Michael, a seasoned butch queen, is dipping, twirling, and duck walking, despite the congestion around him.... [He] draws on particular church and ball-culture call-and-response repertoires that move his friends and make room for his dance and desires" (125). This impromptu tiny ball and cipher is porous and protective for its dancers, rechoreographing the dance floor to permit dissenting ways of dancing. Khubchandani's critical description of this encounter provides us with fertile ground to write about the power of brown accent, and black spatial choreography, through racialized dances of joy, freedom, and unity. These tools for accenting and making space continue to be danced into development as responses to homosocial politics.

For me, as a Two-Spirit Butch Queen artist and scholar, it's rare to read studied writing that speaks from such risk, and intimately focuses on the queer flesh, the homegirls, friends, nightclubs, dark room, and dangerous streets. Khubchandani is not writing as a third-person observer, nor is he strictly writing from personal experience. He is writing from both thoughts of LaWhore and himself to critically engage gay nightlife systems. The intimate vulnerability that Khubchandani curates and catalogues takes extreme bravery, and we, as a next generation of brown queer scholars, need this book to help us to be brave too.

In conclusion, for Khubchandani, "curation is only one part of the labor" (190)—though a very important part. Self-creation, fabulousness, and research and study of local and globalized media become very important in this work, and within the context of queer nightlife. This intimate and deeply thoughtful text is necessary for dance scholars and students of nightlife, globalized South Asian culture, and queer underground public performance, which is danced, embodied, and sometimes UP IN DRAGS! As he states, "Fieldwork changed me, shifted my politics, and rechoreographed my body and gender" (164), and in reading this monograph, we experience this with him through the influence of queer and familiar aunties, hijras, trans men, media, friends, nightclubs, and through dancing with LaWhore Vagistan. This text calls out to us with the necessity of the drag reveal, to tell us what is under the wig—all the influences that make her, and helps us transform and become more with her, and for our own projects. I hope through reading and walking with us through this book, you will transform too!

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DANCING TO TRANSFORM: HOW CONCERT DANCE BECOMES RELIGIOUS IN AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

by Emily Wright. 2021. Bristol, UK: Intellect. 240 pp. $106.50 hardcover. ISBN: 9781789382839.
doi:10.1017/S0149767723000396

During the conquest and colonization of the Americas, dance writing—including the diaries and personal travel accounts of Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and Bartolomé de las Casas—played a prominent role in representing Indigenous culture and framing power relations. For many Europeans, Indigenous dancing signified religious otherness. The alleged idolatry of these dances helped authorize European invasion and domination. Moreover, Christian missionaries often construed Native dance as residual paganism. In their zeal, missionaries arrived in the New World to orchestrate mass conversions of Native peoples. Dance studies scholar Paul Scolieri has demonstrated that early modern conquistadors, colonizers, and missionaries integrated representations of dance "in narratives of discovery, encounter, and conquest" (2013, 1).

The fraught history of colonization suggests that Christianity—Europe's dominant religion since the conversion of Roman Emperor Constantine in 312 CE—was intolerant toward dance. The annals of ancient and medieval history tend to support this notion, given the numerous dance prohibitions emanating from church authorities. Past scholars, including Ann Wagner (1997), likewise argue that Christianity constituted an anti-dance religion. Emily Wright's book challenges these preexisting assumptions. *Dancing to Transform: How Concert Dance Becomes Religious in American Christianity* (2021) offers an alternative narrative about the place of dance in Christianity, particularly among Protestant and evangelical communities in America today. In this first

book-length study of Christianity and concert dance, Wright argues that dance supports, rather than contradicts, the principal tenets of the Christian faith: "The dancing Christians explored here enact movement patterns that enable them to negotiate with the central claim of their faith: Incarnation, the notion of a God who is both fully human and fully divine, the Word made Flesh" (7). Each of the seven chapters explores a different Christian dance company or Christian choreographer. For Wright, these devout artists "employ complex and divergent approaches that stem from deeply felt, religious, and artistic commitments as well as every day, lived experiences" (4).

