "True believers" viewed dance as a form of worship performed in search of communion with God. In spite of the growing acceptance of dance, all forms of dance, particularly social dancing, felt the scourge of the Baptist and Methodist fundamentalists preaching the social Gospel. "There is no disguising the fact that promiscuous dancing, including the Waltz and Round dances to which the square dances

naturally led, are essentially licentious, and legitimately tend to the violation of the Seventh Commandment."[21] Some clergy, however, objected less to dance, itself, and more to the dens of iniquity where extravagant dress, foul air, and drinking led men and women down the paths toward damnation.

During a century of individual opportunity and industrial progress when social dancing became popular among all classes faced with the first essentials of an emerging society (economics, education, and government) the art of dance was generally neglected. To the rugged individualist, aesthetics were nonproductive. At the close of the 19th century dance struggled against two societal institutions, religion and economics, while education slowly yielded to its seduction.

The inclusion of dance in public education during the early 20th century rested principally on accommodation. Laboring under Victorian influence, physical educators included dance in their curriculum as a form of physical activity, primarily designed to meet the expressive needs of females as opposed to the instrumental needs of males satisfied through sport participation. This misconception of human sexuality perpetuated by society and reinforced by parents and educators led to the development of separate departments of physical education in schools and colleges where dance educators yielded to the Victorian myth.

The democratic and individualistic American spirit is reflected in the turmoil of theatre dance where modern dancers rejected the formalism and elitism of classical ballet in favor of freedom, emotion, and personal expression. Although modern dance received greater support in educational institutions, both forms of dance failed in the first half of the 20th century to generate large, literate, and supportive audiences whose principal concerns were economic stability and national security. Ballet and modern dance had elevated dance as art forms generally unrecognized and unsupported by the American public whose interest and involvement was manifested in a new form of social dancing, rock 'n' roll.

In the 1960s Americans became immersed in a cultural revolution.[22] Nurtured by technology and a new ally, economics, consumers sought cultural activities during their leisure time. Their demands caused government, industry, private foundations, and education institutions to reexamine their funding priorities. Art was no longer the province of the wealthy.

By the mid-60s a new well-educated middle class offered broad support for artistic expression. Today, local, state, and federal agencies offer financial assistance while professional associations provide counsel, certification, and services to individuals, companies, institutions, and communities in search of dance.

The National Dance Association estimates that there are over one million ballet and modern dancers, teachers, and professionals in the United States. With increased private and public funding these figures should steadily increase. The International Folk Dance Foundation estimates that more than one million people regularly participate in folk dance while the American Square Dance Society estimates that over seven million people attend square dances regularly. The International Ballroom Federation claims that over five million people enjoy evenings of ballroom dancing on a steady basis compared to a 1979 estimate of 30 million people that frequent the disco. In light of such pluralism one may surmise that the search for dance is no less difficult than the search for religion in American society.

Religion and Dance in America

The pluralistic nature of religion and dance is the basis for considerable misunderstanding and false judgment. Without clear definitions, a discussion of their relationships rests on parochial view and personal bias. Notwithstanding the roughly one hundred religious denominations and sects in America and what Ellfeldt describes as the multitude of dance forms,[23] 24 in all, these definitions are posited to allow further discussion. Religion is a societal institution in which members accept beliefs and values about themselves, others, and a Supreme Being who shapes their lives. Dance is qualitative human movement performed with artistic and aesthetic purpose. Given these definitions, a natural and spontaneous display of compatibility and generosity between religion and dance in our society can be expected.

The preceding overviews indicate a growing tolerance for pluralism in religion and dance in our society. Certainly in a democracy one must allow for the emergence of new forms of religion and dance that strengthen established forms. Nevertheless, religionists and dancers must challenge the creed, credentials, and contributions of new forms of religion and dance lest the distinction between religion and non-religion, dance and non-dance, becomes unclear and misleading. While organized religions have vigilantly safeguarded their members against the evils of secularism and materialism, dancers, by their failure to communicate the true meaning of dance in the written or verbal form, have neglected in part their constituencies, and in general, the American public. A clear distinction between dance and non-dance is absent. Consequently, false judgment about dance, such as the following contemporary tract published by a religious firm is warranted: "... I flatly charge that modern social dancing is fundamentally sinful and evil. I charge that dancing's charm is based entirely on sex and appeal. I charge that dancing is the most advanced and most insidious of the maneuvers preliminary to sex betrayal ..."[24] This view, although held by a minority, contributes to "a vague aura of sinfulness that clings to dance and which compels some school or college administrators to hesitate to provide dance instruction—because some students or parents may find it objectionable."[25]

Historically, we have brushed aside such objections as ignorant condemnations by an uninformed, regional minority. We have failed to address such allegations that, if

unchallenged, will continue to demean the meaning of dance and allow its imposter, non-dance, to seduce and confuse the public.

Can we argue that dancing at the discotheque, where substance abuse, psychedelic lights, and electronic sounds are used to entice performance, is a form of dance? Can one move aesthetically and artistically with a provocatively dressed partner or are one's movements based on sex appeal that, in effect, are publicly accepted forms of foreplay, a prelude to sexual encounter? In spite of these sexual and sensuous detractions, it is possible for *dancers* to move aesthetically and artistically; it is impossible for *non-dancers* to dance. Instead non-dancers engage in non-dance, that is, quantitative human movement performed without aesthetic and artistic purpose. They are lured by materialistic entrepreneurs and hedonists peddling novelty and sensation that offer little to society and offend the tenets of religion. Dancers must recall and embrace the historical linkage between religion and dance by bringing dance in its true forms to societal institutions in search of greater participation in and appreciation of meaningful human expression.

Dancers have, for too long, been performance-oriented to the neglect of their greater role in aesthetic education.

> *Neither practicing artists nor professional critics react with enthusiasm to the notion of aesthetic education. The former are primarily interested in producing works of art and not in talking about them or teaching anybody anything. Some are articulate about the meaning of art and the politics of art, but not necessarily about the way in which they themselves create works of art. They tend to talk to or at each other rather than to the public in general or to young pupils in public schools.*[26]

Unless we clearly and certainly define dance, and place it in full view of society as an avenue toward aesthetic education, our impact on the layperson, school boards, state departments of education, and societal institutions will rest on the uncertainty of indoctrination and politics.

Footnotes

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6

Dance in Mormonism: the Dancingest Denomination

Georganna Ballif Arrington

The Mormon Church, formally called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, has a history of vigorous participation in dance. From its beginning with founder Joseph Smith in 1839 and in the contemporary Mormon Church today, the amount of dance evident in Mormon culture caused a *Time* magazine reporter to call the church the "dancingest denomination."[1] Although not found in Mormon worship services, dance does exist in abundance in the peripheries—in the recreational and educational programs of the church. The place of the dance in Mormon culture is best examined by a discussion of Mormon participation in dance in the history of the church and of the functioning of dance in contemporary Mormondom.

Dance and the Mormon Philosophy

In the summation to the *Articles of Faith* written by Church leader Joseph Smith, there is a short statement which concisely explains the Church's encouragement toward the arts, recreation, and the dance:

> *If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report, or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.*[2]

Neither Smith nor his successor Brigham Young believed in exclusively confining religious training to doctrine. Both leaders desired to develop the *whole* man and embraced every good and enobling activity in the secular as well as in the spiritual realm. Brigham Young recognized that he had been denied permission for physical expression in his own youth and wrote that:

> *I shall not subject my little children to such an unnatural training, but they shall go to the dance, study music, read novels, and do anything else that will tend to expand their frames, add fire to their spirits, improve their minds, and make them feel free in body and mind.*[3]

Because Brigham Young strove to recognize the *whole* man and woman in church activities, he encouraged recreation programs within the church to serve all ages. The Retrenchment Society, later called the Mutual Improvement Association (MIA) first composed of young women and then young men, took the responsibility of providing wholesome recreation for the youth of the church.[4] The first dance festival sponsored by the MIA was held in 1928 and the festivals have continued to the present.

The tabernacle and the theater were two structures of comparable importance in the early Mormon culture, and the compatible existence of both revealed much about the Mormon culture. While the tabernacle was the center of religious activity, the theater permitted education and recreation. Both buildings usually composed the foundation of a new town. The "brush bowery," a primitive structure used for worship services, was the first structure built in the Salt Lake Valley by the Mormon pioneers in July of 1847. The Salt Lake Theatre was constructed in 1861 and 1862 at the request of Brigham Young.[5] W. O. Robinson, organizer of the first MIA dance festival, described the position of the tabernacle and the theater in early Utah: "Around these two institutions revolved pioneer life, and by them was their pioneer life lifted up socially, culturally, spiritually."[6] Eventually, the tabernacle was combined with the theater or recreation hall in a single building for each neighborhood. Theaters continued to exist autonomously, but the coupling of space for devotional service and recreation illustrated the attempt to unify the purpose of each activity.

Brigham Young believed that dance, when engaged in by the pure in heart, was a worthy preparation for a prayer meeting or any other religious activity.[7] The philosophy, again rings clear. development of the whole man meant, ideally, that both devotion and recreation would unite man with God.

> *It is in this spirit that the Latter-Day Saints have ever engaged in this recreation; and it is in this spirit in which the art must ever be practiced.*[8]

Dance and Mormon philosophy still enjoy a complementary coexistence. Through the leadership and example of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, the philosophy of dance in the Mormon religion was shaped. Their admonition to pursue the good and enobling activities of life, and to praise the Lord with music and dancing are still acknowledged and followed. These attitudes provide the underpinnings for the present church recreational pro-

grams, which encourage participation in artistic, intellectual, and athletic activities. Boyd K. Packer, a present Latter-Day Saint church authority, recently restated Joseph Smith's philosophy of the pursuit of the excellent things in life in the following admonition:

> *Go to, then, you who are gifted; cultivate your gift. Develop it in any of the arts and in every worthy example of them . . . increase our spiritual heritage in music, in art, in literature, in dance, in drama.*[9]

Dance in Mormon History

In the early nineteenth century many ministers preached against the evils of recreation. Work alone was the activity of the righteous; dancing was especially forbidden. Joseph Smith however, set a precedent by encouraging and personally engaging in the educational and social activities in the Mormon community such as music, dance, drama, and woodcutting bees.

After the death of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, the leader of the Mormon migration from Illinois, saw dance as a method of strengthening group morale and solidarity. Dancing provided mass physical and emotional release from suffering and hardship. As the pioneers journeyed west, they met regularly to dance and sing, building their courage for the struggle ahead of them. The United States interrupted Mormon migration in June of 1846 by requesting that the Mormons form a battalion of men to march to the Pacific Coast at the onset of the Mexican War. The timing of the request could not have been more inconvenient. However, patriotic feelings for country prevailed and 520 men served. Colonel Thomas L. Kane was present at the farewell ball given by the Mormons in honor of their battalion and described the dance of the Mormons in this way:

> *. . . leading off the dancing in a great double cotillion, was the signal bade the festivity commence. To the canto of debonair violins, the cheer of horns, the jingle of sleighbells, and the jovial snoring of the tambourine, they did dance! . . . French fours, Copenhagen jogs, Virginia reels, and the like forgotten figures executed with the spirit of people too happy to be slow, or bashful, or constrained. Light hearts, lithe figures, and light feet had it all their own way from an early hour till after the sun dipped behind the sharp skyline of the Omaha hills.*[10]

On January 14, 1847, during the harsh winter months of the journey, Brigham Young recorded a revelation which reads in part: "If thou art merry, praise the Lord with singing, music, with dancing, and with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving." This statement reinforced the function and purpose of dance as a sustaining and exulting activity in Mormon culture. After the Mormon pioneers settled in the Salt Lake Valley, dance continued to be the paramount recreation: "This activity was probably the most common amusement of the founding of our State, being enjoyed in every city, town, and hamlet in Utah."[11] Dance was an important feature of every celebration. Schools for teaching dance appeared in communities as early as 1853. The social hall and other buildings were constructed for the purpose of this and other recreations.

With the establishment of the Latter-Day Saints in the territory of Utah, also called Deseret, and the achievement of a certain degree of permanency, dance as an art form emerged. The Salt Lake Theatre, built in 1862, was the home for the "Deseret Dramatic Association," a favorite of Salt Lake audiences. Within this association of actors and actresses was Sara Alexander, performer of dance specialties and comic roles. Brigham Young felt that Miss Alexander's contribution to the theater was so essential that he, in effect, "called her on a mission" to entertain the people of Salt Lake City. Before her term as a comic actress and dancer, Sara was engaged as a teacher to Brigham Young's children. In fact, Brigham Young's daughters became so proficient in dance that they frequently appeared on the stage of the Salt Lake Theatre.[12]

While dance was being appreciated from an observer's perspective in the Salt Lake Theatre, enjoyment simultaneously continued on a participatory social level. Brigham Young's colonization of the Utah territory brought numerous churches and church-organized dances to communities whose recreational facilities were limited. Soon however non-church organized dance halls began to open in the territory in direct competition with the church recreations. Controversy arose in the church about the propriety of both the "gentile" dance halls (those not owned by the church) and the new style of dancing arriving from the east and Europe (the waltz and other "closed" position dancing). One church version of this controversy is expressed in the following paragraph:

> *in too large a number of public amusement places, instead of being owned by the [church] wards and managed by our organizations, are held by ordinary private corporations who therefore devise, direct, and control the amusement of the young people, always with an eye to the main chance of gathering the dollar. While some of the socials are fairly good, it is often the case that no protection is vouchsafed the young people except their own often wavering power of self-control. It is a condition that needs remedy. The importance of owning our own halls and of controlling and directing the social amusements and recreations of our community is only second to controlling and directing their moral and religious training.*[13]

In reaction to these controversies and other worldly temptations confronting youth, the Young Ladies Retrenchment Associations took a firm stand against closed position dancing and sought to develop dance into a more worthy direction for Mormons.

In 1910 the Deseret Gymnasium was built in Salt Lake City and used by students of the Latter-Day Saint University and eventually the Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association (YWMIA). The Deseret Gymnasium provided young women the opportunity to learn and develop skills

in appropriate social dances Ann Nebeker, a former member of the YWMIA organization, was specifically secured for the purpose of teaching dance, gymnastics, and athletics By June of 1911, courses in dance instruction were offered throughout the church on neighborhood, community, and regional levels with the philosophy that "it would be far more credible to teach the young how to dance properly and gracefully than to offer criticism."[14] Dance in the YWMIA as of June, 1914, consisted of "Hewitt's Fancy," the Scotch Reel, and square dances. The program of instruction proved successful and five of the leading church schools arranged to offer a course in dance direction for YWMIA leaders. During this time dance and recreation were officially recognized under the auspices of the Mutual Improvement Associations Enthusiasm for dance in the church grew, and organized balls became an important social outlet for young people. The evolution of the elaborate dance festivals began in 1922 with a dance exhibition at Saltair, a resort situated on the Great Salt Lake, which grew out of this enthusiasm.

The dance exhibition was soon included as a featured event during a June conference, the major organizational and informational meeting of the MIA. As the years progressed and the youth of the church became more experienced and skilled, the colorful dance programs grew in participation and popularity. Young people throughout the church were encouraged to take part, and the dance spectacles were known to include up to 10,000 individuals. The dance festivals continued through 1947 at Saltair, but the festival moved to the University of Utah stadium where it continued until 1973. Church organizations in various parts of the United States and foreign countries now plan their own festivals, which feature dances peculiar to their regional character and traditions.[15]

The need for formal training of dance educators was noted by the church academy, the Brigham Young Academy in Dance, Provo, Utah. In 1890, Susa Young Gates, daughter of Brigham Young, initiated a "Theory of Physical Culture" class which emphasized the health benefits of calisthenics and military marching. During a trip east in 1892, Gates persuaded Maud May Babcock, a teacher of physical culture and the Delsarte system of acting at Harvard University, to come to Utah and expose the women to these important ideas of activity. As a result a summer course in the Delsarte system, natural and aesthetic movements for physical development and for expressions in elocution, were offered at the church academy. Babcock's concepts of physical culture and her successful classes provided the underpinnings for the establishment of a department dedicated solely to the purpose of physical education.[16]

In 1913 the Ladies Gymnasium at Brigham Young University was completed and provided a new and spacious facility for dance and other recreational activities. Dance was added to the physical culture course work, so that from 1915 to 1918 professional dancing, social dancing, and dancing and ballroom supervision were made available, and in 1921 to 1923, creative movement was added.

In the following years, dance offerings continued to grow and expand. The "Academy" changed to "University" as the curriculum of the entire school was upgraded, and the new school took its place among other major colleges and universities in the country. Classes were added in the physical education program which primarily was concerned with the aspects of teaching dance in all its different forms. social, square, tap, marching, folk, clog; modern.

Dance in Contemporary Mormondom

Dance within the Department of Physical Education at Brigham Young University, one of the most comprehensive programs of its kind in the country, offers an ambitious and challenging curriculum. Success is credited both to a skilled, dedicated faculty and to the Mormon belief in education and recreation. BYU is not the only church school with a dance program, however, the BYU program is a model for Latter-Day Saint church schools as well as other schools and universities across the country. Today many performance groups originate at BYU. The Dancer's Company, under Dee Winterton and Pat Debenham, organized in 1976, currently tours internationally performing and teaching master classes. The BYU International Folk Dancers, originated in 1956 by Mary Bee Jensen, has made fifteen annual European tours and serves as an important public relations and educational unit for the University. Beginning in 1960, the Ballroom Dance Team has established a reputation for excellence both in the United States and abroad. Because of the team's success, prestigious dance competitions have been hosted by BYU. The Theatre Ballet, originating in 1968, performs on campus in opera and other dramatic productions. In addition to the performance groups, dance at BYU is widely participated in by the students. Social dance classes, for example, exceed six thousand students each year.

Mormon activity in dance is not limited to church organizations but is extended to the national and international community Mormon culture and ideology have influenced the sphere of dance through highly skilled professional educators, performers, and choreographers. Perhaps the most well-known figure is Virginia Tanner, acclaimed for her teaching methods of creative dance for children. With an unquenchable belief in the value of her philosophies and teaching approaches, Virginia exposed her students to opportunities and experiences perhaps unsurpassed anywhere in the country.

