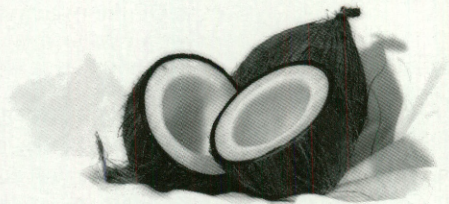


A Time to Mourn, a Time to Grand March

By Chris Blake



My friend Steve told me about meeting some extremely nutrition-conscious Adventists who, while working at a mission project on a Caribbean island, refused to drink coconut milk offered to them. Their reason was simple: “We don’t drink milk.”

That settled it. Of course, the principal reason they don’t drink milk is that it emanates from an animal, but this premise eluded them. Milk is milk, after all. We may surmise from this rationale a similar ban enforced on milk of magnesia, mother’s milk, and the Milky Way galaxy.

Words will fool us. Our resulting confusion may be amusing, but we act foolishly when we neglect to make timely distinctions. The wise Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 3, “For everything there is a season . . . a time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to mourn, a time to dance” (RSV).

It’s Solomon’s dance that’s the sticking point, because “Adventists don’t dance.”¹ Yet turn on the music and watch an infant move instinctively with the tune. Little children dancing is cute because it’s so harmless, so innocent, so natural. So, naturally, we shouldn’t wonder why every people group on earth in some way associates movement with music.

Our prohibition against dancing is too sweeping. I’m writing to those readers who sense that Hebrew dancing, for example, or river dancing, or square dancing, is not inherently evil, but aren’t certain what precisely the Church should say about it. Frankly, I’m weary of hearing how we are so susceptible and ignorant that we will be sucked into any temptation we come near. Certainly we ought to be careful—full of care—but spare me the apprehensive, antiseptic lifestyle. Jesus didn’t live that way. This is why he was accused of being a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners (see Matt. 11:19). Psalm 16:11 states, “In his presence is fullness of joy,” and the fullness appears in astonishing variety.

Too often we fall prey to slippery slope reasoning—a logical fallacy that suggests once a step is taken it will inevitably lead to harmful ends. However, we don’t stay away from grocery stores that sell liquor even though glimpsing the fermented brews may entice us to drink, nor do we shun computers though they may lead us to pornography. We eat mushrooms, though some of them are poisonous. We distinguish.

Recently I watched some friends—a husband and wife—Irish dancing. They skipped under bridges of arms, twirled at giddy speeds, and joined hands with people of many ages and races. It was so far from seductive—it

was fun and innocent, and they finished breathless and exhilarated. I understand it's similar to the "grand marches" of olden Adventist days.

As Christians, we live redemptively. What we could truly use is an acceptable term for vegetarian dancing, an active, joyful response to music that uplifts us, builds community and vibrant health, and makes us feel good about the gifts of music and movement and laughter that God gives.²

Consider the names of "vegetarian meats." FriChik. Bologno. Numete. Stripples. Wham. Prosage. Prime Stakes (stakes?). Meatless Corned Beef. Do these lead to eating meat? No, they provide a meat substitute. Similarly, we can provide a redemptive substitute for harmful dancing—that stuff that exalts sensuality and demeans relationships.

What could we call it? I suppose "folk dancing" could work. Other possibilities include: (a) vegeshuffling, (b) splinkettsing, (c) Worthington waltzing, (d) Little Debbie cakewalking, (e) Jordan River dancing, (f) rhythmical aerobics, (g)

knotdancing, (h) seven-stepping, (i) roller skating.

I'm having fun with these, but I'm also serious. For lack of a palatable term, some people are losing their religion over this. It's time to stop mourning over dancing.

"Milk" isn't always milk. "Dancing" isn't always dancing. Can we talk now?

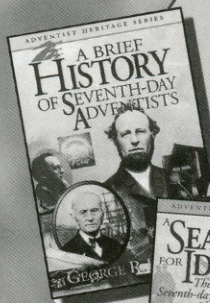
Notes and References

1. As Martin Weber points out, had we begun in New Orleans instead of New England we might be a different church. As further evidence of our irrational fears on this subject, North American Division president Don Schneider's 2001 book is *One Heart Rejoicing*. The book was originally titled *One Heart Dancing*.

2. Of the twenty-seven references to "dance" in the Bible, only four occur in a negative context. Sixteen references are clearly positive.

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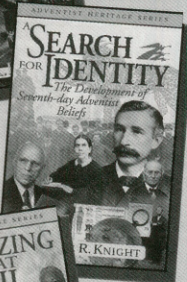
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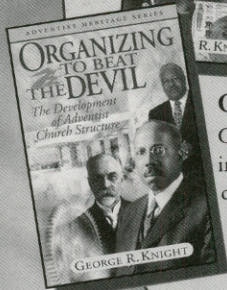
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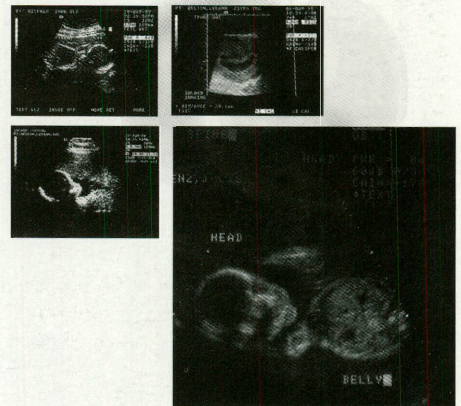
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