The Restoration Of

DEREK MORPHEW



"Man's chief end is to enjoy God and serve him forever."—The Westminster Confession

Sweeping changes are occurring in the body of Christ around the world. Changes in forms of worship continue to occur, both in the older churches and in the new styles adopted by the new churches. During the renewal movement of 1994-96 there was much laughter manifest in the church. The word "celebration" has become a popular term. Some of the newer approaches to church structure make use of this term where a cluster of congregations works together on a fixed basis to form a larger celebrating community. The "church growth" departments in theological seminaries and universities have helped to explain how "celebration" assists the witness of the church. Much could be said along this line (see for instance Eddie Gibbs' *I Believe In Church Growth*).

One of the things that is particularly appropriate at such "celebration" level gatherings is the celebration of the dance. Dancing is similarly one of the phenomena one finds on the increase in the newer churches or in the older churches where renewal has been influential.

While those who enjoy new things tend to be delighted by all of this, others are appalled. Some conservative evangelical and classical Pentecostal believers sometimes wonder whether this is really biblically acceptable. Is this not another expression of the "world" appearing in the Church? Where will it all end?

A simple answer is that it will all end with the Second Coming. But such simple answers need a little more explanation and the remainder of this article is designed to answer the question a little more comprehensively. It is important to examine constantly what we do in the church in the light of biblical teaching and Church history. While the particular focus is the issue of dance, the actual subject will be the broader biblical concept of celebration. Celebration is a concept that embraces a whole attitude to life, to joy, to music, to fellowship; in fact, to God Himself. So we will begin just there, with God Himself.

God Is The Greatest Celebrant

The way people see God determines the way they see everything. A negative view of God produces a negative attitude to life. A positive view of God produces a positive attitude to life. Those who disparage "theology" or doctrine reveal their own impracticality. Good doctrine produces a healthy lifestyle. Bad doctrine produces the reverse. Fundamentally, those who lose their joy when they see dancing or hear laughter in the church have a faulty understanding of God. Subjectively, they cannot truly enjoy such things because they do not really believe that God would enjoy such things. A radical change in one's view of God should take place at the point of conversion, because celebration is part and parcel of salvation. Unfortunately many teachings and attitudes continue in the church that should have changed with the experience of salvation. Misled Christian leaders and teachers often spoil new believers. We must begin then by allowing the true God of Scripture, the living God, to be re-established in our hearts and minds.

We are going to find that:

1) God is the greatest celebrant. He alone knows how to celebrate.
2) Jesus is the center and focus of all celebration. Really to know Jesus is to know celebration.
3) The Holy Spirit is the one who releases that true inner joy which alone can lead to celebration.
4) The Christian life is a life of festivity



Part One

and celebration.

5) This truth is evident from the biblical doctrines of creation, redemption and eschatology (the last things).

God Celebrates His Creation

We know from Genesis that God not only rested after the creation, but also rested in total satisfaction (Gen.2:1-3; 1:31). Proverbs goes further and describes how God rejoiced in his creation. The wisdom of God, a prefigurement of Christ (Matt.11:19), was there beside God as His craftsman (8:22-30): *"I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind"* (8:30-31). It was only sin that removed this sense of satisfaction and joy. But redemption more than restores what was lost (Rom.5:15-21).

God Celebrates His Redemption

Zephaniah was certainly a prophet of judgment. God will *"sweep away everything from the face of the earth"* (1:2). The day of the Lord will be *"a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish"* (1:14-15). *"In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed"* (1:18). Not only will foreign nations such as Philistia (2:4-7), Moab and Ammon (2:8-11), Cush and Assyria (2:12-15) be judged, but also Jerusalem will be singled out first and foremost. She will be searched with lamps (1:12). *"I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem"* (1:4).

As deep as God's wrath against sin is, so deep is God's joy in His redemption. *"Sing, O Daughter of Zion, shout aloud, O Israel! ... The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you"* (or *'within you'* - 3:14-17).