The first three chapters provide an historical overview of Christian dance from the early church through the twentieth century. These chapters are informative but, somewhat problematically, rely almost exclusively on secondary sources. Wright takes her readers through lesser-known dance practices in ancient Christian sects and medieval Christendom. She suggests that Christian dances may have derived influence from pagan and Jewish cultures. While the Puritans of the colonial period did not welcome dance into their worship, modern dance innovators Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, and Alvin Ailey gravitated toward religious themes. In doing so, Wright claims that these luminaries were especially inspirational to liturgical dancers (i.e., performers who enact dance as a form of worship) and choreographers, culminating in the Sacred Dance Guild and the Omega Dance Company (Christian dance collectives established in 1958 and 1974, respectively).

The remaining four chapters arrive at the heart of Wright's project. Here she engages ethnographic methods and philosophical frameworks to illuminate the complexities of contemporary Christian dance. Chapter 4 focuses on Ballet Magnificat!, based in Jackson, Mississippi. Members of this Christian ballet company consider themselves "dancing evangelists," and they hone a performative strategy "that simultaneously disrupts and reinforces the structures of power in conservative Christianity that often suppress bodily movement and women's voices" (63).

Chapter 5 turns to Ad Deum, a company based in Houston that performs in churches, community centers, nursing homes, hospitals, and on the concert dance stage. In Wright's assessment, these dancers "develop movement patterns that enable them to discipline their desires and deepen their identification with the suffering of Christ" (82). While most professional dancers accept pain and injury as necessary byproducts of their training, Ad Deum dancers channel bodily pain to connect to the Passion of Christ.

Chapter 6 turns to choreographer Elizabeth Dishman and her Brooklyn-based collaborative dance company Dishman + Co. Choreography. According to Wright's analysis, "Dishman transforms the creative process into a spiritual practice of ongoing personal devotionalism" (101). Rather than presenting direct biblical, doctrinal, or evangelical content, Dishman's dances evoke the mystery and creativity of spiritual experience.

Chapter 7 explores contemporary choreographer Karin Stevens and her Seattle-based dance company, Karin Stevens Dance. According to Wright, Stevens approaches dance and religion as "collections of movement patterns that educate the senses and enable relationships with her own bodily self, with others, and with the earth" (116), and her choreographic creations promote harmony, gender equality, and healing. Stevens strategically incorporates "touch prayers" in her work, and here Wright's analysis of tactility coincides nicely with Judith Hamera's scholarship on interpersonal communication and cooperation within dance communities ([2007] 2011).

Bubbling over with rich insights, Wright's book marks an important contribution to dance studies and religious studies. Her revisionist framework articulates Christianity's stance on dance with nuance and verve. In doing so, *Dancing to Transform* may be placed into productive conversations alongside recent historical monographs on Christian dance by Philip Knäble (2016), Kathryn Dickason (2021), Laura Hellsten (2021), and Lynneth Miller Renberg (2022). Wright's text has sufficient theoretical sophistication to engage a scholarly audience, but it remains accessible enough for undergraduates and the general populace.

One of the most captivating currents in the book is how Christian dance embodies the paradox of liberation within orthodoxy. Wright's subjects are predominantly white, southern,

Protestant, and (presumably) politically conservative. However, they are also bold and daring, as they forge new forms of art making and personal expression that may question the status quo. Indeed, Wright's dancers inhabit a constant dialectic of tradition and innovation. Reading Wright's book often reminded me of the sheer radicality that was a part of the early Christian movement, which in many ways espoused an anti-imperial and proto-feminist agenda (at least when compared to Roman religion and Judaism from the same era).

Dancing to Transform reveals why religion should matter for dance scholars. Yes, religion is still a form of indoctrination and domination, but the partnership between religion and dance yields unforeseen trajectories toward experimentation, empowerment, and counterculturalism. Consider Wright's study of Ballet Magnificat! According to her, the company members practice a form of proselytization when using dance to "preach the gospel to nonbelievers" (80). At the same time, however, the choreography allows female dancers to mimic quasi-sacramental roles that have been denied to most women within the church's long history of patriarchy. The union of dance and Christianity melds convention and revolution in fascinating ways.

