

4th March 2021

Dance

**“Kind nature first doth cause all things to love;
Love makes them dance, and in just order move.”**

John Davies, Orchestra, or a Poem of Dancing

Having recently pondered the origins of some “traditional” hymns, I turn today to a hymn from the 1960s. The sixties! The era of new music, flower-power, peace and love, and much that challenged received patterns of tastes, attitudes, relationships, societal norms – *and* the Church.

A major challenge to the Church was the introduction of new hymns with words and music that were more accessible to everyone. At the forefront of that development was the songwriter, Sydney Carter. In 1963, his offering of *Lord of the Dance* was nothing short of revolutionary.

Taking a melody from the American Shaker song, *Simple Gifts*, Carter followed the framework of the traditional English carol, *Tomorrow Shall Be my Dancing Day*, which offers the Gospel story in the first-person voice of Jesus, portraying Jesus’ life and mission as a dance. Carter’s concept of Jesus inviting his followers to join him in a dance of new life was remarkable. But he also took inspiration from a statue of the Hindu deity, *Shiva as Nataraja*, (Shiva’s dancing pose) which sat on his desk.

He later wrote, “I did not think the churches would like it at all. I thought many people would find it pretty far flown, probably heretical and ... dubiously Christian. But in fact, people did sing it and, unknown to me, it touched a chord.” And it certainly touched a chord for me.

*“Dance, then, wherever you may be.
I am the Lord of the Dance,” said He.
“And I’ll lead you all wherever you may be;
I will lead you all in the dance,” said He.*

I was fourteen in 1963, and *Lord of the Dance* was formative for me in my reinterpretation of the Church’s concepts of worship and its language of faith. Thank you, Sydney Carter. If “love makes [all things] dance” as John Davies wrote three centuries before you, I’m happy to join, even now in my later years, a dance of faith that still goes on and on.

A prayer for today

“I am the dance, and I still go on.” OK! Is there still time for me to join in? Amen

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon
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