

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SACRED DANCE:

Past - dances were an integral part of all aspects of life, such as harvesting, fertility, health, marriage, life and deaths, and the relation of people to all of nature. It was a way cultures expressed their deepest religious understandings.

Hebrews - Our own religious tradition, the Israelites has triumphal and say processions, circle dances and dances of ecstasy, of which King David's must have been a stupendous example(2 Samuel 6:12-15)

Greek - "choros" - Choral dances Stanza - to stand and listen

Greeks believed that the dance was the art which influenced the soul the most and that it provided the expressive way for that overflow of awareness for which they has no words.

First five centuries - Christian foundation

- seen as an expression of Joy. A remark of Jesus, "We piped to you, and you did not dance (Matt. 11:17). Paul reminds the early Christian in Corinthians-20 that their bodies are temples of the Holy spirit and that they should glorify God in their bodies as well as in their spirits. Paul respected the body as a channel for religious expression, (1 Tim.2:8) "I desire then that in every place the people should pray, lifting holy hands"

Circle, ring, labyrinthine, processional dances

- seen as a natural way of expressing joy, a way of salvation and a way of adoration.

6th to 12 th Middle ages

Dance flourished in sacred Christian movement

14th -17th century - Renaissance

- sacred dance flourished during this time in the oratorio, in the interpretation of hymns and psalms in the services of worship and in theatrical allegorical ballets.

18 - 19th century post renaissance

the door was firmly closed on dance and its creative expression

Religious dancing either disappeared, survived in isolated places, changed into bold expressions, or remained submerged in the prescribed movements of the mass and Protestant liturgy

The Protestant Christian churches at the time of the Reformation has banished the arts of painting, sculptors, and drama from any functions connected with their churches, and had stifled any manifestations of religious dancing.

The Puritans went even farther, for they frowned an all drama and all dance as the sport of the devil. in general, Protestant Christians felt that the portals of the spirit were to be entered with great seriousness through the mind and not through the senses(passion).

Cults and sects - with no opportunity for creative life in conventional churches, the sacred dance faded out and became unknown to the church attendants. However, some sects and cults arose in this arid periods and their members experimented with symbolic movements in their rituals.

One such sect was a sacred order called the "Free and Accepted Mason" 1717 It grew out of a guild meeting of masons who were building English Cathedrals

Shakers were a unique group that created intricate religious dances 1747, they welcomed all those tired of "futile creeds, formal worship, and the veils of a corrupt society."

Our western civilization gradually became lost in the midst of development and dance became relegated , a mode of expression so fundamental to human life. to secular activity. The secular world became its only home

But all good things emerge and are recreated in new ways, we are gradually rediscovering the sacredness of all matter, we will discover how to dance and pray with purity and meaning and depth in our won 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 on the advances in psychological understanding for its depth and freedom and individuality.

Since we haven't handed down a tradition of sacred movements from generation to generation, like that of the sacred dance of India, 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 meaning full for the church. The dance has to be in relation to all the people of God, learning from them that is soul-satisfying and what is stretching their soul in relationship to God.

References:

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