Dance in a ring together with the angels

Many commentators believe that Luke 1:28 is an allusion to this passage and refers to Mary as the "Daughter of Zion." The Lord in the midst refers to the incarnation of Christ. Be that as it may, the most remarkable thing about this passage is the description of God and His behavior. As God beholds His redeeming work, He begins to rejoice. *"He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you in his love, he will rejoice over you with singing"* (3:17). The last phrase is rather weakly translated in the NIV. The RSV has: *"I will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival."*

The question is this: Can you see God behaving like the Israelites used to behave at festivals? Can you see God singing loudly over you and your redemption? God is perfect in all He does. When He has wrath, it is full, holy wrath. When He celebrates, it is full, perfect celebration. In fact, all true joy and celebration begins and comes from God. This is an aspect of the Hebrew view of God that has been largely lost in the Western church. Philo, an ancient Hellenistic Jewish writer, maintained that God alone could truly celebrate, but that He allows the righteous to be included in his celebration (*NIDNTT*, 1, p 627).

The Future Kingdom Is Inaugurated With Celebration

Bear in mind that the way the world to come is said to begin reveals how God's perfect world is set to continue. The final culmination of God's redemption is the marriage supper of the Lamb, a time of true celebration (Rev. 19:6-8). The gathering of all His people to this great moment is described in Revelation 7:9-12.

The future kingdom is already present to us through the Spirit. If there is to be celebration in the future, there should



be anticipated celebration now. Consequently, Hebrews tells us that we have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem and to *"thousands and thousands of angels in joyful assembly"* (Heb. 12:22-24). The actual term for "joyful assembly" refers to a festival occasion (panegyris – "a solemn gathering at a festival" - Samuel Bagster, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*).

True joy and celebration begins and comes from God

The kingdom of God is that reality where God reigns supreme. If celebration is part of that kingdom, it must reflect something inherent in the character of God. This basic biblical understanding of God is one of the things Judaism has never really lost. One may have thought that all the legalism of the Pharisees would have wiped it out. Certainly the inner joy behind the theological truth is always destroyed by legalism (2 Cor. 3:6; Lk. 15:25-32). It is therefore remarkable that despite the inevitable tendencies of legalism, Rabbinical Judaism continued to bear testimony to God as the greatest Celebrator. Obviously the impression God made on Israel was quite explicit.

Rabbi Eleasar said, "Some day the Holy One, blessed be He, will give a dance to the righteous, and He will sit among them in the garden of Eden, and each one will point his finger at him saying, as it is written, 'Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord, we have waited for him, let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation'" (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, p. 426).

The Rabbi quotes from Isaiah 25:6-8. In his view, for God to make a feast is for God to make a dance, because the Hebrew word for feast, "machol," is to circle or dance.

The sub-apostolic period and subsequent church history also witnessed a blurring of the gospel of grace. Moralism tended to increase. Again, however, despite this, the Fathers did not lose the original New Testament sense of celebration as proper to God himself. Heaven was conceived of as a place where the angels danced around the throne of God and they believed the church should emulate their example.

Notice the words of Clement of Alexandria: "Then shalt thou dance in a ring together with the angels, around Him who is without beginning or end" (Arnold L. Haskell, *The Story of Dance*. 1960, p. 45).

Basil the Great (330-379), one of the most famous of the Cappodocian Fathers, wrote to Gregory: "What could be more blessed than to imitate on earth the rhythm of angels?" (Troy Kinney, *The Dance*. 1936, p. 31).

As an indication of how these Fathers thought about dancing, Gregory of Nazianzus (329-387) reproved the emperor Julian for allowing pagan festivals and said, "Rather perform the dances of King David before the ark. Dance to the honor of God. Such exercises of peace and piety are worthy of an emperor and a Christian" (Kinney, p. 31).

