

The Early Christian Prayer Circle

In [The Early Christian Prayer Circle](#) by Hugh Nibley, we are told, "the actual performance of such a rite [Prayer Circle] is described in a very old text, attributed to Clement of Rome and preserved in a seventh century Syriac translation entitled *"The Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ as delivered orally by him to us the Apostles after his Resurrection following his death."*

In celebrating the sacrificial death of the Lord, Max Pulver in his study "The Round Dance and the Crucifixion," tells how the bishop would:
make the sacrifice, the veil of the gate being drawn aside as a sign of the straying of the former people; he would make the offering within the veil along with priests, deacons, authorized widows, subdeacons, deaconesses, readers and such as were endowed with spiritual gifts. As leader the Bishop stands in the middle . . . [the men and women are assigned their places, north, south, east and west, around him]. Then all give each other the sign of peace. Next, when absolute silence is established, the deacon says: *"Let your hearts be to heaven. If anyone has any ill feeling towards his neighbor, let him be reconciled. If anyone has any hesitation or mental reservations [doubts] let him make it known; if anyone finds any of the teachings incongenial, let him withdraw [etc.]. For the Father of Lights is our witness with the Son and visiting angels. Take care lest you have aught against your neighbor. . . . Lift up your hearts for the sacrifice of redemption and eternal life. Let us be grateful for the knowledge which God is giving us."* The Bishop . . . says in an awesome voice: *"Our Lord be [or is] with you!"* And all the people respond: *"And with thy spirit."* (Ignatius Ephraem II Rahmani, ed., *Testamentum Domini Nostri Jesu Christi* (Moguntiae: Kirchheim, 1899). The age of the work is discussed on pp. ix—xiv, 36—37.)

E. Louis Backman cites a passage from the *Stromata* in which Clement reveals that the initiates raised their hands in prayer during the dance: "So also we raise the head and lift the hands to heaven, and set the feet in motion at the closing utterance of the prayer." (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.7, in ANF, 2:534.)

Similar descriptions of the ring dance/prayer circle are found in the writings of Gregory Thaumaturgus (A.D. 210—60) and Basileios of Caesarea (A.D. 344—407), as well as in the Gnostic Acts of John. (Backman, *Religious Dances*, 22—25; Max Pulver, "Jesus' Round Dance and Crucifixion according to the Acts of John," in *The Mysteries*, ed. Joseph Campbell, 173-93.)

Sacred Movement: Instrument for Justice and Liberation

by

John West

WORKSHOP QUOTES FOR REFLECTION

JW* koinonia translates into English terms for community, communion, joint participation, sharing and intimacy. In some contexts to a jointly contributed gift; reportedly appears 19 times in the Greek NT and translates into English as “fellowship” (12x), “sharing” (3x), “participation” and “contribution” (2x ea.) Also comes to us in the word or concept of “communion.” It is a derivative of "koinos", the word for "common.” Koinonia refers to the Greek approach to building community or teamwork.

SCHOLARLY REFLECTIONS:

Note the relationship of the word “enthusiasm” to koinonia; that as it is translated into the African and African-American experience, it yields a people who are committed to be not only “doers of the word.... but dancers of their revelations.” [Brown, Joseph A. , S.J., *To Stand on the Rock*, pp. 68-69]

“muscular bonding” – the human emotional response to moving rhythmically together in dance and drill.

“emotional solidarity within larger communities, sustained by keeping together in time, would also improve and expand the storage and retrieval of information, simply because larger numbers of individuals would begin to take part in all such networks.” [McNeill, Wm. H., *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History*]

“As the dancer loses himself in the dance, as he becomes absorbed in the unified community, he reaches a state of elation in which he feels himself filled with energy or force immediately beyond his ordinary state, and so finds himself able to perform prodigies of exertion.” [Radcliffe-Brown, A. R., The Andaman Islanders]

“The participants in a dance...exhibit a wonderful unison; they are, as it were, fused into a single being, stirred by a single impulse. Social unification is thus accomplished. Apart from war, this is the chief factor making for social solidarity in primitive life; it was indeed the best training for war.” [Ellis, Havelock, The Dance of Life]

(From the warriors' perspective) ... “Their “I” passes insensibly into a “we,” “my” becomes “our,” and individual fate loses its central importance....I believe that it is nothing less than the assurance of immortality that makes self-sacrifice at these moments so relatively easy...I may fall, but I do not die, for that which is real in me goes forward and lies on in the comrades for whom I gave up my life.” [Gray, Jesse Glen, The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle]

A Reading From the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 58: 9-12

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help and he will say: “Here I am!” If you remove the yoke from among you, the accusing finger and malicious speech; if you lavish your food on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; then your light shall rise in the darkness and our gloom shall become like midday;

Then the Lord will guide you always and satisfy your thirst in parched places, will give strength to your bones and you shall be like a watered garden, like a flowing spring whose waters never fail.

Your people shall rebuild the ancient ruins; the foundations from ages past you shall raise up’ “Repairer of the breach,” they shall call you, “Restorer of ruined dwellings.”

A Reading from the First Letter of John

1John 4:16-21

All:

We ourselves have known and put our faith in God's love towards ourselves.

