



Perichoresis: Dancing with God

ABSTRACT

In the whole plethora of human life, dance has been there to move and lead us. However, there is a growing sense that dance seems to be only for the entertainment and secular world. Rarely do we see dance as part of the liturgy of the Church. Albeit in some fiestas and community gatherings where dancing is the most awaited activity for the young and even the old, dance has been generally considered outside the official life of the Church. Is dance outside the realm of the divine? With the researcher's firsthand experience and love for dance, this paper explores the kinesthetic and theology of Dance.

Keywords: Theology of Dance. Perichoresis. Kinesthetic. Divine dance.



INTRODUCTION

Dance has always been a part of human life. In fact, life can be described as a continuous dance wherein we make a lot of steps and encounter many partners. And if life is a dance then the world has become a stage for us as we move and experience dancing with God, the Divine Creator and mover of Life. This leads us to conclude that dance is not just something secular, a way to entertain and be entertained. It is, above all, an expression of our being, a means to relate to God, an articulation of our praise, joy and prayer. Thus, it has been an integral part of celebrations and rituals, a means of communication with the gods and among humans, and a basic source of enjoyment and beauty.¹

Richard Rohr postulates that “God is not just a dancer, God is the dance itself.”² If God is the dancer and the dance, then what has happened to the graceful dance that should be performed in the Church? How, then, are we relating to the Divine Dance of the Trinity? It is high time for us to see once again the God of dance in our world. It is time for us to dance with Him.

EMBODIED DANCE

In any choreography, the first step is crucial for the performer because it must capture the attention of the spectator. The first then is to lay down the meaning of *dance*. As we present the “is” of dance or its definition, we build a sturdy stage. And as we move in our dance, we will explore the dynamics that are embedded in it. Together with our body, dance can create the finest beauty and meaning. It is the body that gives form to any dance. Indeed, an embodied dance captures our first step as we look at the significance of the body in relation to dance.

¹Janet W. Descutner, *World of Dance: Asian Dance*, 2nd Edition (New York, NY: Chelsea House Publishers, 2010), 7.

²Richard Rohr and Mike Morrell, *Divine Dance* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2016), 19.

Dance

“*What is dance?*” Dance is performed all over the world, from the most developed society down to the indigenous communities. It has been called the oldest of arts.³ Dance has evolved from folk, to ballet, to the modern and contemporary dances. In the Philippines, we have tremendous amount of genre of dance that we can find in the different islands, from north to south and from cities to rural areas. These dances come in different forms that grew out of various contexts and experience of the Filipino people.⁴

The basic definition of dance is that it is a rhythmic or patterned movement.⁵ There can be no dance without a pattern as executed by our bodily movement. Now, if dance is a patterned movement, then it has a kinesthetic quality.⁶ It is neither static nor visual alone; it is rhythmic, moving and figurative. What really defines dance is this kinesthetic characteristic; it is always moving and there is an awareness or a sense of motion. It is by kinesthetic that dance becomes sensible to the audience or spectator. This kinesthetic awareness of dance is pivotal because it enables dance to communicate and convey meaning to the audience and at the same time facilitate the response of the audience to the dance. Indeed, if we are going to take a deeper understanding of the kinesthetic concept in dance, not only must the dancer employ movement to express his or her ideas, the spectator must also employ movement in order to respond to the dancer’s intention and understand what s/he is trying to convey.⁷

³Anya Peterson Royce, *The Anthropology of Dance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1977), 3.

⁴Nicanor G. Tiangson and others, eds., *CCP Encyclopedia of the Philippine Art, Volume V* (Manila, Philippines: Cultural Center of the Philippines Special Publication Office, 1994), s.v. “Philippine Dance”, 18.

⁵Royce, *The Anthropology of Dance*, 5.

⁶*Ibid.*, 194.

⁷John Martin, *The Dance in Theory* (Pennington, NJ: A Dance Horizon Book, Princeton Book Company, 1965), 1.