There is therefore such a thing as holy celebration. It befits the throne of God and is given by God as a gracious gift to the righteous. These general remarks have established at least that one's attitude to celebration derives ultimately from one's understanding of God. The subject now requires further grounding in Scripture and history. (Ed. Note: Watch for other parts of this article in ensuing issues of *Inside Worship* magazine and online at www.vineyardmusic.com)

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For Part One in this series, see the previous issue of ***Inside Worship: Caring For Creatives.***



Israel, As God's Holy People, Were Called To Regular Celebration

God commanded regular times of national assembly for the purpose of celebration. Each festival was a time of great joy and rejoicing, but such rejoicing was regarded as a solemn requirement. They had to celebrate. This was no optional matter. Three times a year every male had to appear before the Lord for a festival (Deut.16.16). At Tabernacles, the most festive of all, God commands his people,

> *"You shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns. Seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the Lord your God ...because the Lord your God will bless you...and so you shall be altogether joyful* (Deut.16.14-15 NASB)."

Notice the command to be joyful. The "altogether" would seem to include both the total community, high and low, and the total person, with all his heart.

An examination of the festival calendar reveals how frequently this type of assembly was to occur. Some of the gaps between these official festivals were filled with other less known ones, such as weekly Sabbaths, monthly new moon festivals, the feast of sheep shearing and the feast of wood cutting.

Marking High Points With Festivity

Every high point in the history of Israel was marked by festivity and dancing, especially the times when God's mighty acts were experienced or when the covenant was renewed. When they were delivered from Egypt, Miriam took up the tambourine, all the women followed her, "with tambourines and dancing," and Miriam sang the song of the redeemed (Ex.15.1-21). When David, having defeated all the enemies of Israel, finally managed to take the ark of the Lord into Jerusalem with triumphant procession, "David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals" (2 Sam.6.5).

"Celebrating" in the Hebrew here is *sihek*, to play, sport. When David "danced before the Lord with all his might," the Hebrew is *karar*, to turn or whirl (2 Sam.6.14). Michal despised David because she saw him "dancing and celebrating." Here the Hebrew is *radadh*, to leap, hop or skip (1 Chron.15.29).

Dancing was common in the time of David, as for instance when he returned victorious from battle (1 Sam.18.6-7). One may also notice the references in the Psalms (149.3; 150.4). When Solomon had completed the temple, he "observed the festival, and all Israel with him - a vast assembly... They celebrated it before the Lord our God for seven days" (1 Kings 8.65). When Josiah led the nation in repentance and revival, they kept a great feast of the Passover (2 Chron.35.18-19). When Ezra and Nehemiah led the nation in restoration, they "celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles" (Ezra 3.4) and "for seven days they celebrated with joy the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because the Lord had filled them with joy..." (Ezra 6.22; also Neh.8.18). It was the expectation of the prophets that the Messianic era would be filled with celebration (Zech.8.18-23; 14.16-17; Isa.25.6; Jer.31.4).

Dancing played a part in every festival, but particularly at Wood-cutting, Atonement and Tabernacles. According to the Mishna (Tàanith IV.8), young men and maidens of Jerusalem danced in the vineyards on the evening of 15th Ab (i.e. Feast of Wood-cutting) and on the eve of the Day of Atonement (Encyclopedia Britannica).

According to the Talmud,

> "Whoever has not witnessed the joy of the Festival of Water-drawing has seen no joy in his life" (Jewish Encyclopedia Vol. 4, p. 426).

On the night of the first day of Tabernacles, huge assemblies of people gathered in the women's court of the Temple bearing lamps of gold and vessels of water, while every house in Jerusalem was brightly illuminated.

> "Pious men and men of affairs danced with torches in their hands, singing songs of joy and of praise, and the Levites made music with lyre and harp and cymbals and trumpets and countless other instruments" (p. 426).

This would continue until dawn. Two great galleries were built for the spectators. This section finds a fitting conclusion in a saying of the Mishna, which captures the Jewish concept of God. According to this saying, when God finally judges His people, He will not only judge them for the things they have done, but for the good things which He gave them to do which they failed to enjoy. He will want to know four things:

> Did you ever find yourself playing with little children?
> Did you ever enjoy a fine wine?
> Did you court in the springtime?
> Did you ever find yourself dancing for joy, without knowing why you were dancing?

