

LITURGICAL DANCE

by Thomas A. Kane

Liturgical Dance is a type of religious or sacred dance by an individual, a group or the entire worshipping assembly that enriches the prayer of the assembly. Liturgical dance is not performance, but supports the communal prayer. By bridging the visible and the invisible world of the spirit, liturgical dance serves the worship of the church by drawing the community into the sacred mysteries, revealing new dimensions of the word, and witnessing to the beauty of God.

The style and shape of movement for worship are in process. Not confined to a limited movement vocabulary deemed worshipful, liturgical dance takes on forms that combine different traditions, such as modern dance, ballet, folk dance and yoga. As movement styles are developed, it is the task of present-day artists and liturgists to evaluate what is sacred and appropriate for church use. These forms may emerge from the indigenous culture or from the depths of a person's being.

Liturgical dance presupposes a prayer life and a faith commitment on the part of those involved. Because dance is a performance art, training and discipline for the art are required of the solo dancer or group.

There are five types of liturgical dance according to its function within the liturgy:

(1) *Procession dances* which include the Entrance Procession, gathering all those assembled into a liturgical community; the Gospel Procession, heightening the proclamation of the good news; the Gifts Procession, highlighting the table preparation and the bringing forth the gifts from the community; and the Closing Procession, accompanying the ministers from the celebration space.

(2) *Proclamation dance* proclaims the scriptures in a dramatic way.

(3) *Prayer dance* includes acclamations and invocations, prayers of praise and thanksgiving.

(4) *Meditation dance*, reflective by nature, and can draw the community together in a spirit of thanksgiving.

(5) *Celebration dance*, akin to the prelude and postlude, sets the tone for the gathering or brings it to a festive close, involving entire assembly in simple gesture or movement.

In conclusion, liturgical dance must clearly be prayer and not performance, involving all the participants in the ritual action. Liturgical dance may include solo, group or congregational movement. Liturgical dance is communal, drawing the assembly together; inspirational, uplifting the spirit to God; evangelical, witnessing to the message of salvation, and prophetic, challenging the participants to live the Gospel message.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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