From the perspective of methodology, Wright's multidisciplinary repertoire draws most heavily from philosophy and ethnography. As noted in the introduction, she is deeply indebted to philosophy of religion scholar Kimerer LaMothe. LaMothe was one of the first scholars to animate dance studies with insights from philosophy and religious studies (2004, 2006). Wright relies strongly on LaMothe's concept of "bodily becoming," a philosophical principle that posits that physical movement, and specifically dance, is central to the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development of a human being (LaMothe 2015). According to LaMothe, dance has a long evolutionary history and it remains a biological and ecological necessity. For Wright, this philosophical position enables her to comprehend the transformative impetus of Christian dance (i.e., dancing becomes Christian and Christianity becomes dance,) and to identify sensory experiences, behavioral patterns, and the sense of belonging that her subjects cultivate. Wright gives substantial attention to embodied practice. In doing so, she complicates recent anthropological scholarship that stresses the mind-based (e.g., cognitive and psychological) constitution of evangelical Christianity (Luhrmann 2012).

Ethnography comprises another key methodology for Wright. Her book is the result of dozens of interviews with Christian dancers and choreographers collected over a period of five years. Wright is upfront about her insider status: she is a dancer and a Christian. She grew up in a southern evangelical family, received training in Graham technique, and later utilized dance in her ministry. Going to graduate school gave Wright some much-needed "critical distance" from Christianity (3), and she periodically felt the desire to "unbecome Christian" or "deconvert" (132). In an anthropological sense, Wright's positionality highlights the tension that undergirds the insider-outsider debate. Some scholars are wary of an insider status, as it may compromise intellectual objectivity. However, for this particular project, Wright's deep investment in dance and Christianity actually bolstered her ethnographic approach. While Wright may espouse more liberal politics than many of her interlocutors, her ethnographic data shows a sincere empathy and mutual trust that bind the author to these dancing communities.

When reading Wright's book, I became curious about possible modalities of comparison. For instance, her chapter on Ad Deum focuses on motifs of Christian suffering, and as a medievalist, I could not help but conjure images of the saints and martyrs and their penchant for bodily discipline. Wright could enrich her choreographic analysis further by juxtaposing Ad Deum with premodern Christian art. This comparative approach may impart new perspectives on Christian dance. It would also contribute to the study of dance in the visual arts, especially since iconography is often underutilized by dance scholars. Another undertheorized aspect of Wright's book revolves around the role of the Black church in Christian dance history. While the Puritans were suspicious of the dancing body, Wright explains that Native Americans and enslaved Africans embraced rhythmic movement in their rituals and spirituality. Here she gives special attention to the ring shout (a sacred dance form that enslaved African individuals created) and its

"capacity to sustain ancestral connections while reasserting spiritual agency in the present" (35). Wright also notes that the ecstatic and sensorial flavor of Pentecostalism emanating from African American preachers cultivated a new emphasis on physical experience. Wright, therefore, gestures toward the Africanist roots of Christian dance, which is a fascinating premise. However, she could foreground her argument more prominently and decenter the predominant whiteness of her source base by engaging further with the pioneering scholarship of Brenda Dixon Gottschild (1996), Thomas DeFrantz (2016, esp. 179–180), and Ashon Crawley (2017, esp. 86–138).[1]

The above reflections are not so much criticisms as suggestions as to how Wright's intellectual revelations may invite future scholarly interventions. One of the book's great takeaways is the de-paganization of sacred dance, which, as noted in my introduction, has important ramifications for (post)colonial studies. Another element that readers may find fascinating—and most surprising—is how Wright endows her subjects with dignity and respect. In other words, despite evangelical Christians' propensity toward traditional values and reactionary politics, Wright uses dance to showcase their humanity. This is a sharp contrast to how evangelicals, particularly megachurch moguls and millionaire televangelists, are depicted in the mainstream media. For example, *Saturday Night Live*'s recurring skits, titled "The Church Lady," Investigation Discovery's true crime series *Sinister Ministers*, and HBO's dark comedy *The Righteous Gemstones* all expose and ridicule the blatant hypocrisy of devout Christians. Instead, Wright unveils how the art of dance gives Christians a nobler purpose. In sum, *Dancing to Transform* expands our conception of dance and the sacred in ways that provoke and enrapture.

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Note

1. To be fair, Wright does cite these three scholars, but not in the most effective way, in this reviewer's opinion.

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