Jesus Is The Centre And Focus Of Celebration

Jesus began his ministry by announcing the year of Jubilee (Lk.4.18-19; Isa.61.1-2; Lev.25.8-55). This has rich significance. At the begin-



Part Two

ning of the year of Jubilee, marked by the Day of Atonement, a trumpet blast would announce "liberty throughout the land" (Lev.25.9-10). This liberty was comprehensive. Land mortgaged, any property sold previously out of poverty, including one's house, any money borrowed and any sale of an Israelite into slavery, had to be unilaterally cancelled, restored and released. Imagine what would happen in our day were this to be literally applied! Our community would experience a joy that knows no bounds, apart perhaps from the directors and share-holders of banks and building societies!

Jesus announced the beginning of this year-long festival, but with him the festival has continued for the entire age of grace. The liberty has not been a material one in particular. As Jesus proclaimed the kingdom, the sick, the demonized, the guilty, the bereaved and the dead were released from the bondage that had held them. The entire presence of Jesus, God with us, is therefore regarded as one long festival. He is the bridegroom. While He is with us, only festivity is appropriate (Mk.3.18-22). Jesus was of the habit of extending table fellowship to the outcasts of society. These occasions were foretastes of the Messianic banquet. They extended the grace of the kingdom through the festive meal (Jn.2.1-11; Lk.5.27-39; 14.7-24; 19.1-10).

Celebrating The Kingdom Experience

It is not surprising, therefore, to find Jesus portraying the experience of forgiveness and reconciliation with God as a moment of celebration. "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it." When the elder son came near "he heard music and dancing" (Lk.15.22-25).

While the synoptic gospels record this historical sense of the ministry of Jesus, John's gospel gives a theological/historical emphasis on Jesus as the fulfiller of the entire festive calendar. The story of Jesus is structured around feasts attended by Jesus. With each one, Jesus is shown to be the true meaning of the feast and each feast becomes another occasion for one of His "I am" sayings.

- At the Passover Jesus cleansed the temple and announced Himself as the real tabernacle of God (Jn.2.13-22; 1.14).
- At the next unspecified feast, Jesus cured a man on a high Sabbath and then announced Himself to be equal with God. As the Son of Man He is to judge all men with eternal life or eternal judgment (5.1,18,27).
- At the next Passover Jesus fed the five thousand and revealed Himself to be the true Bread of Life that comes down from heaven (6.4,10,33,57-58).
- At the Feast of Tabernacles (7.2) Jesus deliberately made Himself the focus of the whole occasion. "On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice,`If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink...'" (7.37). It was the normal practice for a ritual of pouring water to take place at that moment of the feast. Jesus chose just that moment to offer Himself as the provider of streams of living water.
- At Hanukkah or Dedication (10.22), Jesus declared that "I and the Father are one" (10.30).
- Finally, at the last Passover, Jesus died as the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world (19.14,31). The exact chronological differences between the Synoptics and John are not the point here. In the flow of John's gospel, the climax of the ministry of Jesus coincides with a Passover, just as the beginning of his ministry began with a Passover.

The meaning of all of this is quite clear. In the Old Dispensation it was legitimate for each feast to point ahead to the coming One. Now that He has come, He must replace every feast as the true focus of celebration. He brings the era of celebration (Jubilee), and thereafter all celebration finds its source and meaning in Him. He "demonstrates in His life, suffering and death the proper festal celebration" (NIDNTT, 1, p 628).

