

I DNACED FOR THE FISHERMEN, FOR JAMES AND JOHN.  
THEY CAME WITH ME AND THE DANCE WENT ON.

I DNACED ON THE SABBATH AND I CURED THE LAME,  
THE HOLY PEOPLE SAID IT WAS A SHAME,  
THEY WHIPPED AND THEY STRIPPED AND THEY HUNG ME HIGH.  
AND THEY LEFT ME THERE ON A CROSS TO DIE.

I DNACED ON A FRIDAY WHEN THE SKY TURNED BLACK,  
IT'T HARD TO DANCE WITH THE DEVIL ON YOUR BACK.  
THEY BURIED MY BODY AND THEY THOUGHT I'D GONE  
BUT I AM THE DANCE AND I STILL GO ON.

YOU SEE, IT'S WHEN ONE COMES ALIVE AS A HUMAN BEING AND GETS  
TURNED ON THAT ONE BEGINS TO DANCE THE DANCE OF LIFE AS JESUS  
DID AND OTHERS WHO HAVE FELT THE RHYTHM OF GOD. IT IS THEN  
THAT WE RESPOND TO THE JOY OF LIVING AND THE REWARDS OF FUL-  
FILLMENT. THE MOTIONS ON LIFE TAKE ON THE EMOTIONS.

THIS IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH AND THE MESSAGE OF THE  
GOSPEL. THE CHURCH, IN A SENSE, IS A DANCE STUDIO AND THE  
GOSPELS ARE DANCING INSTRUCTIONS--TEACHING US THE STEPS OF LIFE  
AND HOW TO GIVE RISE TO THAT DIVINE IMPULSE WITHIN US THAT  
WANTS TO EMBRACE LIFE AND GOD AND TO DANCE.

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH DISAGREES WITH THAT MORIBUND PHILOSOPHY  
THAT "NO MAN CAN BE HAPPY UNTIL HE IS DEAD." WE BELIEVE IN  
A GOD OF JOY AND HAPPINESS, WHO MADE US TO LAUGH AND TO FEEL  
ECSTASY, AND TO DANCE TO RESPOND WITH DELIGHT TO THAT IN LIFE  
WHICH IS GOOD AND PURE. WE BELIEVE THAT LIFE CAN BE JOYFUL  
FOR ANYONE, REGARDLESS OF CIRCUMSTANCE, WHO AVAILS HIMSELF  
OF THE RESOURCES OF GOD'S GRACE, WHICH ARE DESIGNED TO FOSTER  
JOY AND CONTENTMENT.

I REMEMBER VIVIDLY AN INDIAN SUN DNACE I WITNESSED ON THE  
CROW INDIAN RESERVATION IN MONTANA YEARS AGO. THE DANCE  
IS SIMILAR TO THE ANCIENT FERTILITY DANCE AROUND THE MAYPOLE.  
THE THING I REMEMBER MOST IS THE MOTION AND EXPRESSIN OF THE  
DANCERS. THEY WERE NOT JUST DANCING, THEY WERE WORSHIPPING.  
THEY WERE REACHING OUT THROUGH THEIR PRIMITIVE DANCE TO A  
BEING GREATER AND MORE POWERFUL THAN THEMSELVES. IN THAT ACT  
OF DANCE~~OR~~ WORSHIP, THEY ARE PROTOTYPES OF US ALL AS WE TRY  
TO REACH OUT AND ESTABLISH CONTACT WITH OUR DEITY, DOING IT  
THROUGH OUR FIRST ARTFORM, THE DANCE.

WHETHER THROUGH THE RHYTHMS OF NATURE, THE SUN, MOON, SEASONS,  
OR THE RHYTHM OF LIFE FROM BIRTH TO DEATH, WE ARE ALL  
ENGAGED IN THE DANCE OF A RHYTHMIC UNIVERSE AND LIFE. WE  
BELIEVE GOD CALLS US TO THIS DANCE IN A JOYOUS, HAPPY SENSE  
WHERE WE COOPERATE WITH OUR PARTNER, GOD HIMSELF.