This is the communicative nature of dance⁸ that requires dialogue and response just like how language works. That is why we can consider “dance as language.”⁹ Dance speaks by using gestures and steps in vague and lofty ways.¹⁰ Dance does not only create patterned movement but also narrates which is very much evident in festivals or in a *pas de deux*.¹¹ When stories are narrated in dance, they attract more attention and elicit an active response than when they are spoken. Both the performer and spectator must be aware of this kinesthetic character in the dance which becomes a venue for an encounter. It is in this kinesthetic awareness that we become aware of our self as having both body and spirit.

The Conundrum of the Body

The basic instrument used in dance is the human body or the performer’s body. We have already seen that dance is a human body making patterns in time and space and that makes dance distinctive among other arts. However, the reliance of dance on a very basic instrument, the human body, also makes a problematic disposition towards dance. And where does this conundrum come from?

In the ancient Greek civilization, dance had other significant meanings. Everyone was expected to be able to dance creditably although not to the point of professionalism. Albeit dance found a significant role within the society, still it was not something that caught the people’s interests because it was only understood as a means to develop the body, which was secondary among the Greeks. Ideas, words and products of the mind were the things that were given primary attention.

⁸Janet Anderson, *World of Dance: Modern Dance 2nd Edition* (New York, NY: Infobase Publishing, 2010), 7.

⁹Royce, *The Anthropology of Dance*, 192.

¹⁰Ibid., 193.

¹¹A form of steps used in ballet wherein a male and female perform the same step together; it is generally used to narrate a love story.

Therefore, dance was considered so inferior that it should not enter within the realm of the Church's life. This mentality actually began with the mind-body problem, the dualistic view that mind and body are distinct.¹² This view postulated that the human person was a spiritual, non-corporeal being trapped in a body as in a dungeon.¹³ The body, then, is a betrayal of and a prison for the soul, reason or mind. The mind-body problem is hierarchical in nature, seeing that the mind or reason should always rule over the body and over the irrational appetitive functions of the body. With the dichotomy of the mind and body, anything that pertains to the sense or appetite of the body is sinful or regarded as the "sin of carnality."¹⁴ Out of this carnality rises the concupiscence of the flesh, which is lust, sexual desire, pleasure, fornication and self-gratification.

During the Reformation, there were "anti-dance" movement and literature¹⁵ denouncing dance as evil and sinful. Moreover, the Catholic Church, especially with the Council of Trent, insisted on liturgical unity without the use of dance in worship.¹⁶ Thus, all the avenues of dance within the Church were stifled or forced to become private events. "The events of the period eventually led to the eradication of liturgical dance, processions, and most visual arts, leaving only the arts of painting, preaching and music unscathed."¹⁷ Dance was then relegated to the periphery as not a form of worship for the Church and limiting our movements into kneeling and standing. Dance was put into the category of sinful acts and pleasure. Dance is tainted with sin when

¹²Tim Crane and Sarah Patterson, eds., *History of Mind-Body Problem* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 1.

¹³Elizabeth Grosz, "Refiguring Bodies" in *The Body: A Reader*, Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco, eds. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 47.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Dena Davida, *Fields In Motion: Ethnography In The Worlds Of Dance* (Canada, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), 433.

¹⁶Adrian Webber, "The History of Dance in the Church," *Refined Undignified*, <http://www.refinedundignified.com> [accessed February 22, 2017].

¹⁷Lucinda Coleman, "Worship God in Dance," *Renewal Journal: A Chronicle of Renewal and Revival* (May 20, 2011) <https://renewaljournal.wordpress.com> [accessed March 27, 2017].

we reduce body and dance to pleasure. Dance was created not just to entertain or give pleasure but also to communicate relationships especially in our desire to communicate with the greater Being, God.

PERICHORESIS: THE DIVINE DANCE

God is not just a dancer but “God is the dance” itself.¹⁸ Moving in an enraptured music of love, God dances in a most impeccable sense of motion that every creature will become a spectator of dance in a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.¹⁹ “God is dance” might seem an odd image of God. However, this metaphor is not a new notion in understanding the mystery of God. The Fathers of the Church and other theologians use this image in their appropriation of the περιχώρησις (*perichoresis*) to elucidate the Divine Dance in Trinity that there is a dance within Godself, an eternal dancing among the three persons of God. Moreover, going beyond dancing for Godself, God dances with us through the incarnation of Jesus. The earth becomes the stage for the dance of salvation. Jesus, then, becomes the Lord of the Dance who is perpetually dancing and inviting us to dance in the music of salvation.