In 1953, Ted Shawn invited Miss Tanner to bring the Children's Dance Theatre to the famed Jacob's Pillow in Lee, Massachusetts. Overwhelmed by the beauty of the young performers, the nation's foremost dancers acknowledged the children's skill with a standing ovation. Critic Walter Terry referred to Virginia Tanner as a Mormon teacher who is a genius in training children. He continued in his review of the performance:

From the first there was beauty. They were wonderfully disciplined yet gloriously free. It is difficult to describe even the most potent intangibles and the best

I can do is to say that the children danced as if they had faith in themselves, had love for those of us who were seeing them actively believe in their God, and rejoiced in all of these

Tanner's Children's Dance Theatre, and her method of teaching children have continued to impress audiences and educators throughout the world. In recognition of her contributions, Miss Tanner received numerous honorary degrees and awards, but her greatest personal reward was to observe and participate in the growth and accomplishment of her students.[17] Virginia Tanner was also the motivating force in the founding of Utah's Repertory Dance Theatre. RDT continues today as a nationally known force in modern dance.

Another pioneer of present-day dance activity and of the rise of the regional ballet company is L. P. Christensen. Instructor of dance at the Deseret Gymnasium and a director of the 1922 dance exhibition at Saltair, Christensen helped prepare Utah audiences for the appreciation of ballet.[18] His grandsons, Lew and William have strongly influenced ballet in the western United States, especially the San Francisco Ballet and Ballet West.

Two important figures known both inside and outside Mormondom are Shirley Ririe and Joan Woodbury, co-founders and directors of the Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company. They have contributed to both the Latter-Day Saints church and the world through their gifts as talented performers, choreographers, and teachers. Their popular company of dancers is among the most widely and frequently traveled groups in the country. Shirley Ririe has also assisted the Mormon church by adding her words of experience in choreography and theatre dance to the *M I A Dance Handbook*.[19] Her articles have helped amateur directors through the challenging process of staging a play or musical for a church function.

Mormon influence has also been felt in the area of movement education and in the Artists-in-the-Schools program. Many teachers and performers in the Utah area have turned their talents toward these new fields of education. Dee Winterton, a member of the Modern Dance and Musical Theater faculties of Brigham Young University, is also a successful and nationally recognized movement educator. His professional code "to teach *people*, not programs" reaffirms Joseph Smith's philosophy of the education of the whole being. Any attempt to list all those involved in these programs would be incomplete; however, Shirley Ririe, a movement specialist herself, estimates that about one-third of the movement educators in the AIS program are either from or are educated in Utah.

Dance in Mormon culture has served as an end and a means to an end in the pursuit of the praiseworthy in life. Dance has served as a means to an end by increasing group solidarity and providing a vital, recreational outlet in times of tragedy and difficulty, and served as an end in itself, as an enobling activity adding to the grace and dignity of man. The Mormon message has been consistent from the organization of the church in April of 1830 to the present: "Man is that he might have joy."

The words of Brigham Young explain simply and precisely the phenomenon of the Mormons and the "Dancingest Denomination":

Our work, our everyday labor, our whole lives are within the scope of our religion. This is what we believe, and what we try to practice. Recreation and diversion are as necessary to our well-being as the most serious pursuits of life. If you wish to dance, dance, and you are just as prepared for prayer meeting as you were before, if you are Saints.[20]

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7

Southern Baptists and Dancing

J. Douglas Thomas

For most of their history in America, Baptists, especially Southern Baptists, have focused attention on social issues which are individualistic rather than institutional in nature. Opposition to dancing, one of these individualistic issues, has also existed since the beginning of American Baptist history. To understand the stereotype of the non-dancing Southern Baptist and the modern shape of that image, requires consideration of several factors. These are the structures of the American Baptist church which permits individual member and local church decisions about dance, the attitudes toward dance in the history of the church, and the environment in which dance is performed.

The Structure of the Baptist Church in America

The Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, differs from many denominations in that it lacks the power to enforce any position upon local churches or individuals who compromise the churches. The basic Baptist organizational unit, and the only one with any authority to regulate the behavior of the Southern Baptist member, is the local church. Local churches choose messengers to attend the annual meetings of their respective associations and conventions; however, participation in the denomination, including electing the messengers to the annual meeting and contributing money to support the denominational programs is strictly a voluntary decision of each local church. Each level of the denomination, local, state, and regional, remains independent of the others, with only fraternal and informational relationships continuing.[1] None of the conventions can coerce the churches to adopt policies for positions opposed by church members.[2]

As a result of this structure, denominational statements regarding dance usually express opinions and call upon the churches to act. Local churches determine whether, when, and how to discipline its members for participation in dances. If a member acts in ways which his church considers reprehensible or immoral, however, the congregation can exclude him from the membership after sincerely encouraging him to improve his behavior.[3] Baptist church members have frequently fallen under this discipline for participating in dance.

Dancing in Baptist History

When Baptists talk about "dancing," they almost always apply the term to recreational dancing. The dance as an artistic expression has received virtually no attention from the Convention. The entertainment industry, especially theatre and movies, has furthermore been criticized by Southern Baptists.[4,5]

The Anabaptists of the Reformation period and Pietests of the seventeenth century provide a historical background to the attitude of early Baptists toward dancing. Anabaptist confessions emphasized that Christians should separate themselves from evil in the world including political, civic, and social involvement.[6] As early as 1526 Anabaptists criticized the Zurich city council for permitting frivolous activities such as dancing. A person accused of belonging to the Anabaptists could clear himself by proving that he "cursed, *danced,* drank heavily, started quarrels, or beat his wife."[7] The Pietist movement in Germany and Scandinavia deeply influenced the revivalistic awakenings in America, both before and after the American Revolution. Baptists in the south and west grew significantly as a result of the revivals and perpetuated the Pietist disdain of worldly pleasures such as dancing.[8]

Throughout the history of Baptists in the south, the churches and conventions have opposed dancing, but prior to the twentieth century most of the attention given to dancing originated on the local church level. Before the American Revolution, Baptist churches regularly took disciplinary measures against dancing members. The Welsh Neck church in South Carolina included in its church covenant a committment that parents would seek to restrain their children from "wicked company and vain pleasures," including playing cards and "going to dances—balls—and sinful assemblies." Furthermore, the parents promised not to engage in those pastimes themselves. The church consequently excluded members for dancing and one for enrolling as a "scholar" at a dancing school.[9]

Typically a member accused of improper conduct was admonished to improve, with a church committee appointed for this purpose.[10] In 1775 the Grassy Creek church of North Carolina excommunicated a woman who, after admonition, "found no repentance, (that is, she was unwilling to give up dancing)."[11] Again in the early 1790s

the Grassy Creek church voted unanimously that Christians should not frequent "balls and assemblies of the wicked" and censured any members guilty of attending "balls or weddings where fiddling and dancing were carried on."[12] In 1880 the pastor of Grassy Creek church noted the several examples of discipline for dancing and described social dancing as "unscriptural" and "positively and specifically forbidden by the word of God."[13] The Elkhorn Baptist church in Kentucky extended its discipline to a slave for "getting drunk swearing & dancing."[14]

Denominational comments on dancing began in the twentieth century. In 1913 the Southern Baptist Convention established a Social Services Committee and combined it the following year with the Temperance Committee. From then until World War II, this expanded Committee devoted most of the space in its annual report to liquor abuse and the eighteenth amendment of the Constitution. In the early 1920s, however, four statements from the Committee reflected the traditional Baptist attitude toward dancing. In 1920 the report admonished churches to provide alternative recreational and social opportunities so members could avoid the "lascivious and deadly" dance halls.[15] The next year dancing was identified, along with motion pictures as a threat to the morals of young people. The report attributed the increased popularity of dancing to World War I and contended that dancing's danger was intensified "by immodest dress, by close physical contact of the sexes, [and] by its lack of restraint." Pastors should not only protest the dance publicly but should also cooperate with parents in checking and abolishing it.[16] After recording some improvement in the 1922 report, the 1923 Social Service Committee characterized the marathon dance fad as a "disgusting exhibition" and "nauseating excess" which destroyed the modesty and morals of men and women. Churches should take steps to protect themselves from the "positive harm inherent in the modern dance in all its forms."[17]

No direct reference to dancing occurred after the 1923 report, but the negative attitude toward dancing remained dominant. Preachers sermonized against dancing, card playing, theaters, and movies as improper amusements for Christians, while editors of Baptist papers and state conventions protested recreational dancing and dancing instructions for students and military men alike.[18]

In 1936 the program of Bales Baptist Church in Kansas City, Missouri, was spotlighted as a model for other churches. Alvin G. Hause, pastor, explained the churches' desire and need for a "separated church membership," that is, for members who did not indulge in activities which delighted the unsaved and unchurched. Hause included ballroom dancing in his list of prohibitions, although he professed that the church was reasonable and logical in its teaching rather than fanatical.[19]

The Moral and Physical Environment of the Dance

The environment where dancing occurs represents to many Baptists, a moral void if not an overt enticement to evil. Young people typically dance at school and home parties, while adults usually go to a dance hall or a bar which sponsors dancing. Youth dances, so the theory goes, are well-chaperoned, well-lighted, and unaffected by direct influence from alcohol and sex. In fact, Baptists have argued, most school and home dances are held in dimly lighted settings, and many students bring alcoholic beverages. Chaperones cannot provide adequate supervision to teenagers. Adults who dance compound these problems by the facts that consumption of alcohol is often encouraged and that no one attempts to regulate the activities.[20]

Baptists have also been concerned with the moral environment in which recreational dances are held. The feelings that dancing arouses sexual desire cannot be denied. Baptists have consistently advocated and remain strongly committed to sexual continence prior to marriage and sexual faithfulness within marriage. For Baptists, even if dancing does not lead to immoral acts, "lust in the heart" is an equally serious situation.

Baptists have traditionally opposed dancing because of its damaging effect on Christian growth, influence, and witness. Baptist young people are usually encouraged to ask the following questions: Would Christ dance?; Could you witness to your partner on the dance floor?; Would you be able to kneel and pray at a dance? Since the obvious answer to some Baptists is "no," the question of dancing is settled.

In recent decades the attitude toward dancing among Southern Baptists seems to have undergone changes. Official statements have virtually ceased, and informal surveys among freshmen classes in religion taught by this writer indicate that very few of the students from Baptist churches have ever heard dancing ever mentioned in a sermon. Over half the students indicate that they participate in and enjoy dancing, with little or no reprobation from their parents or church leaders.

A number of Baptist colleges currently offer courses (usually in the physical education department) on folk, square, round, modern, and social dancing, and others allow campus organizations to sponsor dances off campus. A few schools provide cultural exposure to dance by professional ballet performers, while some offer instruction in dance as an art form. At times pastors and churches privately and publicly criticize the colleges for allowing such courses and activities, and conventions have occasionally expressed concern, but these developments do indicate that the traditionally negative Baptist attitude toward dancing is evolving into a more moderate posture, at least among the young and those who work with them. Most pastors and other Baptist leaders apparently continue to look upon dancing as a dangerous social activity recognizing the impossibility of changing the course of affairs at least for the present, they choose not to force the issue. Perhaps the passing of another decade will reveal whether this trend toward dancing becomes permanently entrenched or whether Baptists will revert to an older, more traditional view on dancing as a recreational pastime.

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8 Jewish Religious Dance

Laraine Catmull

Throughout the long history of the Jews, dance has played a significant role in religious observances. Dance has served to sanctify religious objects, to express joyous thanksgiving and honor to God, and to unite man's spirit with God's. Dance was never thought of as being merely recreational and professional dancing was generally abhored by the Jews of early times.[1] Dance was a holy, joyous experience augmented by sharing it with others and especially with God.[2] In the ancient Midrashic commentaries the following question was put to the rabbinical scholars of Israel: "Can you furnish for us such a dance as that which the Holy One, blessed be He, will provide for the righteous in the time to come?" The rabbis replied, "The Holy One, blessed be He, will in the time to come lead the dance among the righteous . . ."[3]

Jewish religious dance can be traced through history by examining the ecstatic dances performed in ancient festivals. The development of dance through the harvest festivals borrowed from the Canaanites, the dance of the Hasidism, and the present-day Israeli folk dancing.

Ecstatic Dances in Ancient Festivals

The early prophets of the Old Testament performed a form of ecstatic dance which was an expression of strong religous emotion. The dance would begin quietly and work up to a wild, rapturous frenzy, consummated with a trance-like state believed to be an ecstatic union with God. In this state the prophet became a "mouth-piece" for God since God's spirit was believed to have entered his body.[4]

Although there is a rather rare mention of dancing in the Bible, there is evidence that dance must have played a significant role in Jewish religious festivals. The Hebrew word for festival, "chag," originally meant a circle dance performed around a sacred altar or sanctuary. This circle dance must have been such a principal or customary feature of these festivals and was in the form of either a processional or a closed circular formation. In ritual encirclement rites throughout Jewish history seven circles were completed to sanctify or dedicate to God. This occurs in the marriage ceremony of the Jews of Persia where the bride and groom are encircled seven times. Another dramatic example of this was when Joshua and his people encircled the city of Jericho seven times, bearing the ark to signify God's presence, and causing the walls of the city to fall (Joshua 6:3-5).[5]

The festival of Passover, or *Pesach,* is the most ancient of all the Jewish religious holidays with roots in the time when the Hebrew people were still nomads of the desert even before their captivity in Egypt. Originally a springtime festival celebrating the month in which the kids and lambs were born, the festival featured the sacrifice of a goat or sheep. The Hebrew word for this festival, *Pesach,* originally referred to a certain sacred "limping" dance which was performed around the sacrificial offerings.[6] This limping dance was done by the early prophets of Baal, the pagan god of the Canaanites, as a form of desperate supplication, after all other prayers had failed, to arouse the pity of Baal.[7] The dance resembled the ecstatic dance of the Jewish prophets in that it would gradually work into a wild, jumping frenzy, concluding with masochistic practices of self-laceration. These laceration practices were rejected by the Jews as being too pagan.

Harvest Festivals

When the Hebrew people settled down to an agrarian life in Palestine, they adopted from the Canaanite peoples, two harvest festivals, the *Sukkos* and *Shovous.* Both festivals, which included ritual sacrifice, were celebrated in the same fashion with a joyous feast followed by the performance of holy songs and religious dances. The purposes of these festivals were to ensure good crops for the coming year, to consecrate the sacrifices to God, and to express thanksgiving. As time passed, the Jews began to infuse more and more religious content into the festivals in order to differentiate these from the Bacchanalian festivals of the Canaanites. After the Babylonian exile, *Sukkos,* then called "Feast of the Tabernacle," developed into a spectacular display of religious pageantry. In the Court of the Women, huge menorahs (candelabras) set on bases fifty feet high were lit and attended to by the young priests. The light from these menorahs would illuminate the entire city of Jerusalem. Women then filled the galleries to watch the most respected men of Jerusalem perform the ritual torch dance. Torches were waved and tossed into the air accom-

panied by the Levite choir and musical instruments.[8] The watching women were not allowed to participate in the ritual dances of the Temple and indeed the dancing of men and women together was prohibited by Jewish law. However, it was the women who greeted the victorious soldiers with dances of celebration and thanksgiving to God for the soldiers' return.[9]

When the Jews were dispersed and began living in the cities, their dances changed. The nature festivals of their ancestors no longer held meaning for them and their written history and religious beliefs now became their most precious possession.[10] Instead of encircling the sacrificial altar on *Sukkos,* the ceremonial procession now wound around the Torah-scroll, held on the center platform of the orthodox synagogue.

Hasidism and Dance

In the early part of the eighteenth century, a revivalistic movement called Hasidism began in Poland and quickly spread throughout Eastern Europe bringing about a virtual revolution in the lives of its adherents. Led by Israel Baal Shem Tov, Hasidism reintroduced joy or "simcha" into the religious observances of the Jews by utilizing ecstatic singing and dancing, in order to reach a state of spiritual unity of "devkut" with God.[11] The physique of the Jew, shrunken and cramped as a result of generations of ghetto life, became more robust and normal resulting from the wide and free gestures essential in expressing the joyousness and exhaltation of Hasidic dancing.[12]

Hasidism brought a new form of unity to their worship of one Supreme Being. As their forefathers danced to affirm *one* God, the Hasidic Jew did likewise.[13] The Hasidim would gather together and holding onto each other's shoulders or belts in a circle, would begin the dance slowly with swaying movements characteristic of those used in preparation for prayer since ancient times. While they swayed, they would sing a wordless melody "with a touch of sadness expressive of yearning and mystery."[14] The swaying would move into walking or shuffling followed by running and culminated with the men jumping and leaping wildly and freely around the synagogue with arms outstretched and heads thrown back. To see a Hasid in this final state of ecstacy is to witness something totally ethereal—a man whose outer skin is released and inner spirit is floating in a sublime state of bliss.

The rabbi of the congregation would exercise the lead in these dances by way of gesture and voice modulations.[15] The circle dancing or "mechol," which symbolized the circular relationship between man and God, did not always necessarily move counter-clockwise and there was no limit to its participants. When the circle became too crowded another circle would form on the inside, when there was no room for a massive circle dance the movement would switch to a "rikud," jumping up and down in place symbolic of ladder climbing, until the whole room would pulsate joyously:

> *Packed together on risers and in the center with barely enough room to breathe the men could only move in one direction—up. With heads "yesing" and "noing" and hands clapping, rising higher and higher over head, they bounced up and down, following their rabbi's lead with spellbound attention. As the excitement became contagious, spirits rose, and likewise, the movement until their bouncing became jumping which quickly generated such a powerful rhythmic momentum that the floor shook.*[16]

The greatest occasion for Hasidic rejoicing was *Simchat Torah* Dressed in their traditional long black coats, wide brimmed hats and skull caps, they carried their Torahs aloft executing the seven circles around the reader's desk inside the synagogue. Then the rapturous dancing followed, highlighted by improvised dancing in the center by the rabbi who alone exercises the right to solo performance.[17]

As in ancient times the Hasidic women are not included in the religious dancing except at weddings, and even then the men and the women again dance separately according to Jewish law. Wedding dances serve a religious function since it is stated in the Talmud that "Whoever participates in a wedding dinner and does not make the bride and groom merry he transgresses five commandments."[18]

Hasidim dancing with joy at the Western Wall

Photograph courtesy of the Nancy Hauser Dance Company

Photograph courtesy of the Nancy Hauser Dance Company

Yemenite men in a typical dance movement

Israeli Folk Dancing

As Israel developed into nationhood, Israeli dance researchers and choreographers were looking for dances from the various immigrant groups which could be considered authentically "Jewish" and favored dances of Hasidic Jews and Yemenite Jews.[19] Coming from a desert country like Palestine, the Yemenite Jews stirred romantic images in the minds of these early Israeli folk dance choreographers. The dance songs of the Yemenite men are in the form of religious poetry, collected in a book called the *Diwan*. The recurring themes of these songs are the love between God and Israel and the longing for Zion.[20] The oldest remembered dances were very slow and accompanied only by singing and hand clapping. The people of the older generation attributed this to the mournful remembrance of the destruction of the Temple and the subsequent dispersion of the Jews. However, over the past one hundred years these dances have radically changed in response to more relaxed relations with the Arabic characteristics in rhythm and movement style.[21]

Many Israeli "folk dances" have been choreographed within the last thirty years utilizing elements from Hasidic and Yemenite dances. Many of these dances express the joy of returning to the homeland. Furthermore, with the Israeli return to an agrarian lifestyle, the major festivals reverted to their ancient functions as harvest celebrations and dances were choreographed to portray the work of the harvest.[22] Many dances have been created for each of the Jewish holidays and performed in Israel as well as in other Jewish communities throughout the world.[23]

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9

Comments on Reviving Biblical Festivals in Israel

Judith Brin Ingber

The settlers of the modern day state of Israel have an inspiring precedent for dancing. Their forebears celebrated the cycles of nature and the cycles of human life with great exultation and with dance. Dance was an integral part of the life in ancient Israel.