God is love and anyone who lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

Love will come to its perfection in us when we can face the day of Judgment without fear; because even in this world we have become as God is.

In love there can be no fear, for fear is driven out by perfect love: because to fear is to expect punishment, and anyone who is afraid is still imperfect in love. We are to love, then, because God loved us first.

Anyone who says, "I love God," and hates his brother or sister is a liar, since one who does not love the brother or sister whom they can see, cannot love the God whom they have never seen. So this is the commandment that Jesus has given us, that anyone who loves God must also love ones brothers and sisters.

***Sacred Movement: Instrument for Justice and Liberation:
A Dance Prayer Service Outline***



Greeting and Welcome

Call to Worship

Communal Dance Responsorial for Peace

Offering Burdens and Obstacles to Working for Justice

❖ Dance/Prayer Chant and Procession

Danced Collect

A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah: *58:9-12*

Danced Response to the Reading

Communal Reading from the First Letter of John: *4:16-21*

Danced Reflection on the Reading

Lord's Prayer (Gesture)

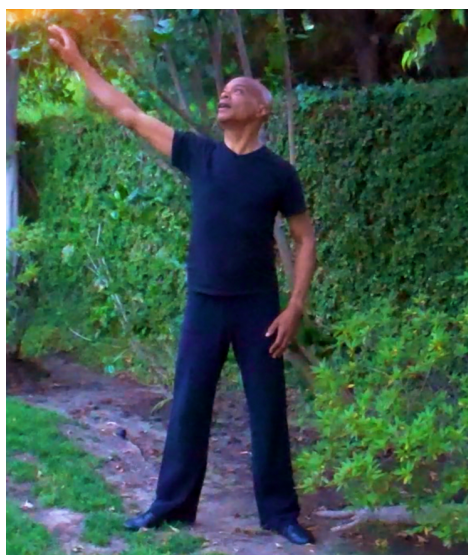
Closing Prayer and Final Blessing

Follow the Valyermo Dancers at www.valyermodancers.org
Save the dates and join us for...

Sacred Dance Class Series

Holy Spirit Retreat Center

<https://www.hsrcenter.com/>



IT'S A WAY OF LIFE: A DANCE SERIES

MAY 7-30

Led by: John West, Choreographer and Director of Valyermo Dance Company

Tuesday and Thursday evenings • 7:00-8:30 pm

May 7, 9, 14, 16, 21, 23, 28, 30

John West, director of the Valyermo Dancers and workshop facilitator at both St. Andrew's Abbey and HSRC, will lead students from teens and young adults to seniors to improve their physical condition and ward off the intimidations and restrictions of stress and limited physical abilities. With attention to the physical core and the spiritual core, movers and dancers will develop a sense of community and joy in the celebration of life and the gifts of the Creator. (Please wear comfortable clothing.)

Fee: Prepaid series of eight: \$160.00 paid in advance; \$20.00 per class.

Click on Register button to register online or call (818) 815-4496. To attend per session, go directly to your session of choice.

<https://www.hsrcenter.com/Event/registertoevent>

Sacred Dance Workshops

St. Andrew's Abbey

www.saintandrewsabbey.com



Dancing the Psalms and Songs of Creation

Workshop on Friday, July 19-Sunday, July 21, 2019

Led by: John West, Choreographer and Director of Valyermo Dance Company

[Join](#) dancers, musicians, artists, liturgists, and poets of faith to dance and sing ancient psalms and contemporary songs that call us to creativity and prayer. Our work will remind us of our unity with all of Creation; will help us recharge our energies and commitment to renew the face of the earth.

In the spirit of "Laudato Si," songs and dances will be offered in thanksgiving and praise for God's Sacred Creation and our kinship with it. The days are full of dance, prayer, reflection, and fellowship. Participants will have the opportunity to offer the work of their days in a beautiful outdoor setting of St. Andrew's Abbey. Bring comfortable clothes to explore nature and to move and pray with ease.

Room, board, and tuition: \$275 single; \$220 each person shared

<https://summerdance2019.eventzilla.net/web/event?eventid=2138953334>

Holy Spirit Retreat Center

<https://www.hsrcenter.com/>



Discovering the Earth and Creator Spirit

Sacred Dance Workshop on August 23-25

Presenter: John West, Obl. OSB, M.Ed. M.A.

Friday, August 23, 2019 5:00 pm-Sunday, August 25, 2019 1:00 pm

Come and rediscover the gift of Mother Earth...in the midst of the California climate. Participants will revisit the dance of creation, the dance of Miriam at the time of Exodus and the spirituality of the Desert Mothers. Dancers of all levels, liturgists, musicians, artists and poets of faith will come together to translate our care and love for Mother Earth into movement reflective of God's creative energy in our humanity. Participants will have the opportunity to offer the work of previous days in a worshipful setting. Bring comfortable clothes to move and pray with ease.

Fee: \$275.00 private room
\$225.00 shared room per person
\$150.00 commuter.

Click on Register button to make your reservation online. A \$30.00 nonrefundable deposit is due by August 18 with registration.

<https://www.hsrcenter.com/Event/register-to-event>

***** 2020 *****

St. Andrew's Abbey

Mid-Winter Dance Workshop

Workshop on January 17-20