In Search of a Metaphor (Naming God)

Richard Rohr postulates that “mystery is not something that you cannot understand—it is something that you can endlessly understand.”²⁰ Understanding mystery is an infinite process. In this search of the meaning of the mystery of God, the great theologians have told different names, images and metaphors. The most common names, images and metaphors reside in the masculine presentation of God that produces an impression that God is male.²¹

¹⁸Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 19.

¹⁹Rodulf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 12-24.

²⁰Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 19.

²¹Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “God in Communion with us: The Trinity,” in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of the Theology in Feminist Perspective*, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, ed. (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 100.

As we focus on the search of metaphor to decipher the mystery of God, Anthony Kelly surmises that, “metaphor is a verbal play of linguistic expression as it stretches the available language to evoke a sense of what is symbolically present, of what is incarnate, inspired, intimated in the basic symbol structure”.²² Since metaphor is used to name the reality of Trinity, it uses a creative language to describe what “God is like...” The use of the metaphor will allow the experience of God to speak to us in an intimate manner rather than in a vague and abstract idea of God. In this way, we make the mystery of the Trinity endlessly understandable. Albeit, we can endlessly understand the mystery of God through metaphor, God remains unnamable.²³ As exclaimed by the Angelic Doctor of the Church, Thomas Aquinas, God surpasses every form that our intellect can reach, even language, and thus we are unable to fathom by knowing what God is, but we are able to have some knowledge of God by knowing what God is not.²⁴ This is his famous *via negativa* or way of negation. Indeed, the words, concept, image, analogy and metaphor we use to depict God is necessarily limited.²⁵ And what makes God incomprehensible is because of God’s nearness to us through Jesus and the Holy Spirit who unites human persons with God and not the distance of God.²⁶ In the same way, God is near yet God remains unfathomable. A fortiori, LaCugna postulates that “God’s mystery cannot be fully captured in any single metaphor, [thus], we are licensed to use an array of images and metaphors, feminine as well as masculine.”²⁷ In other words, “God is not confined within our definitions. It would mean to think of God as the Other who could never be defined by our thought.”²⁸ As Richard Rohr explicates, metaphor is the possible

²²Anthony Kelly, *The Trinity of Love: A Theology of the Christian God*, New Theology Series, Vol. 4 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989), 117.

²³LaCugna, *Freeing Theology*, 102.

²⁴Aquinas, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, Chapter 14, 96.

²⁵LaCugna, *Freeing Theology*, 102.

²⁶Ibid., 103.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ola Sigurdson, “Is the Trinity a Practical Doctrine?” in *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue*, Werner G. Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande, eds. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 118.

language available to us when we speak of God, and certainly when we speak of the Trinity.²⁹ Therefore, our challenge now is, through our experience of God, to explore the metaphor that we predicate to God. One of the metaphors that we can explore is the “Divine Dance,” that God is Dance, as translated from *perichoresis*.

The Divine Dance

A famous German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, narrates a story in his book, *The Gay Science*, of a madman who carries a lantern in the bright morning of the day while shouting “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.”³⁰ This statement became the debate for all thinkers and continued to perplex the field of the academe. However, this same person also imagines a God in his letter to his friend: “If these Christians want me to believe in their god, they’ll have to sing me better songs; they’ll have to look more like people who have been saved; they’ll have to wear on their countenance the joy of the beatitudes. I could only believe in a god who dances.”³¹ What we are blind if is that God is alive, a God who celebrates life and a God who dances with us—dancing in the rhythm of the music of life.

Divine Dance is not a new metaphor to depict the image of God. The etymology of *perichoresis* is best seen in the verb from which it is derived: *perichorein*. *Chorein* means to make room for another while *peri* means round about³² or a round dance.³³ The use of the *perichoresis* will elucidate the idea of the dynamic and

²⁹Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 37.