There were three holidays in particular in biblical Israel, with celebrations most likely involving dance. Each of these holidays included mass pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem. The Talmud says, "Even as all rivers go down to the sea, yet the sea is not full, so does all Israel stream to Jerusalem on the pilgrim festivals, and yet Jerusalem is not full." Interestingly, each holiday had a religious and also an agricultural significance, which in particular spoke to the modern day farming settlements. The kibbutzim took these holiday times for celebration and dance.

The spring Pesah or Passover holiday, early summer Shavuot holiday, and the autumn Succot were revived by the agricultural kibbutzim. In the Diaspora, Passover is the family holiday which is centered in the home around the meal where the exodus or the leaving of Egypt for freedom is told. In ancient times, the Omer, or the cutting and presenting of the first grains, was part of this spring festival. The modern kibbutzim which were essentially nonreligious, stressed the Omer at Pesah. Shavuot marks the giving of the Law to Moses. At this holiday time in the Diaspora, the holiday is marked in the synagogue with special prayers and often with the festive appearance of flowers and fruits. In ancient times, there was a celebration of the first fruits or Hag Habikkurim. In modern Israel, this also became a time for dancing. At Succot, the third ancient pilgrimage holiday, there was an autumn harvest festival or Hag Ha'ssif and Simtat Bait HaShoevah or praying for rain in earlier times. So this also became a renewed time of dancing.

The holidays provided the settlers of this century with a time for celebrating life together and for acknowledging the produce of their work as well as the rebirth of the land. The pioneers turned their physical energy from the fields to dance, as a communal expression of their miraculous presence in the ancient land. In the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, the members of the kibbutzim reflected in dance, what had occurred 20 centuries before.

Kibbutz festivities were not productions such as the dance of highly developed city life in theaters for a select audience. Kibbutz dances took place in the fields and in the communal dwellings. There were no limitations on the stage area or on the length of the performance. There were no requirements for training their dancers, nor were there elaborate financial concerns for production. These celebrations were for the people, a way to focus the incredible energy of creating a new society, or idealistic youth, of the fervor of socialism, of the excitement and settling of vastly different peoples from the East and West.

Creators of some of the original kibbutz celebrations include Leah Bergstein, Gurit Kadman, and Rivka Sturman. These artists galvanized not only the agricultural communities and the cities, but also affected the entire community of Israel and eventually even Jewish communities abroad. Their dance was unique, and it was also the seedbed of the later Israeli folk dance and of much of the theater dance that came later.

These matriarchs of dance received a kind of commission from the settlers of the new Israel, a commission to find new ways to celebrate in the old land. They all referred to the Bible for focus of the power and fervor of their days. Their experiments in dance were for specific groups in special times. Gurit Kadman was the Diaghilev of this epoch period. She envisioned and produced pageants and festivals that combined the works of all of these women from the different kibbutzim as well as others. At Kibbutz Daliah, in 1944, Gurit took the Shavuot holiday and created a "Story of Ruth." In addition, she invited others to participate. Those who came to Daliah saw parts of festivals and holiday dances created throughout the country. Kadman gave the nation an impetus to not only search and create, but also to perform. The Daliah Festival became a pilgrimage of modern times, a cultural ceremony in the life of Israel. It was held several times in a 25-year span backed by the kibbutz movement, the government, and an ecstatic public.

A first-hand account of the connection of Israeli folk dance to the Bible was delivered by Gurit Kadman at the International Theatre Institutes Jerusalem Seminar in August, 1979. In the interest of historical record, Kadman's account is presented in its entirety.

Photograph courtesy of the Nancy Hauser Dance Company

Etching by J. Ben[illegible] illustrating I Samuel 18:7

Our pioneer generation and the workers' settlements danced dances in the beginning we brought with us from the Diaspora. I came to Palestine with the pioneers from Central Europe in 1920 and well remember the five to six European-based dances which made us happy through long dance nights. But soon we felt the lack of tradition and began searching for roots, first of all through a revival of the ancient nature festivals. Later on, when our children grew up and wanted indigenous expression in these holy days, we searched for songs and dances. Naturally, we turned to the Bible and found plenty of inspiration for reviving the seasonal agricultural festivals, but next to nothing for reviving song and dances. So, out of want and an ardent wish for an adequate self-expression in movement, we were forced to create dances, which we did, starting in the 1940s. Our first dance gathering took place in 1944 in Kibbutz Daliah and later, until 1968, followed five more huge dance festivals in Daliah. All of these events furthered the creation of our folk dances. Between the first and second Daliah festivals, 1944 and 1947, folk dances developed in a feverish intensity and tempo, mostly in connection with the revived nature holidays.

Interesting is the fact that the first beginning of this dance creation and its relation with Kibbutz Daliah was connected with the Bikkurim (summer harvest) festival and with the Book of Ruth.

In the spring of 1944, I was invited to stage, with the members of Kibbutz Daliah, parts of the Book of Ruth, for the celebration of the Bikkurim, for the three kibbutzim in the neighborhood, in the hills of Ephraim. The performance, a collective creation by Kibbutz members, with me, took place outdoors, in a beautiful spot in Daliah. It was a great success. Shortly after, we dance people decided to have our first gathering at Kibbutz Daliah to stage the evening performances in that beautiful spot, and to open it with the Book of Ruth, as far as we understood, in biblical style and spirit.

I have to mention here, that in those pioneer days, and especially in a left-wing kibbutz such as Daliah, God could not be m[illegible]oned so Boaz greeted his reapers in the field not t[illegible], "God bless you," like in the Bible, but with "Peace to you." And in many celebrations of the revived Bikkurim festival all over the country, the people dedicated the fruits of their work, instead of to the priests or to God, to the national fund. A great number of the dance songs drew their text from the Bible, and here as well, occasionally texts were changed in order to eliminate the name of God. For example, "Ken Yoydu," a victory dance of mine, where I changed the text, "Thus, may perish all you foes, Oh god," into, "Thus, may perish all your foes, Israel."

The most striking example of change of text exists in Rivka Sturman's war and victory dance, "Debka Gilboa," in the song composed by Amiran, the finishing line dares to change the ancient biblical curse, "No dew and no rain on the Mount of Gilboa," where Saul and Jonathan fell in battle into the blessing, "Dew, dew and rain on the Mount of Gilboa!"

The creators of our new dances drew inspiration by performance of those many songs with biblical texts, but the resulting dances do not contain any steps or movements reviving biblical dance. There are two reasons for this regrettable fact: (1) We simply have no knowledge at all about those movements in detail, not out of the language even though there exist more than 30 words on dance movement in the Bible and the Talmud, but their exact meaning and execution are not known to us, and we get no help by art creations (as do the Greeks, Egyptians, Indians) because of the forbidding Third Commandment, "Thou shalt not make any image or likeness."

In order to build up a dance language for us today, I worked for years with the Language Committee, fixing in meticulous research the exact meaning and execution of the bibli[illegible] words for the most important dance movements.

The second reason for our lack of revived biblical dances is the fact that the dance creation was inspired by the melodies or tunes and not by the text of songs. So we can rightly say: Any dance creation declared as

"biblical dance" is pure imagination. Authentic biblical dances are nonexistent.

Very few of our folk dances try to come near to a biblical feature, mainly in choreographic, not in movement detail. For example, the form of Machanayim, or two opposite lines in "Ken Yovdu."

From the beginning, I was not only interested in but fascinated by the dances of the Edoth of our Oriental communities. From 1944 on, we brought their dancers, soloists and groups to Daliah. I also filmed the dances whenever possible starting in 1951, among them, Yemenites the moment they arrived in Israel with the magic carpet, in the small planes they called angel wings, according to the biblical promise, "I shall bring you on angel wings to your beloved Zion."

Later on, eight years ago, I founded the Israel Ethnic Dance project with the aim to preserve and/or to revive their ancient, traditional dance customs with the music and dance costumes. We encouraged them to continue the customs in daily life and holidays as well as in especially built up performance troupes for state occasions.

All those current traditional dances developed in the long Diaspora—nobody can know for sure of any traces of biblical elements existing in those dances—I have the impression that strikingly similar very spiritual upward movement in Yemenite and in Chasidic dances could be remnants of the biblical epoch. But I have no way to confirm it. The same is true about ancient prayer movements which appear often in movements for the holiday.

It is interesting to mention that in all their activities and intimate relations with the Oriental communities, we never heard them talk about any connection of their dances to the Bible. It seem that their relationship to the Bible is just the opposite of us pioneers 50 years ago. They are so deeply based and rooted in tradition that they do not feel any necessity to search for roots, as we did! The Bible is alive in their midst, they live in the atmosphere of the Bible quite naturally, in daily life and in holidays. They have no problems in their relationship with the Bible.

Rivka Sturman, in her work, was concerned about representing all branches of agriculture during her Hag HaBikkurim celebration at Kibbutz Ein Harod. She also took special pains to present the children of the kibbutz in dance out in the fields. Sturman braided together elements of the Orient and of Europe, paying attention to descriptions and Biblical ideas, presenting tractors and produce and even the new babies born during the year in the dance offerings. Leah Bergstein , by contrast, had more of a choreographer's concern in planning the movements in her Omer celebration at Kibbutz Ramat Yohanon. She wanted the movements to be simple enough and effective enough to present the elements of spring and God's bounty at Passover so that both those untrained kibbutz folk doing the dancing and those watching would understand. These women and others (including Yardena Cohen and Sara Levi-Tanai)made experiments in dance for their own specific groups at very special holiday times. Yet the dances and pageants created were of such artistic worth, that they are recognized as cornerstones of the new Israeli culture, surpassing the original intent—searching for new dances that still spoke to the roots of ancient Biblical Festivals.

10

Dance in Worship: a Viewpoint from the Catholic Church

Fr. Edmund T. Coppinger

As I begin this article, I feel that it is good for me to be aware of my limitations. Being the pastor of a small rural parish, rather than citing statistics or giving a detailed overall picture, I prefer to write of my own experiences within the past few years, and follow these with some personal reflections.

I recall being at the parish of the Paulist Fathers in Boston overlooking the Common, at a Mass for a special group one evening. The part of the Mass selected for amplification by the dance form was the reading of the epistle, the text being Romans 8:14-23. As the text was read, slowly and devoutly, and with music in the background, a male dancer expressed through his motions the meaning of the passage. In it there are many words denoting strong feelings and tensions such as, "We know that all creation groans in agony even until now." The dancer who was ministering through dance was able to interpret these in such a way as to deepen the awareness and appreciation of the congregation for the scriptural passage.

At an outdoor Mass at a summer camp in Maine I had helped two young women prepare to interpret the meaning of a hymn, "Take Our Bread," which was sung during the preparation of the gifts of bread and wine, the theme of the hymn being the attitudes of prayer that we bring as we share in the Lord's banquet. This was expressed solely by the dancers in the verses; at the end of each verse the dancers turned to the congregation and invited them to participate in the chorus by movement and gesture. Because the movements were simple, dignified, and expressive, the congregation was able to join in with ease, and thus feel an involvement of their entire being in the hymn.

At another occasion I recall the use of a very simple gesture at a Mass for our religion school teachers at the parish church in Marydel, Maryland. During the sermon I had spoken of the theme of sharing gifts, so at the "greeting of peace" I invited them to express this sharing by going to one of the teachers, and with hands held together in the prayer position, tilt them toward the person and say, "What I have received, I share with you." The other person, clasping the hands between theirs said, "And I accept." Then each person in turn both "shared" and "accepted," repeating the same gestures. This is an example of how a variety of expression can be used at this part of the Mass.

Another very joyful experience I had with liturgical dance occurred in the above mentioned church at a Mass on Easter Sunday. The teachers of our 8th grade religion class agreed to prepare the young people (six girls and three boys) for a solemn procession to bring the gifts to the altar. The boys led the procession carrying incense and candles, while the girls brought the gifts, using a "pavan" step (three steps forward and one backward). Each of the girls held a gift, and as they moved up the main aisle they extended their gifts outward and upward toward the congregation, thus symbolically drawing all into the spirit of the procession. On the backward step each made a deep bow to express reverence and adoration. Cat Stevens' version of "Morning Has Broken" was the chosen processional music. After the Mass a good number of the congregation came up to me and said they were quite moved, and that they found the procession prayerful and inspiring. The ample number of practice sessions given the young people and the advance preparation made this a positive experience for all.

I also recall the Gloria of the Mass danced by a group of those participating in a sacred dance workshop under the leadership of Carla De Sola. Different small groups interpreted the various parts of the Gloria in sequence. Then, to bring a sense of unity and strength to the closing phrases, all the dancers came together and expressed the meaning of the prayer in unison, giving us a real sense of communal praise.

Finally I remember a Mass which took place in Silver Spring, Maryland, for the final vows of a Franciscan sister. Following Communion, the sister did an interpretive dance to a hymn extolling the virtues and the joy of Mary, the mother of Christ, thus expressing in a very personal way, and yet in a way that was shared by all, her own deep joy and thanksgiving.

I do not see the present status of liturgical dance in the Catholic tradition as being performed on a regular basis in the weekly parish worship; I do believe it should be performed prayerfully, artistically, and competently at Masses on special feasts, for special groups, and at various paraliturgical services. Some of the places where liturgical dance would be more likely to be found on a more regular basis are at Newman Centers of colleges and universities, and at convents and monasteries where there is a desire to seek a more creative expression of worship.

I am encouraged by what I feel is a new growing awareness in the Church of the need and ability to pray not only with the lips, but with one's whole being. Part of this awareness can be attributed to the spirit of renewal embodied in the documents of the Vatican Council II. In the deliberations of the Council, the liturgy, or worship of the Church, was singled out as having a special need to be reformed, renewed, and revitalized, so as to better meet the needs of the people of God. Two examples can be cited from the Document on the Liturgy which speak to the topic at hand. "(The) Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full active and conscious participation .... which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy"; "By way of promoting active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamation, responses, psalmody, antiphons and songs as well as by actions, gestures and bodily attitudes." In the same document the section on music and art reads: "The musical tradition of the Universal Church is a treasure of immeasurable value .... the Church indeed approves of all forms of true art, and admits them into divine worship when they showed appropriate qualities."[1] To me, the above references to "actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes," and to "all forms of true art" are especially significant in relation to the concept of prayer through motion, gesture, and dance.

The Church realizes however, that these reforms will not take place unless pastors are filled with the spirit and power of the liturgy. A program of education and formation for the clergy is most necessary. I would like to offer an example of such a program. Recently, with all the other priests of my diocese, I attended a retreat the theme of which centered on the presider, or leader of worship and prayer. As an aid, each of us received a reference book on the same theme entitled *Strong, Loving, and Wise*.[2] In the book Fr. Hovda expresses a thought which I feel illustrates the need of the clergy to be more aware of the role of the body, and of gesture in liturgy. Speaking of "action and environment" Fr. Hovda says.

> *Experience seems to indicate that initial resistance to the body's part in liturgical celebration is common .. so how can we overcome . inhibitions which effectively prevent the people involved from enjoying themselves in liturgical celebrations? One way certainly is for the ministers and leaders of celebration to do more in the way of movement, gesture, posture—encouraging the congregation, but allowing them slowly to adapt.*

In the spirit of this idea, one evening our retreat master very effectively opened us up to the possibility of using very simple gestures during a worship service. At a service of reconciliation he instructed us how to express the prayer, "Lord, forgive us," in sign language. The gestures for "Lord," and "forgive" stayed with me. For "Lord" one touches the palms of the open hand with the middle finger of the other as if touching the wounds of the nails. For "forgive," one brushes the right palm slowly (and away from the body) across the left palm in a movement suggesting that all is washed away. As we went through a litany of things we sought forgiveness for, we made this gesture at the end of each petition, at the same time praying aloud "Lord, forgive us." All were deeply moved at this simple yet expressive way of asking the Lord's forgiveness.

In conclusion, it is my prayerful hope that through education, and good, inspiring, liturgical experiences, clergy and congregations will find themselves opening more and more to the many possibilities of prayer in motion and gesture, and thus be able to use in even fuller measure all the gifts which our Creator has so generously and lovingly bestowed on us.

The greeting of peace

Photograph courtesy of Fr. Edmund T. Coopinger

Footnotes

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[2]Hovda, Robert *Strong, Loving & Wise* Washington, DC: The Liturgical Conference, 1976.

11

Facing the Issue:
It's Against My Religion

Judith Rock

Sometimes when dance is included in a school or recreational program, parents or others in the community, or even the participants themselves, object to the practice of dance on religious grounds. It is helpful for those responsible for the program to be able to respond to these objections both with personal sensitivity and with some basic knowledge of the historical and theological relationship of dance and religion.

In terms of Christian history, there is a wealth of both positive and negative attitudes to the arts in general, and to dance in particular. While the basic religious stance of an individual or family is not likely to change in response to the issue of dance participation, the leader or teacher is in a position to offer accurate and nonjudgmental information which may help to relax the situation for all concerned.

One common historical error which leads to the rejection of dance is the assumption that religious tradition means "what was done in our community in 1910 . . ." The truth is that it is possible to have a deep understanding of what we do now, and why we do it, only if one has some knowledge of what was also done in 1810, 1510, 810, and so on, and not only "here in our community" but in colonial America, 18th century Poland, medieval France, and Byzantine Athens as well. Obviously, many will not have such a breadth of knowledge about their religious tradition. A sense of such knowledge, and help with the sources of more information can be offered.

A Southern Baptist student objecting to the study of modern dance might be helped to understand that although many American Protestant groups have not condoned dancing, earlier Christian groups (both Protestant and Catholic) did dance. The New England Puritans danced, objecting only to dancing by couples. Their objection was based on scripture, in which (although there is no *prohibition* of couple dancing) the dancing mentioned is that of groups of women or groups of men, as in Exodus 15:20, the account of Miriam's dance. This, of course, reflects the dancing of Middle Eastern people who almost always segregate men and women in the dance. The student might be helped to see that the study of modern dance as an expressive art form is a situation quite different from couple dancing which has been historically rejected by many religious groups.