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The climax of this theme (ed. note: *of celebration*) is found in the resurrection narratives. According to the apostles he "was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen - by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (Ac. 10.41). This "eating and drinking" with Jesus continued for a period of forty days (Ac.1.3-4). It is clear from the story of the two on the way to Emmaus that this "eating and drinking" was no idle experience, but rather a celebration of the Lord's Supper now filled with the triumph of the resurrection (Lk.24.13-35). This is why the early church thereafter broke bread, not on the Sabbath, but on the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection (Ac.20.7; 1 Cor.16.2). The Lord's Supper is a time when we "keep the Festival" because "Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor.5.7-8). This is no funeral service for a dead hero. The remembrance of the death of Jesus must not only continue the Old Testament tradition of the Passover festival, but also supersede that tradition with the joy and triumph of the resurrection.

Celebration is therefore at the very heart of the worshiping lifestyle of the Christian church. Have you ever wondered why the Corinthian church had a problem with excess at the Lord's Supper (1 Cor.11.17-22)? The Corinthian church was, as we know, a little wild, and the reprimand of Paul must ever remain as a warning to every Christian community, but it takes considerable imagination to conceive of how anyone could get drunk at the kind of Lord's Supper "feast" found in the average church today. The "nip and sip" would need a miracle of multiplication for this to become possible. Has the church not perhaps moved so far away from its Hebrew roots that it has forgotten what covenant meals or "love feasts" (Jude 12) are all about?

This sense of celebration is always a foretaste of the age to come. We remember him "until he comes" (1 Cor.11.26). We begin in this age to experience the marriage supper of the Lamb because the Holy Spirit brings upon us the "powers of the coming age" (Heb.6.5). We are already gathered at the heavenly Jerusalem with "innumerable angels in festal gathering" (Heb.12.23 RSV).

As we have noted, the Old Testament prophets speak of the end of the age as a time when celebration will be restored to the people of God. As we approach the end of the age we enter into the time when God will "restore everything" (Ac.3.21). The time immediately preceding the second coming must therefore be a time when celebration is restored to the church. This subject is of more than academic interest. Aside from whether one is pre-millennial, or post- or a-millennial, there is a respected tradition of biblical interpretation in support of the picture of a triumphant church eventually welcoming the returning Lord. "Remnant" theology denies this, but seems to be grounded more in an attempt to explain the lifelessness of the church than in sound biblical interpretation. If the church is to leave this planet on a spiritual high, it will have to be a church filled with celebration. This is why this particular subject has "prophetic" significance for us.

It may well be that many Christians will have to undergo a repentance (*metanoia* – change of mind) in this area. Their dreary and negative concept of God and his ways will need to be replaced with a healthy view of God and a vibrant ability *really* to enjoy his presence. It is actually legitimate, holy and right to thoroughly enjoy God, to sing, dance, laugh and celebrate in his presence.

Celebration In The Early Church And Beyond

There are no detailed descriptions of the exact style of worship adopted by the early church. Deductions have to be made from the book of Acts and from statements found here and there in the writings of the Fathers. Assumptions have to be made in view of the time it took for the early church to break with Judaism. This much is clear. Jesus was a Jew. His concept of celebration has already been referred to (Lk.15.25). He is associated with those who "played the flute" for people to dance, rather than with those who "sang a dirge" to make people cry (Lk.7.32-33 - an obvious reference to the comparison between Jesus and John the Baptist). One can therefore easily imagine Jesus taking part in Hebrew dancing if one operates with biblical assumptions.

The early church functioned as one of the movements within Judaism for a few decades. This means that the apostles and their first followers would have



Part Three

participated in Jewish feasts where dancing was the norm (Ac.20.6).

In the early Christian church the propriety of celebrating the festivals together with the whole of the Jewish people was never questioned, so that it needed no special mention...Pagans who had to give up their form of festival celebrations in order to become Christians, could be taken along to the widely known Jewish festivals, whose historical background was in agreement with the spiritual and moral values which pervaded them (NIDNTT, 1, p. 628).

Statements made by Clement, Bazil and Gregory have already been referred to. Reference will now be made to various authorities to indicate that dancing continued, not only in the early church, but also in some areas, until the 18th century.