³⁰Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, section 125, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 1974), 181.

³¹John Bradshaw, *Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing your Inner Child* (New York, NY: Bantam Book, 1990), 274.

³²Michael G. Lawler, “Perichoresis: New Theological Wine in an Old Theological Wineskin,” <https://creighton.pure.elsevier.com/en/publications/perichoresis-new-theological-wine-in-an-old-theological-wineskin> [accessed December 15, 2017] and K. Kilby, I. A. McFarland, D.A.S. Fergusson, & et. al. eds. *Cambridge dictionary of Christian theology* [2011]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available from: <https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/cupdct/perichoresis/0?institutionId=6142> [accessed December 15, 2017].

³³Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 19.

interpenetration of the Trinity as God is dance, joyfully dancing in the round that make room for each persons.

Accordingly, LaCugna conveyed the term to see the movement of the Trinity: “*Perichoresis* expressed the idea that the three divine persons mutually inhere in one another, draw life from one another, “are” what they are by relation to one another. *Perichoresis* means being-in-one-another, permeation without confusion [...] Each divine person is irresistibly drawn to the other, taking his/her existence from the other, containing the other in him/herself, while at the same time pouring self out into the other.”³⁴ The Trinitarian *perichoresis* encircles each person drawn to move toward one another in an outpouring and self-giving way. Likewise in the Immanent Trinity, God permeates each other without losing their distinct persons yet move in the same divine life or the reciprocal relationship to each other. In other words, God is not a distant, static monarch but a Divine Circle dance in a dynamic and loving action of Three³⁵ moving within the Godself.

Moreover, the term *perichoresis* is philologically scant and although there are manifold interpretations of the term, the metaphor of dance is still the most effective way to describe *perichoresis*.³⁶ This will convey the dynamic and creative energy of the persons in the Trinity as a Divine Dance. That is why LaCugna suggests that the choreography in dance depicts a partnership movement the dancers express their interaction and inter-course in a fluid motion of encircling, encompassing, permeating and outstretching. In the Divine Dance, this only shows an eternal movement of reciprocal giving and receiving.³⁷ So God is in a motion that is dynamically active, alive and continuously communicating with his creation. This kinesthetic awareness enables one to communicate and convey meaning to the other or audience and to facilitate their response. Through the kinesthetic awareness, God is able to work

³⁴LaCugna, *God for Us*, 271.

³⁵Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 21.

³⁶LaCugna, *God for Us*, 271.

³⁷LaCugna, *God for Us*, 272.

in creation and in the economy of salvation. That is why LaCugna favored the usefulness of *perichoresis* in the mystery of the economy of redemption wherein the Divine Dance is indeed an apt image of persons in communion as all creatures partake and literally exist in it as a partner. This is called the *exitus and reditus* – that everything comes from God, and everything returns to God, through Christ in the Spirit, a choreography of the Divine Dance, which takes place in all eternity and is manifest at every moment of creation.³⁸ Nevertheless, the relevance of the Divine Dance of the Trinity will challenge the created being to partake in the dance—to be in a relationship with all other creatures, human and non-human, and to be in communion with the Three persons of the Trinity. In other words, God does not dance alone. The invitation of God to dance is an invitation of salvation in our life and it is where the work of the economic Trinity dwells, dancing in the history of salvation and the dance in creation. Thus, God has been and will always be the primordial mover, dance and dancer.

Thomas Aquinas, in his argument of motion³⁹, expounds that God is the first “unmoved mover”. God is not moved by anyone or anything, there is a motion within God yet God is not moved by another. God causes the motion in all creation. Likewise in the Divine Dance, God causes the motion as God is not just a dancer but is a dance. God first causes the motion in the whole creation and God continuously moves within creation in history. Therefore, the Trinitarian *perichoretic* movement suggests to us that God is the primordial mover, dancer and dance of creation and at the same time an interpenetration of the relationship of the divine life of the Three persons, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

³⁸Ibid., 274.