This leaves the issue of dance and sexuality, which is behind most objections to dance and which ultimately must be addressed, open for discussion. Psychologically, there is probably little the leader or teacher can do that will change this situation in a short time. Theologically, however, there are several things which can be said toward opening up participants' thinking and freeing some of their feelings.

First of all, religious people for whom Genesis is an important scriptural book must take serious God's response to our creation, which is that it is basically good (Genesis 1:31). Human bodies and sexuality are dimensions of humanness. The muddy thinking which leads to the rejection of dance because of fears related to sexuality usually involves the failure to distinguish between sexuality as an element of humanness, and the use one makes of sexuality. People need to be helped to realize that these are two separate theological issues: first, the affirmation of God's gift to them, of being either women or men; secondly, by their own moral choices about how to relate to other people as men and women. Individuals may feel that using the body expressively is using it sexually. They may not realize that to make this assumption is to ignore God's other gifts of spirit, intellect, feelings, and senses, all of which are experienced through the physical body and shaped by artistic expression into dance and other art forms. In other words, a leader can help others to realize, perhaps for the first time, that to use the body expressively may or may *not* mean to use the body sexually. To see sexuality as one among many physical possibilities can mean great relief not only to the adolescent but also to the religiously conservative adult who may have learned to identify sexuality with all physical experience. The person who has made this identification will perceive sexuality as a potentially overwhelming force to be kept under control with the greatest of care.

If there are several for whom dance and sexuality are inextricably identified, the leader might consider inviting a local dance company (assuming that the invited company includes articulate and sensitive performers) to present a lecture-demonstration for the group, and then discuss the dancers' experience of using their bodies expressively in public with persons of both sexes. My own experience is

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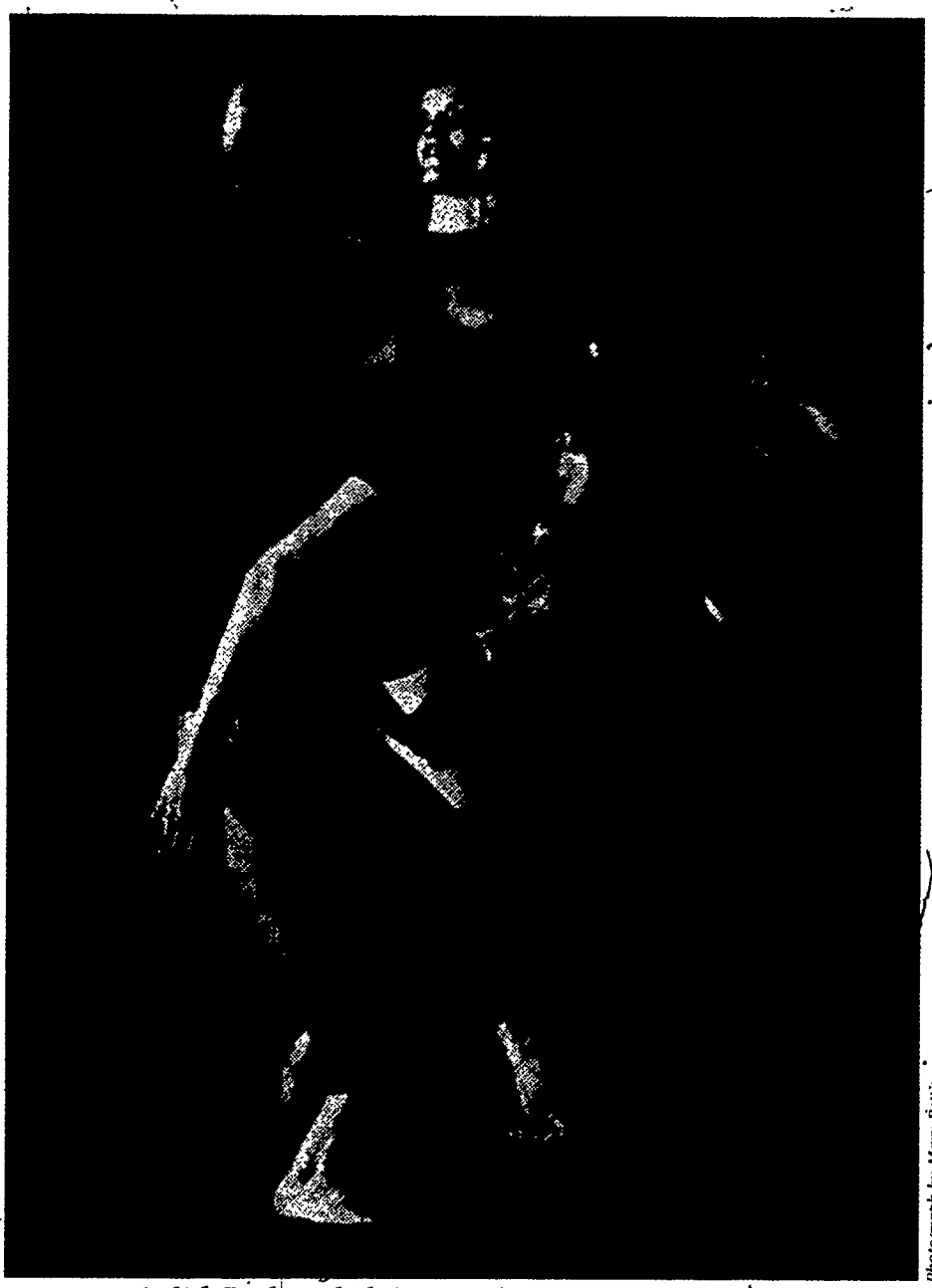
that just as physical, sexual expression is a relatively minor issue for the healthy religious celibate, it is also a minor issue for the professional dancer. Dancers seem to regard their bodies as expressive instruments rather than sexual instruments when they are dancing. To hear them discuss their own feelings and experiences in relation to partnering, costumes, contact improvisation, and so on, could be relevant to those in attendance, and could also enable them to discuss their own feelings and fears about dance and sexuality.

A second stage of this process would be to invite a company or soloist with experience dancing in religious settings, to do the same. With this performer, specific religious questions might be raised. "How can we justify the viewing of bodies in a worship service?", "Isn't religion about spirit and not about body?" Students may be surprised to learn that in the early church it was a heresy to think that only spiritual things are good and important.

In relation to this, it would be important to help Christian students to understand that when Saint Paul speaks of flesh and spirit in his letters, he is using Greek words which cannot be adequately translated into English. He does *not* mean what we understand as "flesh" and "spirit." By flesh, he means an attitude toward reality which assumes that God does not matter, and by spirit an attitude toward reality which assumes that God is at the center of things. Ultimately, information, conversations with dancers, and discussions of feelings can only be helpful if the leader is nondirective and nonjudgmental in relation to the groups. The point, of course, is to help individuals discover what *they* want and to affirm them as complete human beings. A group of Christians called Maronites used to pray this prayer as part of their morning worship. "Grant, Lord, that we may give Thee choice gifts, three lighted and dazzling torches: our minds, our spirits, and our bodies." So may we all.

Spiritual Expression and Prayer



Photograph by Mary Fettis

Judith Rock and Elaine Fruchter in Fruchter's "Back Through"

12 The Religious Nature of Dance

Marina Herrera and Elly Murphy

To arrive at an understanding of the religious nature of dance, we must consider the elements of movement, form, rhythm, and meaning. These elements allow the dancer to enter a space that is both sacred and profound, static and dynamic, changeable and eternally the same, and in this space to outwardly express that which is inwardly felt.

Dance Is Movement

All the possible functions of dance are linked to the essential nature of the dance—the movement of the human body. Movement is the essential sign of life and dance is present when the body is in motion. The dance may be rhythmic or arhythmic, rehearsed or spontaneous, with or without purpose. Dance has existed in primitive societies and in the most sophisticated circles, among the poor and the wealthy, the simple and the educated, the religious and the profane. An activity so profoundly linked to the development of human life must carry a significance that goes beyond the events themselves. Dance can be performed to express emotions and ideas, to tell a story or repeat a dream, to placate the gods, to beg for favors, to experience delight, to deal with magic, and to communicate.

Through dance, the dancer attempts to move beyond the limitations of the body to create new movements. For example, there are more than four thousand mudras for the Hindu dance. The hand gestures constitute an eloquent example of the body's infinite possibilities for expressive motion. Is there a more religious experience than the human potential for creating movement?

Dance Is Form

While the architect encompasses space with given forms, the dancer opens up space with the many forms of which the human body is capable. These spaces created by the dancer have the ethereal nature of the interior space created by visions and the concrete reality of forms to communicate an emotion. Forms have an interior reality as well as an exterior expression and dance presents us with these two aspects. The interior reality of the dancer is not for us to appreciate unless it is revealed through the studied, skillful, or exalted form of the dance. Only when the dancer feels "the spirit" can the external form have the potential for the expression of joy, sorrow, love, or anger. Dance is form that links the inner reality of our being with the outer reality. In its highest expressions, dance has the ability to unify these two realities.

The body is essential to the form of the dance. Symbolically, the body is a reminder of our earthiness, our material nature, our rootedness in time and space. Dance forms on the contrary are ever-changing, ever new. Contemplating a dancing body constitutes a powerful visual reminder of the two realities that humans represent, the material and the spiritual, sometimes in harmony, but most often in conflict. If we could allow the inner being to express itself in motion, there would be more wholeness, more centeredness. If our prayer could be expressed in moving forms, we would be less divorced from reality and our faith and our works would be less contradictory and more harmonious.

Dance Is Rhythm

All activity, because it is rhythmic, has the potential for restoring our sense of balance, for changing our focus, and thereby for soothing our nervous system. The rhythms of the dance are renditions of the many rhythms present in nature. Awareness of the rhythms in all life is found in the famous passage of Ecclesiastes that reminds us, "to everything there is a season . . ." (Ecc. 3:1–8) There is a prayerful quality to that declaration. The author understood the rhythms of his body and knew them to be a reflection of the many rhythms around him.

The successful dancer must have a sensitivity to hear rhythm to create form with music. The person who has attained a certain level of confidence in prayer must be aware of the rhythms of nature to make prayer responsive to the call of the inner being. All religious traditions require their followers to be aware of certain times that are best suited for attaining desirable effects in prayer. When the rhythmic patterns of dance can be spontaneously accomplished, the dancer is able to communicate the world of meanings with inner rhythms and those of the external world. Then we can begin to live out the ultimate and most profound meaning of our lives.

Dance Is Meaning

Dance engages the whole body in prayer. In recent years, this expression has taken the form of liturgical dance in which body, word, spirit, and music are harmoniously joined People who are comfortable with wordless communication and those who find poetic inferences in the ordinary events of life are most often attracted by this form of praying. Feeling from prayer that is danced can only be captured for a moment in time as we physically and artistically link ourselves with the abstract, intangible mysteries of life

A well-spoken word at the right time may adequately convey our thanks, our praise, our wonder, for indeed, words can powerfully express our innermost feelings. Frequently however, words are inadequate to convey our reactions to something that inspires us. How can we praise/thank the sacred objects, events, and persons for lifting up our souls and leading us on the path to wholeness? There is a mode of self-expression, one known to many characters of the Old Testament. Miriam, who took a tambourine and led the women in a dance after the Red Sea event (Ex. 15.20—21), Jephthah's daughter, who greeted her father with a dance after he had defeated the Ammonites (Jgs. 11:34), the women who welcomed David and Saul after their victory over the Philistines (I Sam. 18.6), David who danced with abandon before the Ark of the Covenant in an ecstatic, sacred dance (II Sam. 6.14, 16). Perhaps the most striking reference to dance in the New Testament occurs in the parable of the Prodigal Son. When the errant son returned home, his father "ran out to meet him, threw his arms around his neck and kissed him." (Lk. 15.20) The celebration began. There was singing and dancing because, "this son of mine was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and is found." (Lk. 15.24) Another New Testament reference to dance is Jesus' discourse on John the Baptist when he compares this generation of wayward children to the children "squatting in town squares, calling to their playmates. 'We piped you a tune but you did not dance! We sang you a dirge but you did not wail!' " (Matt. 11:16–17)

"I was dancing before the Lord," said David (II Sam 6.21) We too can dance before Him. During liturgy we can dance as community to blend word and spirit and body to make an acceptable sacrifice. In the privacy of our own homes as we play a favorite piece of music and simply move with abandon, we can dance. Our inner spirit dictates the way in which our body moves and extends the prayer

13 Duncan's Perception of Dance in Religion

Diane Milhan Pruett

In her essay "Dancing in Relation to Religion and Love," Isadora Duncan wrote that the expression of a God in a place of worship with a sense of spirituality might be called a dance. The sacred dancing of any mortal, she felt, was the aspiration of the spirit to transform itself into a sphere higher than the terrestrial.

> *This is the highest expression of religion in dance: that a human being should no longer seem human but become transmuted into the movements of the stars.*[1]

Much of Duncan's aesthetic of dance is concerned with the dancer's ability to allow this transmutation to take place. The philosophical impetus for her aesthetic developed through the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. Duncan studied the extensive discussions on the nature of art and artists, especially on the topics of the Dionysian and Appolonian sides of the human that Nietzsche developed in *The Birth of Tragedy* and in "An Attempt at Self Criticism," an essay which prefaced the second edition of the book. Both the philosopher and the choreographer have much to say to those who today would dance in holy places as prayer to God.

Duncan was sensitive to the fact that people in theatres or in churches were forced to sit while the service was going on around them. She lamented that the congregation did not fully participate in a physical sense in the religious celebration. In a theatrical setting, Duncan suggested that the standing and applauding of a performance did have elements of a dance participation for the audience. But she dreamed of a more complete dance expression on the part of the audience in a temple or amphitheatre where the spectators would rise and make certain dance gestures to fully participate in the invocation to the dance. Duncan suggested that the alternate kneeling, rising, and bowing of the Catholic and Greek churches formed a segment of dance/movement ritual, perhaps vestiges of a more elaborate movement response to a religious service forgotten in time.[2]

Sacred dancing expressed the aspirations of the soul. This dancing, according to Duncan, was filled with magic and potency and was the dance that was the best method in which the child could comprehend those things that he/she could not understand in a written or verbal form. Duncan believed that profound secrets of the nature and natural forces were easily revealed to children through the dance. In childhood, wrote Duncan, humans feel the religious sense of the movement poignantly and give themselves up entirely to the celebration and worship of the unknown God.[3]

Discussions on the nature of religious dances and the method of becoming one with the god through dance are incomplete without consideration of Duncan's Dionysian aesthetic. In *The Birth of Tragedy,* Nietzsche identified two opposite aspects of man which in combination give rise to the creation of art. These two aspects, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, were representative of the worlds of dream and intoxication. The Apollonian aspect expresses a desire in art for that which is measured, ordered, and reposed, while the Dionysian aspect immediately plunges man into the center of living with all the urgency and excitement and joy that can be found.[4] The compulsion of the Dionysian state, intoxicated with life, expresses itself in song and dance and is a celebration of life and the eternal joy of existence. The dancer is transported in rapture. Duncan felt that the double message of Dionysian and Apollonian aspects of man could be conveyed only in terms of the human body. From the form and symmetry of the human body, Duncan believed, was man's first conception of beauty gained. Art and artful movement was instinctive to the dancer if only the dancer would allow the body to express the spirit moving in harmony with itself and with its environment. The creative sources of man, believed Duncan, came from Dionysus who "is the eternal God, all powerful, who under many names and in many forms inspires every creative artist." The Dionysian way of dancing was to "throw oneself into the spirit of the dance and dance the thing itself."[5]

The state of ecstasy that is often seen in religiously-inspired dancing is described by Nietzsche as a physiological state of frenzy or elation where the power of creation is based on increased strength and abundance. In this state the artist enriches and makes everything that he comes into contact with, fuller.[6] The artist in this state may also be described as having unusually vivid perceptions that demand outlet in bodily movement. The artist's nature is a fully heightened state of sensitivity and communicativeness.[7] Duncan desired to develop a dancer capable of finding this Dionysian rapture, capable of converting his/

her body into a luminous fluidity, surrendering to the inspiration of the soul. This dancer would understand that the body, by force of the soul, can in fact be transformed into living expressiveness. The flesh would become light and buoyant, "but always the human soul is more powerful than anything we can see ... When the soul completely possesses the body, it converts into a luminous moving cloud through which divinity itself can be revealed."[8]

When Nietzsche speaks of this new Dionysian soul that "stammered with difficulty, a feat of will, as in a strange tongue, almost undecided whether it should communicate or conceal itself," he declares that this new soul "should have sung, ... not spoken."[9] Duncan however is ready to go further to describe the needs and responsibilities of this new soul, this new dancer:

> *Man must speak, then sing, then dance. But the speaking is the brain, the thinking man. The singing is the emotion. The dancing is the Dionysian ecstasy which carries away all.*[10]

Footnotes

[1]Duncan, Isadora "Dancing in Relation to Religion and Love" *Theatre Arts Monthly 11.* August, 1927, pp 584-93

[2]Duncan, Isadora, 1927, pp. 584-93.

[3]Duncan, Isadora, 1927, pp. 584-93.

[4]Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy* Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 1967.

[5]Duncan, Isadora. *The Art of the Dance* New York: Theatre Arts, Inc., 1928.

[6]Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power,* edited by Walter Kaufmann. New York. Vintage Books, 1968.

[7]Morgan, Jr , George Allen. *What Nietzsche Means* Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press, 1941.

[8]Steegmuller, Francis, ed *Your Isadora: the Love Story of Isadora Duncan and Gordon Craig* New York. Random House and the New York Public Library, 1974.

[9]Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner* Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York. Vintage Books, 1967.

[10]Duncan, Isadora, 1928.

14 Reflections on Dance and Prayer

Carla De Sola

Let me begin with prayer:

I pray that everyone, sitting cramped inside a pew, body lifeless, spine sagging and suffering, weary with weight and deadness, will be given space in which to breathe and move, will be wooed to worship with beauty and stillness, song and dance —dance charged with life; dance that lifts up both body and spirit, and we will be a holy, dancing, loving, praying, and praising people.

How can this be done? Does dance really play such a part in worship—such a fragile yet earthy, ephemeral but enduring, peripheral and seemingly useless form of energy in this age of efficient activity? What is dance? What is its source of strength? Why is it feared and loved? And when did it begin?