A CHRISTIAN IS ONE WHO RECOGNIZES THIS AND RESPONDS TO THE  
DANCE OF LIFE WITH HIS WHOLE BEING. THROUGH THAT RESPONSE  
OF JOY AND COOPERATION, WE COME ALIVE TO OUR RELATIONSHIP  
WITH GOD AND HIS WORLD IN THE DANCE OF LIFE.

\*Y GOD SET ALL OUR FEET A-DANCING.

MAY 15, '88

TODAY WE ARE GOING TO TALK ABOUT MAN'S OLDEST ARTFORM - DANC-  
ING. DANCING IS EVEN OLDER THAN ART, ACCORDING TO SOME  
AUTHORITIES, AND PROVIDED THE BASIS OF ALL THE ARTS. DANCING  
IS MAN'S FIRST ARTFORM BECAUSE IT IS A PRIMAL IMPULSE, BORN  
OF RHYTHM. THE HUMAN BODY~~AS~~A NATURAL APPETITE FOR RMYTHM.  
A BABY, EVEN A FEW MONTHS OLD, WILL MOVE ITS BODY TO RHYTHMIC  
SOUND OR MUSIC.

THE ART OF DANCING WAS FORMED IN PREHISTORIC ERAS, FOR BY THE  
BEGINNING OF CIVILIZATION THE DNACE HAD ALREADY REACHED A  
DEGREE OF PERFECTION WHICH NO OTHER ART OR SCIENCE ATTAINED FOR  
CENTURIES THEREAFTER. PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES DEVELOPED DANCE  
ARTS OF AN INTRICACY OF DESIGN AND DIFFICULTY OF EXECUTION,  
THAT COMPARE WITH THE MOST ARTISTIC DANCE CREATIONS OF OUR  
TIME. CONFUCIUS WROTE, 500 YEARS BEFORE CHRIST, "A NATION'S  
CHARACTER IS TYPIFIED BY ITS DANCERS." IN THE EARLIEST YEARS  
RECORDED OF MIDDLE EAST HISTORY WE COME ACROSS STATEMENTS LIKE,  
"ONE MAY JUDGE A KING BY THE STATE OF DANCING DURING HIS REIGN!"

MAN HAS ALWAYS DANCED--FROM THE HIGHLY ESTHETIC BALLET WITH  
ITS STRICT DISCIPLINES OF TECHNIQUE, TO THE WILD GYRATIONS OF  
ROCK MUSIC DANCES--WHICH ARE A CHIROPRACTOR'S DELIGHT. DANCING  
GOES THROUGH FADS, LIKE IT HAS IN AMERICA THIS CENTURY, FROM  
THE FOX TROT TO THE CHARLESTON, TO THE JITTERBUG AND TWIST, UP  
TO TODAY'S DANCES. VARIOUS PEOPLES DEVISE AND CONTRIBUTE THEIR  
PARTICULAR DANCE FORMS: THE POLKA FROM POLAND; AUSTRIA GAVE  
THE WORLD THE WALTZ; ARGENTINA, THE TANGO; CUBA, THE RUMBA; AND  
THE AMERICAN FRONTIER PRODUCED THE BARN DANCE. MANY OF THESE  
DANCES ARE FOR PLEASURE, BUT THEY ALSO ARE EXPRESSIONS BY WHICH  
WE COMMUNICATE WHAT LIES BEYOND ORDINARY SPEECH.

TO SOME PEOPLE DANCING IS A SIN. THOSE WHO CONSIDER IT A SIN  
ARE PRIMARILY CRITICS OF THE SOCIAL DANCE AND THEY ARE CRITICAL  
OF SOCIAL DANCING BECAUSE THEY MAINTAIN IT AROUSES PASSION AND  
EROTIC INTENT. THE CHURCH IN AMERICA HELD THIS PREJUDICE FOR  
YEARS, TYPIFIED IN THE OLD DITTY: "YOU CAN'T GO TO HEAVEN ON A  
DANCE FLOOR, YOU'LL DANCE RIGHT INTO HELL'S TRAPDOOR." IT  
WASN'T TOO MANY YEARS AGO THAT CHURCHES REFUSED MEMBERSHIP TO  
DANCING MASTERS: IN FACT, THEY SOMETIMES DROVE THEM OUT OF  
TOWN.