³⁹Aquinas, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, Chapter 13, 3, Arguments in Proof of the Existence of God, 86.

*The Lord of the Dance*⁴⁰

“The Word was made flesh and ‘danced’ among us” (cf. John 1: 14). Jesus was the Word that was made flesh and danced among us. To speak of Jesus in relation to a dance is to speak in metaphor. When the Word was incarnated to dance with us, He teaches us the basic steps in the dance of life as expressed in “Come and follow me” (cf. John 1:35-51). By his invitation, Jesus initiated the dance for us. Jesus was never concerned of the precision of the steps that we execute in the dance. He is more concerned about intimacy with him, to feel the dance and not to be too conscious of the steps. Simply dance! In other words, the invitation to “come and follow” in the dance is a reminder that life is about following Christ’s lead, not about him following ours.⁴¹

When we are dancing with the Lord of the Dance, we are not competing with the other partners of Jesus; rather we dance together with others. A life that is being offered to us by the Lord of the Dance is not a dance competition but a dance of life: a dance that is mutually indwelling and in communion with the others. Our dance is not about self-realization but offering ourselves to others. And this is the theme of the dance of Jesus, to give his life for the others so that we may be able to create a human community without boundaries, a “*perichoretic* interrelatedness.”⁴² Jesus mirrored to us the Divine Dance with his paschal mystery, which is basically a movement of love and communion. The Lord of the Dance is leading us to see the glory of God and to take our hands to his in the grand dance of salvation.

⁴⁰This song was popularized in the 1960’s, reached and captured the young people that time. Sydney Carter, *The United Methodist Hymnal*, No. 261, 1963 Stainer & Bell Ltd. (Administered by Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188).

⁴¹Ken Gire, *The Divine Embrace* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2003), 89.

⁴²LaCugna, *God for Us*, 278.

"LITURGY-IN-DANCE"⁴³

Every art uses different tools to express a meaningful message. Music uses different instruments, painting uses canvas, and play or theater uses the stage while dance uses the body. There can be no dance without the body. In our liturgy too, we use our body, from its voice to its gestures to worship God. The body then becomes the medium to communicate with God, a means to an encounter with God. Beyond words, there is a language of the body that gives meaning to our salvation as it is expressed in dance and other gestures.

Our Body and the "Body of Christ"

Our body has a perfect place in the divine worship of the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. This has been expressed in the gestures that have developed out of the liturgy's inner demands. This is the essence of the liturgy; it is bodily visible.⁴⁴ The position and actions of the body in the worship not just in the gesture of kneeling, standing and sitting, allow it to fully express itself, in a rhythmic movement with the awareness of an 'active' God. We cannot conceive a human person without a body. We can only encounter, build relationship, and understand a person through what they have which is the body. The body is God's creation and it always involves the whole of the human person and not just a part. Therefore, the body is the whole human in relationship to God and humanity and it is the place of meeting with God and humanity wherein the body is the possibility and the reality of communication.⁴⁵ This "possibility and the reality of communication" with God can only be actualized because we have the body. Communication is amplified because we have "bodiliness", a communication that is effective to the extent and

⁴³A coined term which connotes liturgy or liturgical participation in the form of dance; thus, "liturgy-in-dance".

⁴⁴Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 200), 176-177.

⁴⁵Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2001), 33.

manner of bodily involvement.⁴⁶ We can communicate with others and with God because of the body that was given to us.

Moreover, dance connects and builds community. Most of the ritual dances of the indigenous people are performed by the community. Even the modern and adapted festival dances with religious tones are performed not just by an individual but by a group. Dance creates a communion of body or people. We have mentioned earlier that dance that is mutually in-dwelling and in communion with others creates a human community without boundaries, or “*perichoretic* interrelatedness.” And in our Christian faith, this community without boundaries is the “Body of Christ,” the Church, “the unity of all her members with each other as a result of their union with Christ, the head of the Body.”⁴⁷