All of life involves movement, and movement becomes dance when there is an inner life and a living spirit directing it. A tree gets its energy from the earth and sunlight all around it, the energy doesn't exist solely in the sap that flows inside it. In the same way, dance isn't just mechanized intellect or rootless flutterings. True dance draws strength from the living flow of the universe. (Either the universe doesn't hold together and we're simply mad, or we really are connected in some way!) With this power, dance can lead us to the heart of reality, it can release energy within us, and this could be a fearsome thing if one were not rooted in goodness. The dance began in the beginning, in silence and stillness, as the world lay worshipping under the hand of God, for the "Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." The dance began with God!

Movement abounded, for life was bursting forth everywhere. There were the rotation of the planets around the sun, the changing of seasons and of day to night, the creepings of cells and plants and animals, but as yet the dance was incomplete, for it required the human soul, the soul of persons moving in relationship to God, to give this dance its deepest purpose, that of praise and gratitude.

De Chardin once said that God's creative power does not mold us as if we were of soft clay, but is a fire that kindles life in whatever it touches, a quickening spirit. A quickening spirit! That's when I catch my breath, jump in joy, and grasp a new idea. Even when we turn to one another at the bidding of the priest for peace, and I touch you with my fingertips and lips ... and though we have only moved a little, we are suddenly quickened, charged with life, and we love. So simple a thing. Our bodies have taught us of what we had been only dimly conscious. We return to stillness as the liturgy moves on, but it is all different. Movement has awakened us.

If prayer is the central core of life, then dance becomes prayer when we are expressing our relationship to God, to others, and to all the world of matter and spirit, through movement originating from our deepest selves, this same central point of worship. The movements of dance-prayer start from our deep center, flow outward like rivulets into the stream of life, and impart life everywhere. So dance can be a part of prayer, just as stillness can be a part of movement and silence can be a part of music. There is one root, all the rest, movement or stillness, silence or sound, is its expression. The closer to the source, the purer the song.

I think Thomas Merton was speaking of this source when, in *Hagia Sophia,* he wrote that there is in all things an inexhaustible sweetness and purity, a silence that flows with action and joy and which rises up in wordless gentleness, and extends to men from the unseen roots of all created being.

Now we can understand when the Psalms say to praise the Lord with the dance! It is a dance that wells from our true nature, from persons not cut off from their inner selves. This dance has found different expressions through the ages, and our own culture has its unique contribution to make.

In the past, dance was an integral part of all aspects of life, such as harvesting, fertility, health, marriage, life, death, and the relation of people to all of nature. They were the way cultures expressed their deepest religious understandings. In our own religious tradition, the Israelites had triumphal and gay processions, circle dances, and dances of ecstasy, of which King David's must have been a stupendous example (Samuel 6:12–15). The early church carried on the tradition of the circle dance and developed the idea of the "ring-dance of the angels." Those graced by God participated in this dance. Throughout the Middle Ages there were a wide variety of dances, some even prescribed for bishops! (See E. Louis Backman's *Religious Dance in the Christian Church and in Popular Medicine*

for a full description of dance in the church.) A living, deep understanding of the religious significance of dance was being lost in the midst of "development," and so our Western civilization gradually relegated dance, a mode of expression so fundamental to human life, to secular activity. The secular world became its only home.

All good things emerge and are recreated in new ways. As we gradually rediscover the sacredness of all matter (through mystics like Teilhard, from appalled ecologists, from our own sense of deprivation of the sacred in the life we live), we will discover how to dance and pray with purity and meaning and depth in our own Western way.

This reemergence of sacred dance will take forms that use aspects of folk dancing, square and popular dancing, ballet and modern dance, and it will draw from the advances in psychological understanding for its depth and freedom and individuality. It will no doubt be affected by disciplines from other cultures, with which, for the first time, the average person has a chance to become acquainted—disciplines such as the movement-meditations of Yoga, T'ai Chi, of Sufism, and of Zen.

We haven't handed down a tradition of sacred movement from generation to generation, like that of the sacred dance of India, so we must turn to the artists, the dancers in this case, and ask them to plunge into their own depths and draw, from the living spirit that dwells within them, movements that are meaningful for the church. The dance has to be in relation to all the people of God, learning from them what is soul-satisfying and what is really wanted. Vatican II's Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, in the section entitled "Harmony between Culture and Christian Formation," states very well this relation of the arts to human development. Of specific interest for those concerned with dance and liturgy are these two sentences in paragraph 62:

Let the church also acknowledge new forms of art which are adapted to our age and are in keeping with the characteristics of various nations and regions. Adjusted in their mode of expression and conformed to liturgical requirements, they may be introduced into the Sanctuary when they raise the mind to God.

Whenever and wherever there is dancing as part of the specific worship of church, it must be clearly prayer and not performance, in keeping with the liturgy and setting.

One way of preparing the congregation for dance is to clarify how much the church is already involved in dance through its rituals. Think of all the various movements of the priest as he presides in a mass, and all the movements prescribed by the church during the year. The priest bows, raises his hands in so many ways to bless, lifts the bread plate and cup, and prostrates himself on Good Friday and at ordination. The people respond by kneeling and bowing and standing. There are processions, as on Palm Sunday, and all the movements of the Easter Vigil. Think of all the rhythms that could be described during each liturgy and throughout the year!

The Scriptures also speak of movement. Jesus raised his hands to bless, fell with his face to the ground in the garden of Gethsemane, and touched those who needed healing. The very words "descent" into hell, "ascension," and "resurrection" convey images of movement. The dancer in the church, as a member of the Christian community with a special gift of understanding and loving movement, lifts up by art and prayer all the movements of everyday life, uniting them to the deepest gestures of the church.

The congregation can participate in the dance-prayer experience as it is expressed by the movements of a solo dancer of fine quality, who can lift up the people's souls to God through beauty in the same way that a solo singer can. Then there is the participation of a small group of nondancers who are willing to learn beforehand a simple movement-prayer, such as the Our Father. Finally there is the general active involvement of all in a simple circle dance, or even just the joining of hands during the final song.

As a dancer I know the special gifts that dance has to offer, gifts we all need for the fullness of life. They are gifts of rhythm with its exuberance and energy, of motion with its full spectrum of dynamics, ranging from softness and delicacy to piercing strength, and of moving shapes, shapes that can sweep through space awakening undying visions. All these comprise the unique language by which dance communicates. Perhaps dance's most important gift to us lies in its ability to unify us and make us whole by

Carla De Sola

Photograph by Beverly Hall

joining our inward life with our outward expression. This can be done when the simplest gesture is meaningfully done.

What I have experienced is that the very atmosphere created by people dancing together in prayer is conducive to evoking, in an easy and joyful way, gifts each of us has—gifts that emerge when we are called to look freely and deeply into ourselves and then share our discoveries with others, focused on one another in God: "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation." (1 Cor. 14:26).

We all have gifts, gifts needed by others, gifts which are shaped from how we see and hear and respond to the world that is inside us and around us. Dance expresses these gifts in an all-inclusive way, for its subject is our very selves—our thoughts, dreams, loves, talents as well as our bodies. Dance, when it is a response from the heart to the living God, is also a special gift in itself—a gift of prayer, praise, and transformation.

Reference

Backman, E Louis *Religious Dance in the Christian Church and in Popular Medicine* London. Allen & Unwin, 1952

15 My Self, Examined

Mark Wheeler

If you are seeking the solutions for the Great Whys of your creation, you will have to start with the Little Hows of your day-to-day living. If you are looking for the answers to the Big Questions about your soul, you'd best begin with the Little Answers about your body.

Dr. George Sheehan
in *Running and Being: the Total Experience*[1]

It had been suggested that I set down on paper just what I, a dancer, conceive myself to be, that I inquire as to whether I perceive my existence/essence as being physical or mental or spiritual or, just perhaps, an integration of these. Certainly never before having found a graduate course assignment to be a fruitless, purely academic, even debilitating exercise, I asserted that I would defy the perpetrator of this self-dissection and, by God, express on paper who the hell I am.

I came to like the idea, deciding to have the document reprinted. "Copies of a copy of a copy," Plato would have it, but he, like the fox who sold his Xerox stock before copies became respectable, was just sour grapes. It will be good, I reasoned, to have a reprint on hand when a cashier, contemplating my bank check, demands identification or when a receptionist asks "Who's calling?" "Who am I, anyway? Am I my resume?"[2] My professor suggests that I am just that, so I decided to write it.

The professor's belief that I can, through mental and verbal pyrotechnics, arrive at an expression of my essence, and my submission to that suggestion, label both of us rationalist in method. One holding the rational process in lesser esteem would declare this exercise a "fruitless, purely academic, even debilitating" one and would take a never-to-be-fulfilled Incomplete in this particular course of life.

The other side of the rationalist coin, the side that is bartered more passionately than the method side, is concerned with belief.

The opinion opposed to mysticism in philosophy is sometimes spoken of as rationalism. Rationalism insists that all our beliefs ought ultimately to find for themselves articulate grounds . . . Vague impressions of something indefinable have no place in the rationalistic system . . . If you have intuitions at all, they come from a deeper level of your nature than the loquacious level which rationalism inhabits.[3]

I shall proceed. I'll resume this survey, but with no naive hope of finding "articulate grounds" for my beliefs or for my belief-related actions. I'll be loquacious, but never entertaining the possibility that this or any other excavation will reach my "deeper levels." Granted, I like to think things out, but I love my mysteries too.

Another problem with the rationalist position, it seems, is that in its most eloquent expression, that of Descartes, it is sufficiently narrow in its conception of the cognitive process to exclude from application any movement of the body or other link to the senses. It is, in this light, the logical extension of Plato's mind-body dichotomy.

I shall close my eyes, I shall stop my ears, I shall call away all my senses. I shall shut out even from my thoughts all images of bodily things.[4]

Descartes, as Kleinman observes, further identifies movement of the body, the dancer's raison d'etre, as "physical, non-thinking, and corporeal, severing it completely from the world of cognition, sensing, and knowing (res cogitans)."[5] Descartes convinces me, a rationalist I am not.

The "vague impressions" and "intuitions . . . from a deeper level" which James associates with the non-rational outlook likewise do not fit into the idealism of a Plato nor the materialism of a Berkeley. For Plato even the furthest recessed fossils of knowledge are easily explained through an elaborate system of *deja vu:* we've been here before, and though the replay isn't instant, the recall may be. The materialists, for their part, would have me reduced to that finite point on a graph where genetics and circumstance meet. Such simplistic bisection is an insult to my infinity of idiosyncracies. What idiosyncracies? Hang on; like an initially reluctant participant in primal scream therapy, I'm warming up to the idea of baring all.

I must first complete this rundown of what I am not. Rationalist. Idealist. Materialist. Pragmatist? Although Wil-

liam James is among my favorite thinkers, I find him in the pragmatic position a potential threat to heartfelt discourse. James relates the principle of Mr Charles Peirce.

> *In what respects would the world be different if this alternative or that were true? If I can find nothing that would become different, then the alternative has no sense.*[6]

Man, I hold, has a deep, deep need to talk about things he cannot *know*, about that which he only believes, about this "alternative" rather than that. To "know" in the Platonic sense implies that all the facts are in In questions of this kind the word "fact" itself provokes a smile: certainly the facts are never all in Accordingly, the debate cannot end Believing that this paper's conclusions or absence thereof will make "nothing different," but at the same time not believing the paper to be a "fruitless ... exercise," I conclude: pragmatist.

Phenomenologist? Getting to the thing itself? In this paper, that thing being sought is I Getting to that "thing" necessitates getting to those "vague impressions" at the "inner level" For with me, you see, we're out of the tight-ship world of syllogism and ontological proof and into the realm of mystics Not only am I not rationalist, idealist, materialist, pragmatist I'm not philosophical. I'm religious.

It has been lamented that philosophy is a rational scratch for an emotional itch For this predicament the lamentor prescribed the salve of religion I prescribe the same for the seventy-two-year itch of my expected lifespan. But one can hope to answer the question, "What is the nature of religion?," only after inquiring into the nature of the "itch."

I deny that the itch is correctly characterized as being solely emotional Analogous to emotional states in need of attention are body anxieties. A particular instance of this phenomenon is identified by the colloquial expression "the can't help its" In this state the body experiences a slight, momentary, completely involuntary convulsion, uncontrollable, yet tolerated by tensing the neck and shoulders, shaking the head, and saying "I have the can't help its." An occasional case of the "can't help its," like the emotional state of anxiety, is a necessary side effect of existence The universe scratches us and the "sacrifices and surrenders," James' terms to be cited in context below, are the itches we muster up. Upon reflection I realize that the nature of my itching response, to a variety of scratches, is decidedly physical.

My life would seem to be organized around a set of physical rituals. For example, once I have been out of bed over two hours, my every use of the toilet is preceded by my bending over, with legs straight and perpendicular to the floor, a la Horton technique, and touching my palms to the floor four times. I do the same before getting into a bath tub or shower, and again immediately upon stepping in. I go to my knees when feelings of gratitude or entreaty rush over me. I touch palms to the pavement before entering a car. When drinking beer in my home, alone, late at night, I sit in the cross-legged Indian position of Yoga, Graham, and Hawkins, finding it important that I be well-aligned so that clear thoughts might close out the day. I care not about the alignment of the stars with regard to my astrological sign, but believe it crucial that this reflective hour of the night finds my pelvis in proper relation to my spine.

On a PBS documentary devoted to the life and artistry of pianist Arthur Rubenstein, the genius expressed, "All my life I have been on my knees before music." Upon hearing these words I decided that it would be admirable to attempt to inspire the epitaph, "All his life he was on his knees before life" Thus, I go to my knees frequently Mind you, I take care not to be observed, but hope that the physical act of kneeling will create in me a sense of humility and awe which might be reflected in less physical aspects of my life.

At moments of particular significance I am compelled to extend this prostration into a fully-counted execution of Erick Hawkins' "scroll" exercise. For four counts of eight I explore the articulation of my vertebrae. Attempting to sense every physical point between, I pass four times from the forehead-on-the-floor, "rolled up into a ball" position to the squatting position with the spine perpendicular to the floor. Examples of such moments of particular significance are those when a rush of gratitude or entreaty comes over me, when leaving a place dear to me, when leaving a piano where I have found inspiration, when approaching a piano where I hope to be inspired, or, of course, every night before getting into bed. To experience one of these moments, or to reach the milestone which is the end of a day without acknowledging it would be a cosmic case of presumption.

Postures are of critical importance to me. My return to organized religion (I have six years before quietly renounced my Methodist upbringing and with it all organized worship) was to a great extent precipitated by the Episcopal Church's practice of using the kneeling rail which graces every pew. The dilemma for me was how to use it, to kneel with thighs perpendicular to the floor or to stretch the quadriceps and let the pelvis sit on the heels, one of the positions of the Hawkins' "scroll." The latter was more relaxed, permitting me to have the pelvis in its proper tilt forward, consequently permitting free contemplation. The former, however, seemed to more effectively pay homage. I recently determined that I would employ both positions, depending upon the part of the service being said and upon my relationship to the Force before whom I kneel.

Since learning some years ago that Katharine Hepburn ended every shower with a cold shower, I have done the same. What began as a challenge has run the course through habit to ritualized reminder that I am alive. When the water has reached its coldest I push against the wall with my hands, doing eight Achilles tendon stretches, a la barre, four with each leg. Once done I can turn off the water, do my floor touches, and take up my towel.

On a Kuder psychological preference test, I was asked if I frequently took stairs "two steps at a time." I realized that the right answer for me was "yes" and determined that every set of steps I later encountered would be graced by at least one such jeté To fail in this would be to admit lost enthusiasm for all life

Sometimes when I'm studying in a carrel at a favorite coffeehouse, thoughts will jump from a written page to spur something to my mind. I will write it and like it. An old song will be on the radio and the moment becomes magical I place my pelvis and spine in that harmonious relationship to each other, I contract my pubecoccygeus muscle, my iliac, psoas, and gluteals, until I feel that I have sufficiently imprinted the moment and adequately expressed admiration and gratitude to whom it may concern. To merely "take it in" would constitute a case of taking it for granted To tacitly let it go unheralded by my deepest nerve ending would result in atrophy from the inside out; soon the thought on the page would just stay there; soon the old song would be just another old song, soon I'd be physiologically incapable of tingling with a high.

In summary, in random moments of recognition of the precious tenuousness of life I may bring my pelvis forward and push out my lower back, I may stretch my arms from their glenoid fossae, I may touch my hands to the floor or lean over into a flat-back "table-top," or kneel with the forehead on the floor and there, pray.

> *For when all is said and done, we are in the end absolutely dependent on the universe, and into sacrifices and surrenders of some sort, deliberately looked at and accepted, we are drawn and pressed as into our only permanent positions of repose. Now in those states of mind which fall short of religion, the surrender is submitted to as an imposition of necessity, and the sacrifice is undergone at the very best without complaint In the religious life, on the contrary, surrender and sacrifice are positively espoused; even unnecessary givings-up are added in order that the happiness may increase.*[7]

In the above words William James characterizes the relation of my self relating itself to my self, he pinpoints what I feel If physical joy, i.e., tone, leanness, agility, flexibility, is to be taken away, I want to be sure that it was God, or fate, or the ravages of time that took it away, and not my own laxity, my own reluctance to surrender, to sacrifice, to expend energy in homage, to get "on my knees before life." Thus, this physical dues-paying has a physical end But it must be seen in a broader, more complex, integrated light.

Removed from purely physical concerns, I feel that if happiness, i.e., perception of the divine, aliveness to the instant, ability to reach the natural "high" of a peak experience, is to be taken away, I do not want it to be due to my smugness of taking it for granted, to my failure to acknowledge, to my surrendering and sacrificing grudgingly. Despite the not exclusively physical nature of these

Photograph courtesy of the Nancy Hauser Dance Company

broader concerns, the tool of cheerful surrender and sacrifice is the all of me, including my body

I cannot rationally explain why I do these things with my body, why I feel compelled to perform these personalized genuflections A force from within my mind and body, and from without, commands me to these actions; I "can't help it" The force, because I can neither see nor explain it, has to be termed "spiritual" or "mystical" My compulsion to obey such commands attests to my belief in the force As for grounds for belief in the reality of this spiritual mystery, I find C S Lewis stating my position eloquently.

> *Authority, reason, experience, on these three mixed in varying proportions all our knowledge depends The authority of many wise men in many different times and places forbids me to regard the spiritual world as an illusion. My reason, showing me the apparently insoluble difficulties of materialism and proving that the hypothesis of a spiritual world covers far more of the facts with far fewer assumptions, forbids me again. My experience even of such feeble attempts as I have made to live the spiritual life does not lead to the results which the pursuit of an illusion ordinarily leads to, and therefore forbids me yet again* [8]

Believing in the reality of spiritual energy, I am indeed happy to answer its command with my mental and physical energy.

