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A Time to Dance

Fr. Randy Roche

Loyola Marymount University

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A Time to Dance

I love Hawaiian music, but my first and only attempt at hula came to a rapid conclusion, when, after having learned how to make a simple hand-gesture, I was told to also make a coordinated series of steps. End of lesson, end of dance for me. Yet, I am scarcely able to remain still in the presence of music: classical, liturgical, or popular – if it has rhythm, my body wants to move.

We can be positively and negatively stirred by various kinds of music. We choose the music we like to hear, and willingly allow ourselves to respond to it. Other music does not move us, as with much of what we hear in our environment: from shopping malls to elevators and offices, and sometimes the room right next to us. We hear the sounds, which sometimes are forced upon us, but we do not listen, and we do not freely respond with our whole selves. We will not dance to music that is not ours.

Spiritual experiences, including prayer, are like music, having a rhythm to which we might want to dance - at least in the sense of allowing ourselves to be moved according to what we perceive in the quiet of our hearts. When we respond to music, we do so not just with our ears, in hearing, or our bodies, by moving in time with the beat, but with our minds and hearts. When we are in contact with God's loving Spirit, we are at times moved with positive feelings, perhaps accompanied with a bit of tears in our eyes, because our bodies cannot help but respond to what we "hear" within us.

As with music, we can choose to respond to the non-physical "sounds" that we become aware of when we quietly reflect on the experiences of our day, or calmly read a passage of Scripture or spend time with a piece of poetry or prose that has meaning for us. We allow or disallow our spirits to dance to the music that no one else can hear since it takes place wholly within us. We can become familiar with experiences of mental words or no-words, with gentle feelings or strong, with knowing or not knowing, yet never hear the same music twice, and never dance to it in exactly the same way.

As I was self-conscious when receiving the hula lesson, any of us can become uncomfortable at first with spiritual experiences. But who is present, other than God? Who would even think of us as being awkward as we learn to dance to heart-music? We have no audience to judge us either kindly or unkindly, and no one for whom to perform. As we become familiar with, permissive even, with our own inner responses

to the movements of love, our dancing will only indirectly become visible to others. Love will show forth in deeds - that is its nature - and those who love have a radiance that manifests its unseen source.

Even those who have learned the discipline of moving their bodies in time with music, and are rightly called dancers, either choose to follow the spirit movements within them or decide not to pay attention to the inner music.

Some of us do most of our "dancing" within, but for all of us there is a time to dance.