Primarily, with Christ, the entire body is united with one another. We move as a community. That is why our liturgy is never an individual but a communal and a public act. The magisterium of the Church teaches that, “if the Church is a body, it must be an unbroken unity, according to the words of Paul, ‘though many we are one body in Christ.’”⁴⁸ However, the Body of the Church is not only united and in communion but it must be tangible and perceptible to the senses: “the Church is visible because she is a body.”⁴⁹ This shows that we are not just *having a body*, but *we are a body*. Each member forms part of the one body. And this body comes together in worship before the presence of God. That is, in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and the member, for it is the action of Jesus and his Body, the Church.⁵⁰

⁴⁶Bernard J. Cooke, “Body and Mystical Body: The Church as Communion,” in *Bodies of Worship: Exploration in Theory and Practice*, Bruce T. Morrill, ed. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 47.

⁴⁷*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 789, Vatican.va [accessed December 12, 2017].

⁴⁸Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, # 14, Vatican.va [accessed December 12, 2017].

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, # 7, Vatican.va [accessed December 12, 2017].

Indeed, in “liturgy-in-dance”, we create a physical and assembled body, we become observable. The liturgy nurtures that bond in us as an “observable assembly”⁵¹ of body. We are not just bonded by the Spirit but we are bonded as a body. What people encounter in the liturgical celebration is an assembly of believers which is basic to any experience they might have being body of Christ, an experience of corporately professing their faith.⁵²

Creativity of the Spirit

Creativity is allowing art to be part of the liturgy. Through art, we are able to open our imaginative community to express our praise towards God. However, the liturgy becomes minimal in terms of the movements of our body, especially in dance.

Creativity is not just allowing art to be engaged in the liturgy but we allow the Holy Spirit to “blow where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes” (cf. John 3: 8). In dance, we allow the Spirit to take the lead and guide us wherever it will lead us. The creativity in the liturgy or in particular the “liturgy-in-dance” happens by allowing the Holy Spirit to work with us and in us.

This creativity is self-transcendent. It does not point towards the self as much as the Holy Spirit does not point towards the Spirit-self. Creativity remains open to all sorts of possibilities and it is transcendence toward the unknown and the infinite space; as God gives the Spirit without measure.⁵³ We are not just humans for we are energized by the Spirit to have that creative union with God. This fact tells us that in the “liturgy-in-dance” we are not focusing the attention to ourselves but to God as we also lead others to a reality beyond ourselves, to a union with Someone beyond us. In this creativity, through the Spirit, we allow God to be God.

⁵¹Cooke, “Body and Mystical Body,” 48.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Albert Rouet, *Liturgy and the Arts*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 141.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit is energy indicating life, dynamism and creativity.⁵⁴ It is the energy of the Holy Spirit that fuels our creativity. The Spirit is ever active and is never at rest. According to Diarmund O'Murchu, energy is kinetic like the heat, light, motion and sound; it enables us to do active work.⁵⁵ The energy of the Spirit is kinetic because it enables us to move and create actions like the Trinity. Moreover, the energy of the Spirit can transform us not just into communion with God and others but it can also lead us to ecstasy or trance.

Dance, as empowered by the energy of the Holy Spirit, can become problematic for some because it can lead to ecstasy or trance, which others may equate with being "out of control." Some people would look at trance or ecstasy as immoderate. It places the person under the control of an unconscious even anarchical force making a person a "victim" of one's desire.⁵⁶ However, LaCugna surmised that the life of God is ecstatic, and the doxology or praises that we offer to God is our ecstatic mode towards self-transcendence and disinclination to remain self-contained.⁵⁷ The ecstatic mood that we may experience in a dance is not about the self but about the wholly Other, God. "The 'way of ecstasy' refers to the union of a human person with God, a union in which the distinction between the two no longer seems to exist."⁵⁸ When we praise, through our dance, we become united to God in our ecstatic disposition that primarily flows from our desire to be with God.

Now, if we will allow creativity to be accomplished in the liturgy, are all dances possible? At this juncture, we must look at the intention of the dance from the one who does it. In the dance of Salome, what was solely intended for entertainment and revelry became an instrument for evil and manipulation. In other words, the intention is important if we want to incorporate dance into

⁵⁴Diarmund O'Murchu, *In the Beginning was the Spirit: Science, Religion and Indigenous Spirituality* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2012), 45.