I hold that the physically toned and tuned individual enjoys more potential for realizing and maintaining a mystical, religious, transcendent life, for offering the sacrifices and surrenders of which James writes. The image of "the praying hands," to choose a well-known symbol for the awe-inspired, obedient, communing person, strikes me as being as limited as the belt-turning production line worker was to Laban The tone, aligned body is an available instrument offering more opportunity for integrated surrender and sacrifice. "Nothing is more spiritual than the human body."[9] On its knees or contracting its way toward inner quiet, the examined body happily responds to the universe's, and its own, varied necessities.

Afterword

All of this may seem rather eccentric. I am not unaware of the threat involved in following formalized, regimented repetition I had eccentric mind fixes in childhood, e.g., "Step on a crack, you break your mother's back." I sincerely believed, and assiduously, devoutly kept my head down as I walked home from grammar school, missing the beauty above I recall also a relentlessly open closet door which I, when having passed by it, closed with religious fervor.

In the summer of my twenty-first year I read my first book on Zen and the following fall *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court,* Mark Twain's biting indictment of the medieval church. The combined effect of my reading these two works was a falling away from organized religion and my renouncing anything more ritualized than a walk alone in a forest I suppose that after six years I could no longer cope with the beauty of the forest without acknowledging that beauty with a "formal and customarily repeated act."

Since returning to organized religion and to ritual, I recall the ancients' "moderation in all things" I strive for that Golden Mean, between falling into slavery to a barrage of personal ritual, and living "the unexamined life" which Socrates deemed "not worth living"

Footnotes

[1]Sheehan, George *Running and Being the Total Experience* New York. Warner Books, 1978.

[2]Lyric from "I Hope I Get It," in *A Chorus Line* Lyrics by Edward Kleban, 1975

[3]James, William *The Varieties of Religious Experience a Study in Human Nature* New York. The Modern Library, 1902

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[7]James, William, 1902.

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16

Biblical Criteria in Modern Dance:

Modern Dance as a Prophetic Form

Douglas Adams and Judith Rock

Theologian Paul Tillich advanced the discussion of "Theology and the Arts" by noting that some art is strongly religious in style even though it is not religious in subject matter; conversely, some art is not religious in style even though it is religious in subject matter Similarly, some sermons and writings cite many Biblical passages but are essentially unexpressive of Biblical faiths (for such sermons uphold the status quo without justice for many individuals); other sermons and writings cite few if any Biblical passages but express Biblical faiths (for such sermons call into question the status quo and seek justice for each human life) To date, most discussions of the Bible in dance have focused on works which are Biblical in subject matter such as "The Prodigal Son" or "Job "[1] This paper focuses on the less obvious but profound reflection of Biblical faith and value in the aesthetics of modern dance technique and choreography.

Religion and art analysis in the visual arts has proceeded further than such analysis in dance and therefore may aid dance criticism as we consider the question of Biblical criteria Tillich has drawn our attention to how the very style of art expresses theology.[2] Our preoccupation with iconography in visual art or with subject matter in dance tends to reduce the visual art of dance to narrative or literature; attention to style considers each art form in its own terms and allows its unique contributions to inform us. Tillich distinguished between religion in the larger sense ("being ultimately concerned about one's own being, about one's self and one's world, about its meaning and its estrangement and its finitude") and religion in the narrower sense ("having a set of symbols, ... divine beings, ritual actions and doctrinal formulations about their relationship to us."[3] The larger scope of religion is communicated in style and the narrower is communicated through subject matter.

Thus Tillich was able to distinguish four categories of relation between religion and visual art. The first would be a style expressive of no ultimate concern and a content without religious subject matter The second would be religious in style and non-religious in content. As an example of this second category, he cites Picasso's "Guernica," because it is a painting in which "we do not cover up anything, but have to look at the human situation in its [illegible]hs."[4] The third category is a non-religious style but religious content, as in the case of Raphael's "Madonna and Child" or "Crucifixion." The symbols in these paintings are obviously religious, but so harmonious and well-rounded is the style that it denies the content and makes the paintings "dangerously irreligious." Tillich sees paintings of this kind as dangerous because, for example, Raphael's Christ on the cross reveals no dimension of suffering and so may mislead the viewer to expect an easy harmony with humanity as the goal or result of Christ's presence, an expectation that will blind the viewer to Christ's presence in much of life. The fourth category is that in which we find both religious style and religious content. Tillich's prime example for the fourth category is Grunewald's sixteenth century "Crucifixion" on the Isenheim altar where the style as well as content expresses the Crucifixion. He is uneasy about identifying any contemporary visual art on this level.

Tillich's four categories are thought-provoking when considered with respect to modern dance. In the first category, that of a work whose style shows no ultimate concern and whose subject matter is not religious, we would place many student dance compositions of the Cunningham genre. The second grouping characterized by religious style and non-religious subject matter would include Kurt Joos' "Green Table," Paul Taylor's "Cloven Kingdom" and "Esplanade," Jose Limon's "The Moor's Pavane," and Twyla Tharp's "Sue's Leg" to name only a very few. In the third category, we would place many of the so-called "religious" dances we have seen. Many of these dances, while their content is specifically religious, display a non-religious style, i.e., a style which is smooth, pretty, and entertaining, but no more. Norbert Vesak's "Gift to be Simple," a ballet about the American Shakers, would be in this third category. In the fourth category, that of dances with both religious style and religious content, we would place Margalit Oved's "Mothers of Israel," Helen Tamiris' "Negro Spirituals," and Martha Graham's "Seraphic Dialogue."

It is the second category which radically expands our understanding of the Bible in dance, as we begin to explore Tillich's observation that the very style or form of an art work may be Biblical whether or not its subject matter is Biblical. The influence of the Biblical sects and the effects of values on Western culture (and therefore on art)

is diffuse, but discernible in many specific instances. Any artist within a culture is affected by its values, both those consciously accepted, those rejected, and those not even consciously considered. Western modern dance choreographers are no exception. Any modern dance *may* reflect Biblically-rooted affirmations and values, whether or not its subject matter is specifically Biblical, and whether or not the choreographer had a direct intention of affirming Biblical values. The reason for this is that there is in modern dance technique and choreography a prophetic element which parallels the prophetic element in the Biblical narrative.

The first obvious question raised by this thesis is an important one. Because the modern dance is such a diverse phenomenon in terms of style, technique, and choreographic intention, is it even possible to speak of a basic modern dance aesthetic? Selma Jean Cohen states, in her Introduction to *The Modern Dance. Seven Statements of Belief*, "The modern dance is always concerned with the unacceptable symbol, the one that startles us into awareness. The pressure may be subtle or it may be obvious, but it is always there."[5] The modern dance, then, can be seen as a prophetic attitude toward the function of art in general, and dance in particular, in the contemporary world. The basic modern dance aesthetic is a prophetic point of view.

Biblical prophetic as defined by Abraham Heschel is: the prophet is an iconoclast, challenging the apparently holy, revered, awesome." The prophet's language, poetry, and action is charged with agitation, anguish, and a spirit of nonacceptance. The prophet "is a preacher whose purpose is not self-expression or the purgation of feeling, but communication."[6]

John Martin, a *New York Times* dance critic, elaborated in 1933 that the modern dance was not dance for spectacular display or self-expression, but dance which attempted to communicate personal authentic experience, experience connected with a basic truth about human beings and reality.[7] Modern dance began as a prophetic form in that its purpose was the communication of personal authentic experience by means of new symbols, new forms, and new ways of moving. It queried both the dance that had previously existed and the time and place in which it found itself.

Perhaps the modern dance of the 1920s, 30s, and 40s shows the basically prophetic character of the form more clearly than the dance of the 50s, 60s, and early 70s. For the early choreographers (Graham, Humphrey, and Wigman), emotional motivation and human communication about human beings was primary. These choreographers believed in the potential social relevance of art, art rooted in time and space. They saw the ordinary experience of human beings as valid artistic material out of which the artist may create. They were concerned with meaning in all its dimensions; like Biblical characters and stories, they saw no necessity for happy endings. (Moses never made it to the promised land, the elder brother in Jesus' parable does not go to the party.) While the earlier choreog-

Body and Soul Dance Company in Judith Rock's "House of Prayer"

Photograph courtesy of the Body and Soul Dance Company

raphers saw that dance could be communicative in itself apart from narrative or representative content, they were always concerned with form as the structure of content, rather than simply as an end in itself As Heschel reminds us, the prophet's central concern is "the plight of man .. God Himself is described as reflecting over the plight of man, rather than as contemplating eternal ideas."[8] The early modern dances of Graham, Wigman, and Humphrey did not contemplate eternal ideas. They looked at human beings in human situations and told the brusque, undecorated, unlovely truth as they saw it Borrowing Joshua Taylor's categories of style, we call such dances "communitive" and not "unitive."

Those choreographers offered us dances which lift up the ambiguity, the humor, the sorrow, and the absurdity, (and through these realities the truth) found in ordinary human experience This lifting up of things as they are is part of the prophetic voice and Biblical touchstone within modern dance Confronted with such a dance (one thinks among others of Joo's "Green Table," Graham's "Lamentations" and her dances based on Greek myths, Wigman's "Witch," and Anna Sokolow's "Rooms") the audience has the opportunity to see some part of themselves as they really are, to hear some part of the truth about how it is to be truly human

Heschel states that though the prophet begins with a message of woe, he ends with a message of hope. As the modern dance and its choreographers grew, they also developed the counterpoint side of their prophetic form. The prophetic message has a tenderness at its heart, what Heschel calls the pathos of God[9] Repent *so that* the crooked may be made straight, *so that* the barren places may bear fruit, *so that* Jacob may stand, for he is very small Dances which come immediately to mind are Humphrey's "Day On Earth," Graham's "Appalachian Spring," and Charles Weidmann's "On My Mother's Side."

While in that earlier period, modern dancers shared many of the above mentioned principles of belief, this is not as true today Perhaps the major change since 1950 has been the lessening importance of emotional motivation and communication of universal human experience Form has taken precedence over content Graham found the genesis of movement in the act of breathing, the source of human life, beginning as the Biblical narrative begins with the gift of breath to the human body, and its consequences Humphrey created new movement out of her discoveries about the human body with respect to the world around it, to space, to gravity Some of the middle generation of choreographers, however, have taken the modern dance in other less prophetic directions As non-Western religions and their corresponding aesthetics permeate Western culture, one sees a shift in modern dance style as reflected in the work of Erick Hawkins Hawkins states that the function of the artist is not to present life as it is, but in line with traditional Oriental aesthetics, to offer ideals of enlightenment, life as it ought to be.[10] This is directly opposite of the Biblical prophetic understanding that renewal or enlightenment is to be found in the midst of life

Photograph by Paul Waring

Judith Rock in "Mary Alice's Magnificent"

as it is in all its grubbiness and ambiguity, that God is at least as likely to be encountered through the experience of being invaded by the Assyrian army as in meditation in the temple

Other choreographers, e.g., Alwin Nikolais and Merce Cunningham, have turned almost exclusively to form itself as their artistic concern. This is a potentially prophetic direction, as witnessed by Tillich's second category of art with religious style but non-religious content. However, a requirement for the prophetic whether in Biblical narrative or in modern dance is that it calls us and our favorite attitudes and assumptions into question. Insofar as choreographers have simply acknowledged the tenacity of contemporary forces of abstraction, randomness, mechanization, and meaninglessness, they have ceased to be prophetic. The prophetic is that which speaks the new word and calls us beyond what is The prophetic transcends the contemporary and is allied with a yet unrealized future Insofar as modern dance or any art simply reflects or reiterates the beliefs and tendencies and statements of the surrounding culture, it ceases to be prophetic. The prophetic art form grows out of its time and place but also questions its time and place and offers a clearer and deeper vision lest the people perish. In the work of the choreographers of the 1970s, such as Twyla Tharp, Meredith Monk, Philobolus, and Kei Takei, there seems to be some return to a concern with emotional motivation and the importance of human experience, although the result looks utterly different from the works of Graham,

Humphrey, Limon, Weidmann, and others. There is a new unification of emotional motivation and abstraction of form in dances which are religious in style by suggesting realities and concerns below the surface of human life. In these words the modern dance seems to be reemerging as a prophetic art form in our time and place.

In retrospect, we see that dances which have struck us as prophetic have certain technical elements in evidence that stress the realities of life as it exists: use of percussive movement, the center body, fall and recovery; the floor, asymmetry, humor. Such elements have been used to create dances that have been surprising and new to us, they have required us to again look more closely and they have expanded our vision. Similarly, the Biblically prophetic calls us to the new song, the new wine, repeating what used to be prophetic will no longer be prophetic. John Cage helps us understand why this is the case. He notes that the American flag is radically asymmetrical in design, but we have seen it so often that it becomes symmetrical because of our expectations of it, and we do not really see it.[11]

New prophetic dances use movement elements in unexpected, new prophetic ways as we see in Twyla Tharp's "Sue's Leg." Although all dancers try for a flow of movement, Tharp achieves it to a unique degree in "Sue's Leg." She uses an extraordinary flow of movement in the dancers' bodies, with humor, to recreate the social dance and popular music world of the 1930s and 40s. The movement never stops, it flows through individual bodies, and from body to body, without visible drops or dead spots. The dancers meet, cling together, bounce and roll off each other, giving and receiving energy from each other's flow of movement. When body contact occurs between dancers it is not for the purpose of spectacular lifts or other technical fireworks, but to show us real bodies—excited, moving, playing, exhausted. Her use of humor also permits the audience to perceive a sense of community among the dancers. We see potential couples eye each other, try each other; we see them both succeed and fail at dancing together, we see them move on. Their encounters, like ours, are both serious and absurd. Like us, they keep on dancing, stepping on each other's feet, and squeezing the last drop of life out of an era and out of themselves.

"Sue's Leg" is a prophetic dance with secular subject matter. It is prophetic in showing us human beings not only as they were but as they are. Tharp's dances have been called merely fashionable, chic, and slick by some critics. In this particular work though, she has shown us something of "the plight of man," to use Heschel's words.[12] Watching "Sue's Leg" and listening to its music, it is remembered that those people moving frequently, throwing each other into the air, clinging together in the last hours of dance marathons, were people on the brink of war and in the midst of war. Their dances came out of the heart of "the plight of man." As we watch them, recreated by Tharp, we are in our time and in the midst of our own wars, reminded of our own plight.

A prophetic modern dance whether religious in subject matter or not tells us the truth, not necessarily particular truths (that God exists or does not, or that love is full of pain or full of pleasure), but some truth about ourselves. A prophetic modern dance tells us something about how it is to be human. Any particular truth, any particular message, is soon stated. The truth about ourselves can never be told fully or too often. Biblically prophetic art is made by an iconoclast, by artists who break the holy images to shock us into new awareness of the truth about ourselves. Confronted with such a work of art, we once again have ears to hear and eyes to see, miraculously, for a moment, we do hear, and we do see.

Footnotes

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[7]Cohen, Selma Jean, 1965.

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[10]Cohen, Selma Jean, 1965.

[11]Cage, John. "Jasper Johns: Stories and Ideas," in *Jasper Johns, Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture, 1954-1964*. London. Whitechapel Gallery, 1964.

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Dance in Places of Worship

Photograph by Allen R. Goldenberg

17
To Dance or Not to Dance

Mary Jane Wolbers

Hail Terpsichore. Sweet Goddess of the Dance: Art-Divine! Grace of Manners and Innocent Joys are thy Charming Gifts, Gentle Muse, and not in the Rhythm of Motion, but only in a Bad Heart, or a Vicious Tongue, is the Guilt of Sin Then hail, Terpsichore, Sweet Goddess of the Dance, all hail! Bigots may scowl, Hypochondriacs — Horror-Stricken, may sigh, Dancing is, nevertheless, an Amusement as Old and as Universal as the Human Race. Classic Antiquity made it one of its Chief Modes of Aesthetic Development as well as Most Delightful Pastime, while the Holy Bible of the Jews and the Christians' Sacred Gospel Emphatically and Benignly sanction and sanctify its Judicious Observance! Then hail, Sweet Terpsichore, Goddess of the Dance, hail, all hail![1]

With this invocation, the Reverend J. B. Gross opened his treatise in defense of dancing in 1879. In this work, he praised the dance for its positive effects on "the mental and physical constitution of man." He endorsed dance as a form of religious expression and as an artistic, social, and recreational pursuit as well. Recognizing the religious and socializing nature of early dance, he stated that dancing is, and always has been, a normal, natural response to life.[2]

"God has wisely ordained that all the faculties with which He has endowed us should be exercised in their proper time and in their appropriate manner," he wrote.[3] He did not espouse an "anything goes" attitude toward dance; in defending it as a form of human activity, he acknowledged that it is liable to abuse, but not more so than any other activity. (He conceded that even some religious sects are guilty of abuse and perversion in the practice of dance.) He concluded that "a great many worse and less seemly deeds than are implied in dancing are done in His august and holy presence in His "house of Many Mansions."[4]

His belief that "rational amusement and true piety are clearly the essential twin-factors of a useful, a contented, and a happy life," supported his case for dance. It set him apart from many of his contemporaries who wrote and preached against dancing. He attributed to Ruskin a statement that the only safeguards to morality are "music and [illegible]ecise dancing."[5]

Clearly the complaint of early Christian leaders in America was against "mixed" (male-female) social dancing, e.g., at balls, in dance halls, in taverns, and what was labeled "profane and promiscuous dancing" (the association with feasts and public demonstrations was specifically mentioned).[6] Where dancing was justified by the Bible, it was not condemned, nor was dancing instruction totally frowned upon. Increase Mather looked with favor on dancing instruction which concerned itself with good manners, poise, composure of body, and decency of behavior, provided it did not take place in mixed company.

Mather was distressed that dancing was "customary" among Christians in the colonies. Maypole dances were particular targets of condemnation and the people responded (at least in one instance, in Charlestown, Massachusetts) by erecting larger Maypoles. History records laws against dancing, court cases, the presence of dancing masters, and books published on the dance. Dancing survived, despite the "fire and brimstone" sermons. Marks' bibliography of "anti-dance" literature from 1685-1963 lists some 150 books, tracts, essays, sermons, and discourses, fifty-four of which were published since 1900.[7]

Although dancing has been suppressed by religious leaders and communities in the Western Christian world, it is well to bear the following facts in mind. Some theologians condemn dance; others support it. Some deny joy, others claim it is our salvation. Some discourage self-expression, others urge that it be given release in satisfactory, healthy modes of behavior or it will find self-destructive, anti-social outlets. Attitudes toward dance are being examined and the dialogue is now more open and rational than it was in the early days of America.

