

## “The Dance”

James R. Gorman

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Text: "Days pass and years vanish, and we walk sightless among miracles. Lord, fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing; let there be moments when Your Presence, like lightning, illumines the darkness in which we walk. Help us to see, wherever we gaze, that the bush burns unconsumed. And we, clay touched by God, will reach out for holiness, and exclaim in wonder: How filled with awe is this place, and we did not know it! Blessed is the Eternal One, the holy God!" [*Gates of Prayer*, a Jewish worship book] Amen

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One of the all-time great camp songs is by Sydney Carter and is sung to the tune of the Shaker tune “Simple Gifts.” It is called “The Lord of the Dance” and in this simple song, the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ is told.

*“I danced in the morning when the world was begun  
I dance in the moon and the stars and the sun  
I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth.  
At Bethlehem I had my birth.”*

*Dance then where ever you may be.  
“I am the Lord of the dance,” said he  
“And I lead you all wherever you may be  
And I lead you all in the dance,” said he.*

The central metaphor of this song is the idea that God dances, and has danced from the very beginning of time. God dances in the moon and the stars and the sun. God dances in the midst of creation. God dances with us. God dances even in suffering and death, and the dance triumphs over both suffering and death.

*“They cut me down and I leapt up high.  
I am the life that will never never die.  
I’ll live in you if you live in me  
For I am the Lord of the dance,” said he.*

The early church theologians also used the metaphor of the dancing God to understand that greatest of all mysteries, the Holy Trinity. They depicted God as three dancers dancing one dance. It is a dance of lovers that, in the ecstasy of holy love, loses all individuality and becomes one. Shakespeare, writing about human love, could have been writing about this heavenly dance of God as lover:

*So they loved, as love in twain,  
Had the essence but in one;  
Two distinct, division none:  
Number there in love was slain.*

[Cited in *The Orthodox Way* by Bishop Kallistos Ware.]

Two distinct individuals become, in their dance of love, one being. When we perform a marriage, we almost always use the words of Christ, “For this reason, a man shall leave his mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.”

*So they loved, as love in twain,  
Had the essence but in one;  
Two distinct, division none:  
Number there in love was slain.*

Number there in love was slain. God is love, and if love, then the very diversity of God is united into one being. Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier are engaged in a dance of a most perfect love in which their separate persons become one substance as the Church teaches.

In love, in perfect love, the diversity of God becomes one. If we have a glimpse of this in the love that two people have for one another, so much more intense and mysterious is the love of God which flows from the Holy Trinity. It is a kind of riddle that points us to the mystery of God, who is both diverse in our experience as well as one. St. Gregory Bishop of Nyssa, who died in 379 AD, wrote:

*Do not be surprised that we should speak of the Godhead as being at the same time both unified and differentiated. Using riddles, as it were, we envisage a strange and paradoxical diversity in unity and unity in diversity. [On the Difference Between Essence and Hypostasis in a letter written to Basil #38]*

This riddle of the Trinity has a way of pointing us toward our own life together. The Trinity itself becomes a metaphor for the unity and diversity of our own life in Christ, our dance. “*I’ll live in you if you live in me, for I am the Lord of the dance,*” said he.

Christian unity, in its diversity, is made possible in the doctrine of the Trinity. God, who has diverse manifestations, is one God. As our Jewish ancestors put it, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God.” And we Christians have not given up on that radical monotheism. The Lord our God is one God. As the poet Kathleen Norris has put it:

*For Christians, the Trinity is the primary symbol of a community that holds*

*together by containing diversity within itself. Another symbol of a unity that is not uniform might be the Bible itself, with its two creation accounts in the Book of Genesis, and four gospels, each with a strikingly different approach to telling the story of Jesus and his ministry.... The wonder is that this flexibility and diversity has often been considered more of an embarrassment than celebrated as one of the religion's strengths. [Amazing Grace: a Vocabulary of Faith p. 289]*

The irony here is that the Trinity itself has been a cause of our divisions, rather than a symbol of a unity born of diversity. Nothing has divided Christians one from another more than this riddle of divine love.

It may be that this is the case because we modern folks have little patience for mystery. Mystery doesn't earn money. Mystery doesn't win Nobel prizes in science or medicine. Solving mysteries does that.

But life is fundamentally mysterious, even to scientists. The farther scientists push the empirical data, the closer they come to mystery. I'm told that there are things called "quarks." *"They are subatomic particles that exist in threes. There is no such thing as one quark, but only three interdependent particles; I picture them dancing together at the heart of things, part of the atomic glue that holds this world together,..."* [Norris, p. 290] Three distinct particles in a holy dance.

At the center of sub atomic reality there is this trinitarian mystery. Life is a mystery, even to those who don't think that mystery is a good way to carry on scientific inquiry. That's why I love the prayer that I began with. It comes from an old Jewish prayer book:

*Days pass and years vanish, and we walk sightless among miracles. Lord, fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing; let there be moments when Your Presence, like lightning, illumines the darkness in which we walk. Help us to see, wherever we gaze, that the bush burns unconsumed. And we, clay touched by God, will reach out for holiness, and exclaim in wonder: How filled with awe is this place, and we did not know it! Blessed is the Eternal One, the holy God!"*

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