⁵⁵Ibid., 46.

⁵⁶Rouet, *Liturgy and the Art*, 132.

⁵⁷LaCugna, *God for Us*, 350-351.

⁵⁸Ibid., 351.

the liturgy. The “intentionality” of the dance and its subsequent actions will make it clear to us if we can include it in the liturgy. If the intention of the dance is just for self-glorification, or even desecration of the body and distraction of our presence with God, then we must be vigilant of it.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

There is in each one of us an innate desire to move with the rhythm of music. We may not be professional dancers but we all dance to the rhythm of life; we dance to the music of God. Specifically, in our secular life, we dance on many occasions. In dancing, the dance actually becomes us. As an expression of our embodied being, we become the person that we are. When we dance we are born.

When two or three are “dancing” in Jesus name, there he is in the midst of them (cf. Matthew 18:20).

In my mission experience in Barangay Uguis, Nueva Era, Ilocos Norte, I have seen how dance became part of the liturgy. During the “*Gloria iti Dios*” (Gloria) in the mass, the youth danced using their traditional dance and beat, the *tadek*. It was an overwhelming encounter of their culture and their faith. The mass was not just a celebration; it became alive for them because it connected them to their identity as a *Tinguian* Tribe.⁵⁹ Their *tadek* dance is a part of nearly all their social and religious gatherings. This dance focuses mainly on the tapping or stamping and movements of the feet, usually done by a pair of a man and woman.

With the same pattern of steps, the *Tinguians* express their adoration and praise to God in a most intimate and unifying way in the Gloria. This is one example of inculturation, allowing the people to express their faith according to their culture. The Church recognizes that in the liturgy, she does not wish to impose a rigid

⁵⁹See Fay-Cooper Cole, “The Tinguian: Social, Religious, and Economic Life of a Philippine Tribe,” (Jeroen Hellingman: July 8, 2004), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12849/12849-h/12849-h.htm> [accessed February 1, 2018].

uniformity in matters that do not implicate the faith or the good of the whole community but rather she respects and fosters the genius and talents of the various races and peoples.⁶⁰ Inculturation is where talent, creativity and culture encounter the faith. At the same time, our talent, our creativity, even our dance can become an expression of our faith. Who said that only words could express the faith? Even bodily movements of which dance is a prime example is capable of expressing and relaying the faith we have with God.

In inculturating liturgy, we allow ourselves to express our doxology or praise in a more intimate and in a *perichoretic* interrelation, we become mutually connected to our body, others, and the Divine. Moreover, dance in itself is a liturgy. Dance is not just added to the liturgy to become creative, rather, the liturgy itself is expressed in dance; thus, “liturgy-in-dance.” In the liturgy, the people encounter God and express their doxology to God so much so that dance is an expression of our exaltation of God wherein we use the whole of our being, both body and spirit.

To use dance only for the sake of creativity in the liturgy is to demean the character of dance that is very much present in the triune God who is the Divine Dance. Dance is a means to communion. Indeed, in the liturgy, dancing is the best way to manifest the dance of God, a dance that is mutuality, interrelatedness, interpenetration of each of the three persons. It is also the means to actively participate in the Divine Dance of the Trinity. Dance, then, that is mutually in-dwelling and in communion with the others, creates a human community without boundaries, or *perichoretic* interrelatedness. This is where we are invited to dance together, to dance as a community, to allow ourselves to have time and space to reflect our encounter with God. God’s invitation to dance extends to all. Our Christian life may not always be a joyous dance but it is always an invitation to dance to the beat of life. Therefore, our life should be a dance patterned after the Divine Dance of the Trinity. We are moving together, balancing and creating a graceful movement wherein we are drawn to the Trinity to see the

⁶⁰Sancrosanctum Concilium, # 37.

glory of God. God does not require a perfect dance, He just wants us to dance for we are all born to dance with Him.

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