Constraints against dancing have not come solely from the church. Secular factions have also been involved. The Federation of Women's Clubs banned the Argentine Tango and the Hesitation Waltz in 1914. This was the era in which Vernon and Irene Castle popularized such dances as the Castle Walk through their ballroom exhibitions. Public officials denounced the Lame Duck, Turkey Trot, Fox Trot, and Bunny Hug as "orgies taking place in public dance halls." Fifteen young women were reportedly fired from their jobs with the Curtis Publishing Company because they were caught doing the Turkey Trot during their lunch break.

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The case against dance has not always been predicated on its abuse The invention of the printing press thrust upon the world a new emphasis on verbalism The capacity to read and write, as well as to speak "the word" suddenly took on increased importance, all forms of nonverbal expression were suppressed. We are only now coming back to a full appreciation of nonverbal forms of expression and communication.

Although too many colleges still base admissions chiefly on S.A.T "verbal scores," other institutions are probing ways to develop and evaluate human potential. We hope that the individual can develop a healthy self-image, the ability to express and communicate his values to others, to behave in a socially acceptable manner and to approach problem-solving with creativity and confidence. Studies on hemispheric functions of the brain point out the desirability of training the right half to perform long-neglected tasks, and of bringing the activities of the two hemispheres into harmony (It is interesting to note the great potential which dance holds for meeting the challenge of the above mentioned goals.)

Dance can and does exist under a variety of names. Perhaps it is the old matter of semantics: "a rose by any other name..." A group which rejects dancing as sinful engages enthusiastically in "singing games" (self-accompanied dances). A congregation feels comfortable with the "worship choir" or "motion choir" which dances regularly in its church. (A "dance choir" would not be welcome!) Leaders involve people in "symbolic movement" who could not bring themselves to think of this movement as dance. Church "sociables" just as often include dancing among the evening's activities as prayer and the potluck supper.

Mary Jane Wolbers in "Liturgy of Dance in Worship" performed at the Salem United Church of Christ, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Photograph by Chip Decker

On the other hand, there is a growing, open acceptance of dance as worship and in the social lives of Western Christians by formerly resistant denominations. The revival is well-documented in *And We Have Danced*, by Carlynn Reed, and other sources.[8] Priests assert that "the Mass, itself is a dance." The Coast Salish peoples are dancing again—ancestral "spirit dancing" laced with elements of Shaker dance (which has been incorporated into their beliefs and practices).[9] Social dances are frequently sponsored by church groups. Dance is a technique increasingly used by religious educators. Students are learning about dance in theological schools and, they are calling it dance! In asserting that the pioneers of American dance were "evangelically inclined," Joseph Mazo writes,

> *Religious ceremonies frequently are celebrated in dance, even, at times in the Western tradition. A Chassidic folk-song bids the congregation be quiet, the rabbi is going to dance, and when the rabbi dances, the tables and chairs dance with him and Satan falls dead in the middle of the floor. There comes a moment of ecstacy in which voice and words are too weak to contain fervor; the entire body is impelled to movement.*[10]

Modern Western society, beset with problems of drug abuse, crime, hypertension, and disease can well look to other times and other cultures for clues to their solution. We can no longer write off the practices of other cultures as "heathen," or "uncivilized," and having no relevance for our time. We have tended to dismiss the dance practices of primitive man and other cultures without seriously examining their nature and significance. Is it possible there is a message here we are missing?

Two present-day churchmen speak for dance as a way of life that holds promise for the future. "Do something (it's bound to have a shape). Move (movement makes a path or pattern)," writes John David Maguire. He concludes, "Our call is to begin moving. And as we warm to walking in the Light, we shall surely come at sometime to that moment when with all men—'the sons of morning'—we shall dance and sing for joy." We shall dance in the company of God." [11] Marvin Halverson in "Opening Statement" to the proceedings from the first national conference on the church and the dance in 1960, writes of the role of dance in worship adding, "And not least, the restoration of the dance in the life of man, even apart from corporate worship, is an important gesture in the direction of wholeness and holiness."[12]

We live in a religiously plural world. Today's world is shrinking. We must be mindful that the Christian religion is one of eight major faiths, and one of a considerable number of faiths if all denominations, cults, and groups are counted. Christians actually number less than one-fourth

of the world's population. For many of the world's people, dance is part of the very fiber of life. In many non-Western societies, religious activities are an integral and intimate part of community life and defy separation from the total cultural pattern. There are those who have always danced their faith, have always danced as a form of socializing, healing, and celebration. They would be unable to accept a religion which forbids dancing. Those in the field of Christian missions have always experienced difficulty if conversion means giving up dancing in order to be "saved." Present-day missionaries have expressed great interest in the revival of dance in Christian worship and in the work of individuals and groups such as The Sacred Dance Guild, an international, interdenominational organization devoted to furthering the dance as a dimension of worship.

José Limon said, "We all dance a little every day." We all know the spine that stiffens in resistance, the clasp of a sympathetic hand, the impatient, tapping foot. Being human, we all reveal something of our inner selves through expressive movement. If this movement is not a full-fledged dance, it is at least "dance-like." In this regard, is it possible for a normal person to be a 'non-dancer?" Is it humane to forbid something as normal and natural as dancing? To dance or not to dance: do we really have a choice? If dance is a normal, human response to life, then let's be human—let's dance!

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18 The Art of Worship and the Art of Dance

Barbara Kres Beach

The first time I ever danced in a church service was at Harvard Divinity School. My husband, with several other Unitarian students, decided to create a service for Good Friday. Why the Unitarians decided to tackle that particular religious Everest (I suspect that Hillary's answer would have served them as well), why they brought me into their conspiratorial band, has long since slid into a memoryless chasm. I remember the sequence of the dances (triumphal entry, betrayal), and a lot of personal anguish. In the midst of one of these bodily and psychic wrenchings, I left the chancel to execute a great sweeping gesture, a sort of "we're in this together, folks" message, and found my fingertips within inches of Dean Sam Miller's nose. I suddenly felt terribly exposed. I had leapt in front of plenty of footlights, but had never been eyeball to eyeball with my audience before. What was worse, was that this was not an audience but a congregation. I knew that there was a difference, but I have yet to establish what that difference is.

Dancing in the Unitarian church was never a big issue. Unitarians tend to gloss over the Salome-seductive-body-syndrome in favor of Paul's "temple of the holy spirit." Dancing in church taught me how to proof-text. Liberal religionists, I learned, readily identify with David, "dancing before the Lord with all his might." In David's famous dance, in which the return of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem is celebrated, he abandoned his ephod in an exultant moment and finished the dance nude. His proper wife, Michal, peeking from the tent, was shocked and thus, reprimanded him. Though there are never many "Michals" in our congregations, with David I might have said, "Cool it, Michal. If the Lord hasn't struck me down already, dancing in very holy places must be OK."

Of course there *are* issues. First was the barefeet issue. Several people had previously suggested that dancing in church would be more religious if they didn't have to look at barefeet, especially those that were *dirty*. Several years later, the big issue in the liturgical dance group was bras-or-no-bras. (That was during the period, to paraphrase Kipling, when all those about us were burning theirs . . .) The implication is obvious. Dancing is holy when the bodies in question do not distract from their ethereal intent.

Then there is the *who*-should-dance issue. If the liturgical dance group is in fact a community-creating adjunct to the larger church, shouldn't everyone with desire and sincerity (and reliability at practice) be encouraged to share the dance experience with a congregation? The question is how much desire, sincerity, and reliability is required to compensate for the sins the flesh is heir to. Adult congregational dance groups usually attract young matrons, not nymphets whom George Balanchine so readily takes to his heart and into his company. One enthusiastic member was perpetually on the brink of losing 30 pounds. Some folks feel the act of dance ought not to require a willing suspension of *utter* disbelief.

Finally, there are the issues of purpose. What does dance do in a service of worship? How does it work? Where does it fit? Is the best dance in the church fundamentally the same as the best dance in the theatre? Do we ask only that dance expression reflect the diversity and depth of the creative imagination which gives it form? Do we ask that it be authentic? Aesthetic? Both? Because it's church art and not art with a capital A, do we look for dance more in the manner of Norman Rockwell, and less in the manner of Mark Rothko? Should it, in other words, cleave a little closer to the explicitness of actual gesture, and a little further from the kind of symbolizations not given to facile translation? Should we tread a careful boundary, eschewing dances (like David's) which might evoke ecstasy at the expense of the logic that liberals so admire? Should these aesthetic questions be discussed at all, when taking into consideration that most of the dancers are volunteers, and the community is beloved?

In his preface to *The Holy in Art*, Gerhardus van der Leeuw writes: "Whoever talks about religion and art comes in contact with two sorts of people: Christians of the most varied stamp and connoisseurs of art. Both are difficult to get along with."[1] Difficult or not, I would like to concern myself for the remainder of this article with worship (and some Unitarian attitudes toward worship), what dance is and how it speaks to us, and dance and worship and why they belong together.

Attitudes toward Worship

Before struggling once again to define the relationship between the art of worship and the art of dance in the

Photograph by David Tilson

"Invocation" performed at the Unitarian Church of Arlington, Virginia

liberal church, I wanted to learn what worship meant to a cross-section of laypersons. The Unitarians I consulted firmly believed that reason and truth in its diverse forms are entirely compatible with religion, and with religious faith as they uphold it, and it, them. Many indicated that they came to their liberal position after an intense intellectual struggle with orthodoxy. It led them to ask no less of their religious faith than they ask of secular intellectual and aesthetic disciplines. In short, they possessed a determination to pursue truth, to commit themselves to the ethical dimension of their lives, and to insist that seekers, like themselves, whatever their theological persuasion, be welcomed within their religious community. The spirit of the Enlightenment with its emphasis on tolerance, reason, and Biblical criticism, my informants told me, is as strong in Unitarian churches today as when the religious ideas of William Ellery Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry Ware swept the New England Congregational Churches of the 1820s and carried them into the Unitarian fold.

Liturgical embellishments associated with "high" Protestantism, e.g., the chants, prayers, choral responses, and interactive ceremony between minister and congregation, were never integral to the spare Protestantism of the Puritans from whose roots Congregationalism sprang. On the other hand, neither is liturgy, in its root meaning, "the work of the people," foreign to the liberal Protestant tradition. What has remained, however, might be characterized by an artless simplicity: the congregational hymns, responsive readings, and straightforward traditions peculiar to individual churches. Thus when one respondent cited his requirement for a "clean service," simple and direct, with the emphasis on the sermonic spoken word, I was not surprised. When another indicated the need for religious services capable of "celebrating the inherent diversity in liberal thought" (emphasizing the intellectual mode), without "pulling congregants by the heels into some uncontrolled religious experience" (negating the affective mode), I was not surprised.

The congregational autonomy of liberal congregationally-governed churches guarantees both their particularism and their openness. It does not guarantee a structure in which community-affirming religious beliefs are articulated through the music and actions of liturgy, through forms which bridge belief and feeling.

Is liturgical dance possible in this context? Insofar as dance, like any variable element of the act of worship, is indeed the "work of the people" of a gathered community, I would hold the answer to be yes. The parameters of that "work" are elastic, its meaning variable, unlike "work" in a church community whose liturgical worship points explicitly to its belief system. There are two dilemmas: in this context, dance in worship cannot as easily build on commonly-held beliefs effected through liturgical forms, the function of dance, and any art in a tradition so heavily weighted toward reason, must be examined, even "invented," within the particular worship service in which it becomes a part.

Howard Nemerov has written of "the tears which clarify the eye toward charity."[2] What *I* look for in a church service is that something which "clarifies my eye" too. A confrontational period of meditation-silence-prayer often does this, precisely because it asks that the congregation do something with their own thoughts and feelings, not as passive listener-observers, but as active participants. It engages. A second element can engage the congregation in a simple "choreography." At the Unitarian Church of Arlington, Virginia, we take a few moments to reach out, to extend a hand to greet persons on either side, to the front and behind us. The invitation is not to anticipate the coffee hour, which most liberal religionists would agree is certainly a Unitarian ritual, but to anticipate in the outstretched hand, the community we would become. Merleau-Ponty calls this phenomenon "an intentional arc." "Our intentions," he writes, "find their natural clothing or their embodiment in movements and are expressed in them."[3]

While reaching out to grasp the hand of another doesn't give itself to Dionysian abandon, even this modest exercise suggests that liberals want to break through the barriers of isolation with which all of us shield ourselves, perhaps even to break through to some emotional qualities which have eluded us. Cleaving as we have to the Apollonian virtues of rationality, ethical judgment, and restraint, we have tended to cut out the Dionysian ones (ecstasy, transformation through excitement, and danc-

ing) We have eliminated, as Marianne Micks points out, those qualities through which one "enters into another body, another character—(able) to see the god"[4]

Appealing to these contrary Apollonian and Dionysian ideas may seem indirect but there is a dialectic at work here which we who celebrate the Apollonian virtues only ignore at our peril The thesis, examined in Nietzsche's early essay, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Geneology of Morals*, argues that classical tragedy is born of the marriage of Dionysian and Apollonian elements, and that tragedy dies when the union is dissolved.[5] When later Greek dramatists attempted to extract the so-called irrational elements, and tried to make everything understandable, Nietzsche suggests, the poetry, the art, the drama degenerated He writes, "Because you had abandoned Dionysus, Apollo abandoned you."[6] I interpret this to mean that the stately, ordered movement of Apollo stands in tension with the Dionysian mood, the breaking through of order Without that tension, the dynamic center dissipates Even Emerson remarked of the attempt to devise rituals for the post-French Revolution religion-of-reason that it was all "pasteboard and filigree."[7]

How Does Dance Speak to Us?

The compelling reason for dance in worship, in both its Apollonian careful measure and countermeasure and its Dionysian excitement, is *the reappropriation of feeling*. This is not to ignore the powerful capacity of music, poetry, and sermons in affecting us. Dance gives presence as no other art can. I would not have us divorce reason from worship in the liberal church, but to enhance the marriage through dialogue with other modes.

What of the art of dance? How does it speak to us, and what is it really? Dance opens up one more avenue to knowing and feeling Its symbolic language eschews verbal translation, it defies, as music does, the constraints of language. When we become attuned to the symbolic language of dance, we become fluent in a sensitivity which does, however, translate to our everyday lives. Gertrude Stein once said, "I like to go to museums, I like to look out the windows"[8] Of dance we might paraphrase, "I like to watch dances; I like to move out into the world."

Even without a sophisticated dance-literacy, congregations have direct access to dance, as they do to music. The dancer Pauline Kroner speaks of dance communication as melding subjective and objective experience, and adds, "We (dancers) identify with the receiver (the audience/congregation) and the receiver with us . . . because that person has the identical instrument we have: the body. The body sends a message from a giving muscle to a receiving muscle, the spirit sends a current of emotion to a receiving emotion."[9]

Even without the *communicative* power of dance, choreographer Erick Hawkins has written that dance movement, being *in* and *for* itself "yields that strange and holy center which is the only thing we know about being alive its significant purpose is to fill the audience with wonder and delight . . . more valuable than anything in the world."[10] In worship, the dance might well be the perfect Whitmanesque expression. As van der Leeuw puts it, "The dance is the natural expression of the man who is just as conscious of his body as he is of his soul. In the dance the boundaries between body and soul are effaced The body moves itself spiritually and the spirit, bodily."[11]

In dance, what we see is what we get. So what is it we see? We see *dance*, Suzanne K. Langer writes, through the dynamic image that it creates. "In watching a collective dance one does not see people running around; one sees the dance driving this way, drawn this way, gathering here, spreading there—fleeing, resting, rising, and so forth, and all the motion seems to spring from powers beyond the performers. In a *pas de deux* the dancers appear to magnetize each other—the relation is more than a spatial one, it is a relation of forces . . . dance forces, virtual powers." She adds: "The prototype of these purely apparent energies . . . is the subjective experience of volition and free energy and of reluctance to alien and compelling wills. The consciousness of life—the sense of vital power, even of the power to receive impressions, apprehend the environment, and meet changes—is our most immediate self-consciousness."[12]

Dance in Worship

Do dance and worship belong together? That "consciousness of life," or "vital power," of "volition" and

"Invocation" performed at the Unitarian Church of Arlington, Virginia

Photograph by David Tilson

countervolition, is one sought element in a service of worship Through it and as a result of it, we want to be *turned around* We do not want to depart in the same way that we arrived What we ask, and are willing to participate in, is a change of heart, a new inclination of the heart, mind, and will.

Each art form has the power to affirm—in Robert Coles words, "the thoughtful reveries of people who struggle for coherence, vision, a sense of what obtains in the world"[13] I regret that Coles omitted passion, the Dionysian element in art also can move us into that struggle for what obtains in the world by breaking through mere order, stagnation, and even repression. "Passion" opens the possibility of being subject to overwhelming forces, and thus, even to suffering. But when that suffering is shared, when it is suffering *with*, it becomes compassion People often comment that dance in church moves them to tears. Do we weep for ourselves or for others—or is it both, in recognition of our common passions? Howard Nemerov says it much better than I can:

> *That there should be much goodness in the world,/ kindness and intelligence, candor and charm,/ and that it all goes down in the dust after a while,/ this is a subject for the steadiest meditation/ of the heart and mind, as for the tears/ that clarify the eye toward charity*[14]

The melding of any two arts, such as worship and dance, is itself an art, requiring sensitivity, cooperation, and a peppering of spontaneity. In the worship context, dance can affect in heart and mind some new vision, a vision of a moment, a vision that *turns us around*. The source of the vision is both in the dance and within us. What is articulated and revealed through dance resides in part within the repleteness of its symbolization. The other part resides within us—our responding muscles and attending hearts.

The meaning is completed within us at the moment the moving form of the dance reverberates against our own unique experience and thought. This can be a potent meaning, for as Martha Graham reminds us, "Dance is the symbol for the performance of living."[15] But before the performance of dance, as every dancer knows, or the performance of living, as we live to learn, comes practice. It is through practice that each of us, in Miss Graham's words, becomes in some area "an athlete of God."[16]

Not long ago I found Martha Graham sitting alone in a hotel lobby after a performance. I wanted to thank her for those "moments" that her choreographic genius had created, and—not incidentally—to confess that I had been her student. On the far side of 80 she sat, enveloped in clouds of chiffon, fragile, musing. "Ummm. . Barbara Kres " Among the thousands I was, alas, not a vivid memory Then she smiled. "But I'm sure," she said, "I'm sure I'd recognize you in a leotard." A kindness and a truth For as Graham has said, "the body does not lie." It is important that we dance in church. It is important that we bring this truth into our midst.

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19
Dance as Worship

Jerry Bywaters Cochran

A little over ten years ago, a young minister asked me to dance in a worship service We had both been in school in New York City (he at Union Theological Seminary and I at Juilliard) in the days when those two institutions were across the street from each other. He was studying to be a minister and I, a dancer My only concern with his request was whether I, a fallible human being, a searching, struggling Christian, a sinner, should dance in a church? Would my body serve as a vessel to convey the Word of God? The minister assured me by saying, "If we gave into that concern, there would certainly be no dance in churches, and probably no music, no preaching, and no congregation as well."