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN CHURCH SCHOOLS DIDN'T PERMIT SOCIAL  
DANCING EITHER. ~~WHEN~~ WHETHER WAS ATTENDING ONE IN ALAMBAMA WHEN  
THE STUDENTS TRIED TO GET SOCIAL DANCING "LEAGALIZED" ON CAMPUS

THE PRINCIPAL WAS A SHREWD, ALBEIT INTRANSIGENT, MAN AND AFTER LISTENING TO THE STUDENTS' DEMANDS HE ASKED THEM: "JUST WHY DO YOU WANT TO DANCE?" THE STUDENTS ANSWERED: "WELL, BECAUSE DANCING DEVELOPS BEAUTY OF MOVEMENT: IT TEACHES CHARM, POISE, AND OTHER SOCIAL GRACES." AFTER THEY HAD GONE ON WITH THIS "BEAUTY OF MOVEMENT AND SOCIAL GRACES BIT," THE PRINCIPAL AMAZED THEM BY SAYING, "ALL RIGHT, YOU HAVE CONVINCED ME: I'M GOING TO LET YOU HAVE YOUR DANCES." THE STUDENTS WERE ECSTATIC, THAT IS UNTIL HE ANNOUNCED THE SCHEDULE. HE SAID, "THE BOYS WILL DANCE ON MONDAY NIGHTS, AND THE GIRLS ON WEDNESDAY."

NEEDLESS TO SAY, NO ONE SHOWED UP EITHER OF THOSE NIGHTS, FOR SOCIAL DANCING IS A COURTSHIP GAME, WHERE BOY MEETS GIRL. SQUARE DANCING, BALLROOM DANCING, AND SOCIAL DANCING ARE ONLY SOPHISTICATED FORMS OF INDUCING LOVE, A RITUAL WE HAVE BORROWED FROM THE MATING GAMES ANIMALS GO THROUGH.

THE BIBLE MAKES MANY REFERENCES TO DANCING. ONE OF THE MORE UNFORTUNATE EPISODES OF THE BIBLE SURROUNDED THE DANCE OF SALOME, WHO MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE A STUNNER ON THE DANCE FLOOR. HER DANCING PLEASED HEROD TO THE EXTENT THAT SHE WAS GIVEN THE HEAD OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

MOST BIBLICAL REFERENCES TO DANCING, PARTICULARLY THOSE OF THE O.T., ARE RECORDED AS LEGITIMATE AND WORTHY EXPRESSIONS OF MAN TO GOD. DANCING IN THE O.T. IS LARGELY A FORM OF WORSHIP. MIRIAM, THE SISTER OF MOSES, DANCED FOR JOY AT THE ESCAPE OF THE HEBREWS FROM THE ARMIES OF EGYPT. KING DAVID WAS KNOWN AS THE DANCING KING. IN FACT, ONE DAY HE DID SUCH A FRENZIED DANCE BEFORE THE ALTAR OF THE LORD THAT HIS COURT CRITICIZED HIM FOR "BEHAVIOR UNBECOMING A KING." THE PSALMS MAKE CONSTANT REFERENCE AND ALLUSION TO THE USE OF DANCE IN WORSHIP OF GOD. THE LAST PSALM, WHICH WE READ AS OUR SCRIPTURE READING TODAY, TELLS OF THE DANCE BEING AN APPROPRIATE EXPRESSION OF THANKSGIVING TO GOD.

IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT THE RELIGIOUS, INTERPRETIVE DANCE HAS BEEN CHASED FROM THE CHURCH AND THE SYNAGOGUE INTO THE THEATRE FOR IT IS A TREMENDOUSLY MEANINGFUL AID TO WORSHIP WHEN DONE WITH SKILL AND SINCERITY. RELIGION HAS KEPT AND DEVELOPED THE OTHER ARTFORMS: MUSIC, PAINTING, SCULPTURE, ORATORY, AND OTHERS, BUT THE DANCING HAS BEEN ALLOWED TO "WALTZ" RIGHT OUT OF OUR RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND THIS IS REGRETABLE. THE SHAKERS AND OTHER SECTS HAVE EMPLOYED PERVERSIONS OF DANCE IN WORSHIP, BUT THIS IS NOT THE WHOLE-SOME OFFERING TO GOD NEEDED. OFTEN IT IS VULGAR AND DEGRADING, INSTEAD OF BEAUTIFUL AND EXPRESSIVE.

IN THE THINKING OUT OF THIS SERMON, IT OCCURED TO ME THAT THE DANCE IS A USEFUL IMAGE FOR LIFE FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE. LIFE IS A DANCE! WE ALL DANCE TO THE RHYTHMIC BEAT OF LIFE. WE RESPOND TO THE MUSIC OF THE UNIVERSE WITHIN THE PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH WE LIVE. WE ARE ALL GAGED IN THE DANCE OF LIFE. BUT HOW ARE YOU DANCING? ARE YOU MERELY GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS, BUT NOT THE EMOTIONS? ARE YOU REALLY DANCING THE DANCE OF LIFE, AS GOD INTENDED YOU TO. WITH ENJOYMENT AND UNDERSTANDING? HAVE YOU REALLY BEEN TURNED ON AS A HUMAN BEING? WHAT A FULFILLING EXPERIENCE TO COME ALIVE AND REALLY LIVE--TO MOVE TO THE VIBRATIONS OF LIFE ABOUT YOU.

AS YOU READ THE BIBLE BIOGRAPHIES, YOU CAN SEE HOW GOD CAME INTO THE LIVES OF CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS AND THEY BEGAN TO DANCE. ABRAHAM WAS JUST GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS OVER IN THE CITY OF UR. HE WAS RICH AND HAD A FINE FAMILY AND ALL, BUT HE DIDN'T BEGIN THE DANCE OF LIFE UNTIL GOD DIRECTED HIM TO LEAVE ALL BUT HIS FAMILY AND GO TO CANAAN AND BECOME THE FATHER OF THE HEBREWS.

MOSES TOO, WAS MERELY GOING THROUGH THE DANCE STEPS IN HIS LUXURIOUS LIFE IN PHAROH'S PALACE. IT WAS WHEN HE RESPONDED TO THE CALL OF GOD TO FREE THE HEBREW PEOPLE THAT HE BEGAN TO DANCE--TO COME ALIVE TO LIFE'S VIBRATIONS.

THE PROPHETS--WHY DO WE REMEMBER THEM? THEY HAVE LIVED THROUGH HISTORY BECAUSE THEY WERE MEN WHO CAME ALIVE TO THE DANCE OF LIFE. THE DISCIPLES, SHUFFLING ALONG IN THEIR DULL ROUTINE AS FISHERMEN, UNTIL THEY WERE TURNED ON AND REALLY FELT THE RHYTHM OF LIFE AND THE JOY OF LIVING WITH PURPOSE.

PAUL GOT TURNED ON ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS AND DANCED" ALL OVER ASIA MINOR, ESTABLISHING "DANCE CLUBS" AT GALATIA, EPHEBUS, CORINTH, PHILIPPI, AND ROME. TEACHING PEOPLE HOW TO COME ALIVE TO LIFE THROUGH CHRIST.

JESUS WAS A DANCER OF LIFE, AS EXPRESSED SO WELL IN THE FOLK SONG "LORD OF THE DANCE."

I DANCED IN THE MORNING WHEN THE WORLD WAS BEGUN,  
AND I DANCED IN THE MOON AND THE STARS AND THE SUN,  
AND I CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN AND I DANCED ON THE EARTH.  
AT BETHLEHEM I HAD MY BIRTH.

I DANCED FOR THE SCRIBE AND THE PHARISEE,  
BUT THEY WOULD NOT DANCE AND THEY WOULDN'T FOLLOW ME.