According to Hastings Encyclopedia,

In early Christianity bishops led the faithful in sacred dances both in the churches and before the tombs of the martyrs. The Council of 692 forbade the practice, but the prohibition was ineffective. Centuries later the Liturgy of Paris included the rubric "le chanoine ballera au premier psaume" ("the bishop will dance at the first psalm"). As late as the 18th century dancing by the priests on saints' days was practiced in French provinces (p. 361).

Scott remarks as follows:

In the oldest Roman church the choir is a kind of raised stage, and on this the priests are said to have danced the sacred dances (Edward Scott, Dancing In All Ages, p. 100). Scaliger says that the early bishops were called praesules because they originally led the dance in solemn festivals (p. 100).

Father Menestrier, a Jesuit Priest who researched the subject, wrote in 1682,

Divine service was composed of psalms, hymns and canticles, because men sang and danced the praises of God, as they read his oracles in those extracts of the Old and New Testaments that we still know under the name of Lesson. The place in which these acts of worship were offered to God was called the choir (Kinney, p. 30).

bishops led the faithful in sacred dances

The Canon of Langues, France, in 1584, Jehan Tabouret, wrote as follows:

We practice such merry-making on days of wedding celebrations, and of the solemnities of the feasts of our Church, even though the reformers abhor such things; but in this matter they deserve to be treated like some hind-quarter of a goat put into dough without lard (Kinney, p. 31).

What we today call a "carol" arose through the history of dance:

The origin of the carol is a dancing song of the Nativity, definitely a legacy of the Church dances (Evelyn Porter, Music Through The Ages, p. 16).

Apart from France, Spain and England continued to see dancing in Christian worship. In Toledo the liturgy of the mass included a dance by the choirboys. For those who know Spanish music, one can only imagine the kind of rhythm in these dances! A dance of similar style to the Spanish one (six in a ring) was used in England in the Elizabethan period at Whitsuntide.

Various attempts have been made to eradicate dance in the church and one particular incident in this history does not exactly dignify the attempts of those who seek the same in our day.

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This article is the fourth and final installment in this series on Celebration. For the first three articles, see the three previous issues of our magazine, or visit us at ***www.insideworship.com*** *for Derek's complete article.*

The Retreat From The Dance

We have noted the attitude adopted by the Council of A.D. 692. Augustine made a similar attempt to eradicate dancing (1265 – 1321). There were perhaps valid reasons for these attitudes at the time, which we are now unaware of. In any event, they were not successful. In 1518 a plague broke out in Europe caused by a poisonous fungus, which developed on rye bread. This produced strange contortions of the limbs and people filled the streets with these strange movements. Many would go on for hours and then collapse and die. This strange dance, called St. Vitus Dance, was judged to be a demonic manifestation by the church authorities. As a result, attitudes to all forms of dance hardened. Dance became synonymous with the demonic.

The reformers opposed dance mainly because of their great stress on the preaching of the word as the focus of worship.

As the church retreated from the use of dance in worship, it was gradually taken over by secular society, and what was originally created by God for the praise of God became the property of men with no love for God. The secularization of dance is a direct result, not of the renewal of the church, but of the retreat of the church.

The Renewal Of The Dance

It was therefore most encouraging to see the restoration of dance in the twentieth century church. There are, in fact, a number of different modes of dance that are emerging within different traditions. Here one should bear in mind that the biblical terminology is flexible and covers a variety of movements. The Hebrew words for dance cover the following spectrum,

to leap or hop,
to play or sport,
to turn or whirl,
to circle i.e. in groups.

The term used for the latter, to dance in a circling group, is translated by the Latin "chorea", leading to the English "chorus". In the history of the church the "processions" of the Greek or Orthodox church continued the element of dance.