As I have danced and choreographed for worship services many times since this first request, I have grown increasingly grateful to God for allowing me to pray in church through dance. I believe that dance can serve as a prayer for the dancer and I often think of Paul's sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." Prayer in dance must not be limited to the expression of the dancer however. Dance in church must communicate for and to those who watch. Both the needs of the dancer in prayer and the needs of the congregation who are the audience and worshippers must both be addressed.

In retrospect, that first invitation to dance in church forced me to search for the spiritual and technical resources I had not thought could be used in this way. Though I had not any specialized training to prepare me for this moment, I soon found that much of what had passed for "secular" dance training was now of use to me. I thought back to many of my dance teachers, in particular Ruth St. Denis, Martha Graham, and José Limon, all of whom have produced notable choreography on religious themes. I called on my own experiences in church as a child, on college courses in religion and most notably, in the lectures of theologian Paul Tillich, who was particularly interested in the relationships between religion and art. With all of this, I began to view dance as an earthly trinity, joining body, mind, and spirit, impelling me to a greater understanding of the Word. This understanding allowed me to go straight to the spiritual significance of man in relation to God, not just by hearing the message but by experiencing it. I realized that it was long before dancing in church that the understanding had begun to grow.

Each time I dance in church, I try to open my mind, my body, and my soul to the conversion significance of my faith. I hope that my mind, the body, and the soul of the congregation can likewise be opened.

The total individual needs to express his worship of God with his total being. Such basic themes as the differences between activity and passivity, strength and weakness, tension and relaxation, disease and grace, are more easily learned from bodily movement than in any other way. Certain emotions are difficult to fully comprehend without motion. Perhaps the sparcity of joy in contemporary life is related to the loss of dance as a primary means for the education and articulation of values. That dance is a natural vehicle for religious expression is clear to the dancer for as

Photograph by Helmut Gruniouski

he works to train and perfect the body, he becomes increasingly aware of the miracle of God's creation. One need not be a trained dancer to have this experience. When a worshipper kneels and clasps his hands in prayer there is a dance, a simple dance but a dance in the broadest sense of the word. In this sense it can be truly be said that dance never really left the church.

Now that dance is coming back into the Western Christian church, I am thankful that this opportunity is available to me as a dancer and choreographer. I am always in mind that the physical juxtaposition of Julliard and the Union Theological Seminary, which seemed of no particular interest to me when I was in school, ultimately played a part in bringing me to religious dance. The words of the Psalmist have a deeper meaning for me.

Praise Him with timbrel and dance;
Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!

82

20 A Christian Art of Dance

Carolyn Deitering

Our worship and the arts that serve that worship must show an understanding of the unity and the salvation of the wholeness of the body and soul. The art of movement, whether it be the ritual gesture of ministers and people or the creative work of trained liturgical dancers, is the art which most profoundly cultivates and demonstrates the reality of the redemption of the whole person. In the twelfth chapter of his letter to Romans, St. Paul exhorts believers to offer their "bodies as a living sacrifice, acceptable to God" in their spiritual worship. In the earliest centuries of Christianity, gesture and dance were integral parts of worship. Gradually however, dance was discouraged and even banned by the Church which came to honor intellectual and spiritual aspects of the human person and to distrust the physical and emotional ones.

Protestant churches began experiencing the return of liturgical or sacred dance to worship in 1925! Since Vatican II, the Catholic Church has produced some documents which guide the reintroduction of liturgical dance. The most notable of these documents is the American Bishops' Environment and Art in Catholic Worship, which states that "processions and interpretations through bodily movement (dance) can become meaningful parts of the liturgical celebration if done by truly competent persons in the manner that befits the total liturgical action."[2]

Although many forms of dance are available and could be used to present religious themes, the theology of Christianity calls its dance artists beyond these forms. A Christian art of dance calls for movement which is created by the body-mind-spirit unity of the dancer. Performing conventional steps or routines by memory while placing religious meaning upon them like some "outer garment" is not sufficient. The outer form of the dance must grow out of the inner feelings of the dancer. No false or limited vocabulary of "dance movement" will do. The new Christian art of dance must arise from the natural, God-given language of movement and should be as limitless in its vocabulary as the God of whom it speaks is limitless. The creators of this kind of dance must draw the form of their dance from their own feelings and faith rather than imitating the forms of theatrical or show dance. This is easy because their art is a gift from God and readily available—a natural, free movement of the human body united with mind and spirit.[3]

One might argue that technique or discipline could suffer from such an approach. If the Christian dancer desires to offer his or her body as an instrument of expression, then every part of that instrument must be strong and alive and capable of its full range of movement within the limitations of the dancer's temperament and body structure. That takes work. If the liturgical dancer wishes to speak in the language of movement of his experiences of a limitless God, then continuous exploration of new movement possibilities is required. That is a soul-searching as well as a body-aching discipline that never ends.

Photograph by Helmut Gnamowski

Liturgical dancers need to be well-trained in the disciplines of liturgy as well as in the disciplines of their art in, order that each dance presented "befits the total liturgical action." Dances to be offered during a liturgical celebration need not only be of the highest possible craftsmanship of movement and meaning, but must also serve the liturgical action and be appropriate to the community. Christian dancers have, at this point in history, an opportunity to affect both the Church and the world of dance. In this way, challenges of breaking through the barriers of conventional approaches to dance and through the barriers of objections to dance in the liturgy can be met

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21 Ballet Training as It Relates to Sacred Dance

Suanne Ferguson

For years there has been some sense of controversy over the training of the sacred dancer The first conflict seemed to be "to train or not to train?" This conflict seems to have been resolved, at least for the majority of those involved in this expression of faith. If not overwhelmingly, at least substantially, we seem to agree that training is necessary if we want a product that will communicate to anyone beyond ourselves

The issue now seems to be "how to train " Should the sacred dancer have modern dance training, ballet training, or jazz? No dancer today can be satisfied with learning any one technique So it is with the sacred dancer who must explore and become proficient in many forms of dance if he is to truly communicate the message which he has to share We must be concerned with the training of the body, the mind, and the spirit if we are to produce dancers who can express their faith with the dances they dance and the lives they live

Since my own orientation to dance began with ballet training, I will expand on this type of training and what it has to offer the sacred dancer Although ballet is one of the most disciplined of art forms, through its very nature, it leads to freedom. The discipline of study results in freedom to use knowledge in new and creative ways. The truly disciplined artist is the one who is ready to make use of his imagination and communicate the message he would share in a clear, exciting, and valid piece of work.

I have heard it said that "pretty poses" have nothing to say about life and sacred dance is about life . . therefore, sacred dancers should study ballet. I can accept the fact that pretty poses have nothing to say about life, but the dancer well-trained in ballet will a difficult time identifying the art of ballet with "pretty poses." The strength and polish of the ballet dancer is not an accident, but built into the discipline of the training.

One of the greatest weaknesses that I have noticed in much of the sacred dance that I have observed is its lack of energy The impact of the dance does not reach much beyond the first pew Much of the congregation is thus left untouched I have witnessed this in my own group when what I thought was a "good dance" left me absolutely cold when I watched it during the service from the balcony. It sent me back to the studio to analyze the problem. The source of energy is within the dancer The dancer must discover the control of energy which comes from understanding oppositional forces in the body. For example, we may look at the first exercise of the ballet barre, the plié The bending of the knees is a movement which obviously takes the body down, but when correctly executed, the pull of the body is up. It is one of the most difficult but most important concepts that a teacher must reveal to his/her student in the training process. that is, that the student must learn to make use of all the oppositional forces in the body which will then result in the control of energy Perhaps it is difficult to understand what this instruction about oppositional pull in the plié has to do with sacred dance that communicates beyond the first pew. Actually, it has everything to do with it because new life is breathed into a weak performance without any alteration to the choreography. It is a matter of controlling energy. It is actually the energy that communicates.

Ballet technique can also be beneficial in clarifying the line of each individual dancer so that the focus is more defined and thereby the message clarified and strengthened. The problem of focus is a problem of use of the body, the focus of the entire body, or line. There is certainly no one easy lesson approach to applying ballet concepts of line to sacred dance. It means working with this approach over a period of time before the influence is observed in our dances and our dancers.

I discovered this quite by accident. In my early years of teaching sacred dance, I purposely avoided the ballet class. The people with whom I was working had very little formal training and rather than intimidate them, I avoided the classical approach. Then as more trust was manifested, I felt that I had more to offer in ballet and I began to introduce more and more into the training. The results surprised even me. Technique became cleaner, line became much clearer, and the dancers with even the least amount of training began to look "trained." The added bonus was that the dances were clarified. I knew this not only by observing them myself, but by the response we began to receive from our congregation. People began to comment on how much the dance meant to them and how much they could relate to the dance instead of how "pretty" the dancers and the dance were.

In summary, we must train the sacred dancer. The study of line, focus, and motivation can energize, clarify, and

lend purpose to movement. All forms of dance discipline are important and the more we can incorporate into the training, the better will the vocabulary of the dancer be. In turn, we can more adequately express our faith through the art of dance.

22
A Practical Guide to Dance in Catholic Liturgy

Virginia B. Shuker

Aspects of introducing dance into contemporary Catholic liturgy which must be considered include the discovery of the most practical and appropriate locations to include the dance, introduction of the dance experience to include congregational movement, and experimentation with accompaniment. This chapter, then, will sequentially deal with these three aspects through the purposes of the four divisions of the Mass. Introductory Rites; Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist, Concluding Rite.[1] These guidelines may be expanded to include ritualistic celebrations in other denominations where such an order of worship is also prescribed. The placement of dance/movement in a particular section, however, will naturally give emphasis to that section, and care must be exercised to assure that the emphasis is acceptable to that particular liturgy. Therefore, even though the general theme of all Eucharistic liturgies is thanksgiving, there are times when that thanksgiving may be emphasized through penitence, reconciliation, quiet joy, or exhuberant celebration, and further tempered by the prescribed daily readings.

Within the Introductory Rites of Entrance, Penitential Rite, Kyrie, and Gloria, the easiest place to introduce dance by a dance company or choir is through the Entrance or Processional. This gathering song, when accented by dancers and rhythmical and celebrant movement through the aisles, stresses unity and equality among all worshipers, clergy and laity alike. Schutte's "Mountains and Hills" and Ducote's "Sing out His Goodness" are good choices especially when accompanied by congregational singing. In this way, all are participants, there are no observers.

When the Gloria is sung, its forcefulness and majesty can be enhanced through dance. "Gloria of the Bells" by Peloquin and Foley's "Glory to God" both contain repetitive lines which give opportunity for congregational as well as choir singing. Both afford opportunities for dance in unison and in harmony, even though the first is light and grows in intensity and the second is intense and majestic throughout.

The Kyrie and Penitential Rite are often overlooked as possibilities for dance, but when they include the congregation in a simple movement or gesture at the same time that the dancers perform, they can intensify the feeling behind "Lord, have mercy." It can assist in acknowledging failures and shortcomings if the congregation kneels or turns away from the altar while errors of omission are read. At times a Penitential Rite may be especially written to coordinate and emphasize the importance of cleansing the heart and mind before coming to the Scripture readings. Here the trained dancers may embody the words to provide even deeper understanding.[2]

The Liturgy of the Word offers numerous possibilities for dance. Beginning with the scriptural aspects, Old and New Testament readings and even the Gospel may be danced as long as the dance clarifies, deepens, or sheds new insight on the written and spoken Word. These may be performed in a number of ways. The lector may read as accompaniment to the dance, the lector may read the entire text and have the dance follow, or the lector may read a short segment followed by the dancer dancing the same segment and freezing in a meaningful pose as the reading progresses, alternating word and dance to its conclusion. If the Gospel reading is readily remembered, such as the stories of the Prodigal Son or the Good Samaritan, dancing the Gospel Alleluia, especially with candles or lanterns to emphasize Scripture as the illumination of God's Word, is appropriate.

The Responsorial Psalm is also an excellent place to include dance between Old and New Testament readings. By its title, the Psalm is a response to the Old Testament reading and its purpose is to vocally involve the congregation in singing or chanting. If the response is sung, the congregation may sing the refrain while a group of dancers dance, when the solo singer sings the verse, the solo dancer may interpret it.[3] Often, also, the congregation can be taught a simple gesture as accompaniment to the refrain. Merely reaching out and clasping the hand of the person on either side while singing the refrain to Ducote's "Be Not Afraid" or simply lifting the arms from a resting position in the lap to an open position overhead to the refrain of "I Lift Up My Soul" by Manion can be evidence of one's openness to God and humanity.

The other areas within the Liturgy of the Word where dance is not widely used but which have enormous potential are at the Homily, the Profession of Faith or Creed, and the General Intercessions or Prayer of the Faithful. The

Homily, the practical application of the Scripture readings, may be enhanced by dance at its beginning or conclusion. On some occasions it can be replaced entirely by the dance, the nonverbal communication can have an impact far greater than words, particularly when the readings themselves are lengthy. Owens' "He Came in Love" and Carter's "Lord of the Dance" both deal in different musical styles with the birth, life, death, and resurrection, and can be used in liturgies geared to young adults or to the entire congregation respectively, especially during Advent or Lent when the focus is on internal and external preparation. Instead of mechanically repeating words of the Creed, dancers may move to it by coming from the congregation to the altar then ultimately connecting with one another and serving as a visual summary of the proclaimed faith. The General Intercessions, by contrast, could involve the congregation in movement. At the response, which is often, "Lord, hear our prayer," the congregation could move from a standing position to stretching the arms wide, from there to lifting them upward, and from there to a deep bow while holding hands. This serves as a visual and kinesthetic experience of the faithfuls' support of each other through community.

The first part of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the Offertory, is another natural place to include dance. The gifts of the people which they have received from God are now brought back to Him in thankfulness. These gifts may be symbolic of the theme of the Liturgy. Tokens of healing such as stethoscopes, medication, or books can be brought forward by doctors, nurses, or counselors who work in the healing professions when wholeness is emphasized during Advent, signs of various vocations may be offered when committment to vocations is celebrated, balloons may be presented on Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, for a festive atmosphere. All offerings are appropriate when they are connected with the theme. At other times the actual bread and wine to be consecrated as well as the wheat and grapes from which they are made can be offered. These gifts are emphasized through sung music such as Joncas' "Our Blessing Cup" or Cothran's lyrics for "Planted Wheat" to the traditional Hebrew "Hashual." However, sometimes instrumental classics such as Vivaldi's "Winter" from "The Four Seasons" or Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" impart even more intense emphasis on the gifts and help the worshiper to more fully appreciate them.

The Sanctus or Holy, Holy, Holy, is an excellent place for congregational movement. Simple gestures of reaching up and out, holding the hands of those on either side, bowing, then lifting arms again upward can be combined according to the musical version being sung. This gives acknowledgment to the work of God in everyday life. Likewise, the Mystery of Faith in any of its forms may be moved to by dances or congregation as an opening to the awareness of the unseeen yet believed. Even the Eucharistic Amen is intensified through congregational movement and the "so be it" is strengthened.

Also within the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the entire Communion Rite from the Lord's Prayer to the Sign of Peace, Lamb of God, and Communion Meditation offer possibilities for movement. A series of repetitive movements by the congregation to the Lord's Prayer[4] or an antiphonal reading of the text accompanied by dance[5] will foster greater concentration on the meaning of the prayer for dancers and congregation alike. The handshake or kiss at the Sign of Peace and crossing the arms over the breast at the Lamb of God are additional gestures which focus on the meaning of reaching out and looking in, respectively.[6] The silence after Communion may be broken by the dancers' movement meditation to Landry's "Lay Your Hands" or readings of "Children Learn What They Live" or "Desiderata." Dancing the meditation to music without lyrics such as Pachelbel's "Canon in D" or Sor's "Estudio No. 5" can change the tone from one of quiet meditation to one of glorious celebration emphasizing the strengthening effects of Communion.

The Concluding Rite bids the congregation, now strengthened by community celebration, to go out into the larger community to do good works and to praise and bless the Lord in all aspects of daily life. Generally the concluding hymn is strong and straightforward, lending itself to the tripudium step which moves three steps forward then one backward, and indicating the ongoing progress of Christianity in the face of occasional setbacks, or to a modified version of the African high-life, stepping right, touching left at heel of right, behind, at heel again, then stepping left to repeat the sequence which repeatedly alternates with rhythmic foot stomping.[7] Either step works well to the contemporary "Mountains May Fall" by Schutte or the the Black Spiritual "Amen," or even to the traditional "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee," Van Dyke's adaptation of Beethoven's "Hymn to Joy."

The above guidelines suggest logical places to include dance, and at first only one segment of the Mass should be danced. The congregation should be left wanting more. Gradually one may include both a major work and a minor one such as the Offertory Procession and the Gospel Alleluia or the Mystery of Faith acclamation. In a liturgy which celebrates a major feast such as Easter, Christmas, or Pentecost, more than one major segment may be danced, e.g., the Processional, Responsorial Psalm, and Offertory. Some of the other congregational movement sections such as the Sanctus, Lord's Prayer, and Rite of Peace, may gradually be incorporated into the community's weekly liturgies and on special occasions may be emphasized by their omission. Occasionally liturgy will cater to a special group, when the congregation is primarily composed of dancers, singers, and musicians, many of the sections of the Mass may be danced.

Dance will become an integral part of the ritualistic liturgy of the Catholic Church, not just enhancement for major celebrations, when both liturgist and dancer study each other's craft and have the sensitivity to understand its proper placement and execution. Both placement and execution need to be well-planned and revised when necessary. In this way performance of good dancing liturgy and good liturgical dance will give shape to the celebration. This heightened awareness of the interde-

pendence of the two elements will then enliven the expression and communication of the sacred from God to humanity and from humanity to God.

Footnotes

[1]*Celebrating the Eucharist*, Collegeville, MN The Liturgical Press, 1981.

[2]Moynihan, Michael E S J *Embodied Prayer* Kansas City, MO National Catholic Reporter Publishing Co , 1980 (Series of cassettes)

[3]Adams, Doug. *Congregational Dancing in Christian Worship Austin, TX. The Sharing Co , 1971*

[4]Moynihan, Michael E S J., 1980

[5]Taylor, Margaret Fisk. *A Time to Dance Symbolic Movement in Worship* Austin, TX The Sharing Co , 1976.

[6]De Sola, Carla. *The Spirit Moves a Handbook of Dance and Prayer* Washington The Liturgical Conference, 1977

[7]Adams, Doug, 1971

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