Today one may note the following variety of movements in worship. The Latin American Pentecostal churches practice dancing. As one might expect, these movements are rather rhythmic. In most indigenous African churches, a swaying, rhythmic movement is taken for granted as a normal way to worship God. In the British "restoration" movement, a free kind of hop on the spot has become commonplace. This is one of the only possible outlets when one is enclosed in the typical western church seating arrangement. The only way is up and down. In the liturgical churches, a more organized tradition of dance is emerging, based mainly on classical dance theory. Trained groups dance before the worshipping congregation. Then, of course, there is the re-emergence of Israeli dancing as a result of the growing contact between Christian groups and Judaism. Messianic synagogues have proliferated in the United States.

As dance is restored to the church, local congregational leaders will have to find the particular style they feel comfortable with. It will be helpful for Christian leaders to teach their people a correct Christian view of the body. The biblical tradition is holistic. Man is not viewed as a conglomeration of separate elements (body, soul and spirit), but as one whole being, able to express himself through body, soul and spirit (1 Thess.5.23). We are to worship God with heart, soul, mind and strength (Mk.12.30). As the Psalmist says, "My heart and my flesh, sing for joy to the living God" (Ps.84.2 NASB).

There is, unfortunately, a great deal of pagan Greek philosophy that has continued in Christian thinking, together with the ancient heresy of Gnosticism, with its separation of the spirit from the body. One finds Christians deducing from Jn.4.23 that worship "in spirit and in truth" means worship with the mind but not with the body, not with the "flesh". This raises a large subject that cannot be dealt with here. The reader may want to consult *The Spiritual Spider Web* (Derek Morphew, VBI Course, www.vineyardbi.org), which deals with the Gnostic problem. Let it suffice to say at this point that a rejection of dancing in worship may sound very theological and biblical but will reveal more about the non Christian influences on the thinking of the objector than anything else.

Current Ideas And Trends

The biblical concept of the body also militates against the "classical" Pentecostal idea of "dancing in the spirit".



Part Four

One seeks in vain for biblical justification for this term. We dance in the body (where else?) before the Lord as we are inspired by the Spirit. True, dance should proceed from a genuine joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom.14.17; I Pet.1.8), but this does not mean that we have to wait for some kind of special "dance anointing" to sweep us away before we dance. While organized dance groups are therefore certainly within the biblical tradition, the spontaneous release of dance amongst the worshiping community (a la king David) can be a wonderfully edifying experience.

The last thing that I wish to encourage is avoiding a slavish habit of having to dance at every meeting in order to prove that we are truly "liberated". Having to dance is just as silly as always having to clap or make a noise or whatever we do as a mindless ritual. I rather enjoy the relaxed style of most Vineyard services and find hyped worship exhausting. As a local church policy I support the idea that those who dance should do so in the aisles and at the back, so that the congregation is not forced to view them continually. Freedom is not exhibitionism.

Further, the true context for dance is a festival occasion. Celebration gatherings (various congregations coming together) are an obvious occasion. Those times when the particular leading of the Spirit in the meeting is towards joyous abandon before God are equally obvious.

Conclusion

We have tended to narrow the concept of celebration down to the area of dance. There is, of course, much more to celebration than dance itself and it would be a complete misunderstanding of my intentions were the reader to conclude that dance were some kind of personal "hobby horse" or "hang up". A general repentance about our total view of God, his wonderful salvation and the response of the church is rather in mind. However, it would seem that dance has become the "shiboleth" (Judg.12.6) issue that either opens churches up to celebration or closes them down into age-long monotony.

The words of Richard Foster, in his *Celebration Of Discipline* serve as a fitting conclusion.

"Far and away the most important benefit of celebration is that it saves us from taking ourselves too seriously. That is a desperately needed grace for all those who are earnest about the Spiritual Disciplines. It is the occupational hazard of devout folk to become stuffy bores. That should not be. Of all people we should be the most free, live and interesting. Celebration adds a note of gaiety, festivity, and hilarity to our lives. After all Jesus rejoiced so fully in life that He was accused of being a wine bibber and a glutton. Many of us lead such sour lives that we couldn't possibly be accused of such things."

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separation of the spirit from the body

