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BLESSED IS SHE WHO DANCES FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

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BLESSED IS SHE WHO DANCES FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

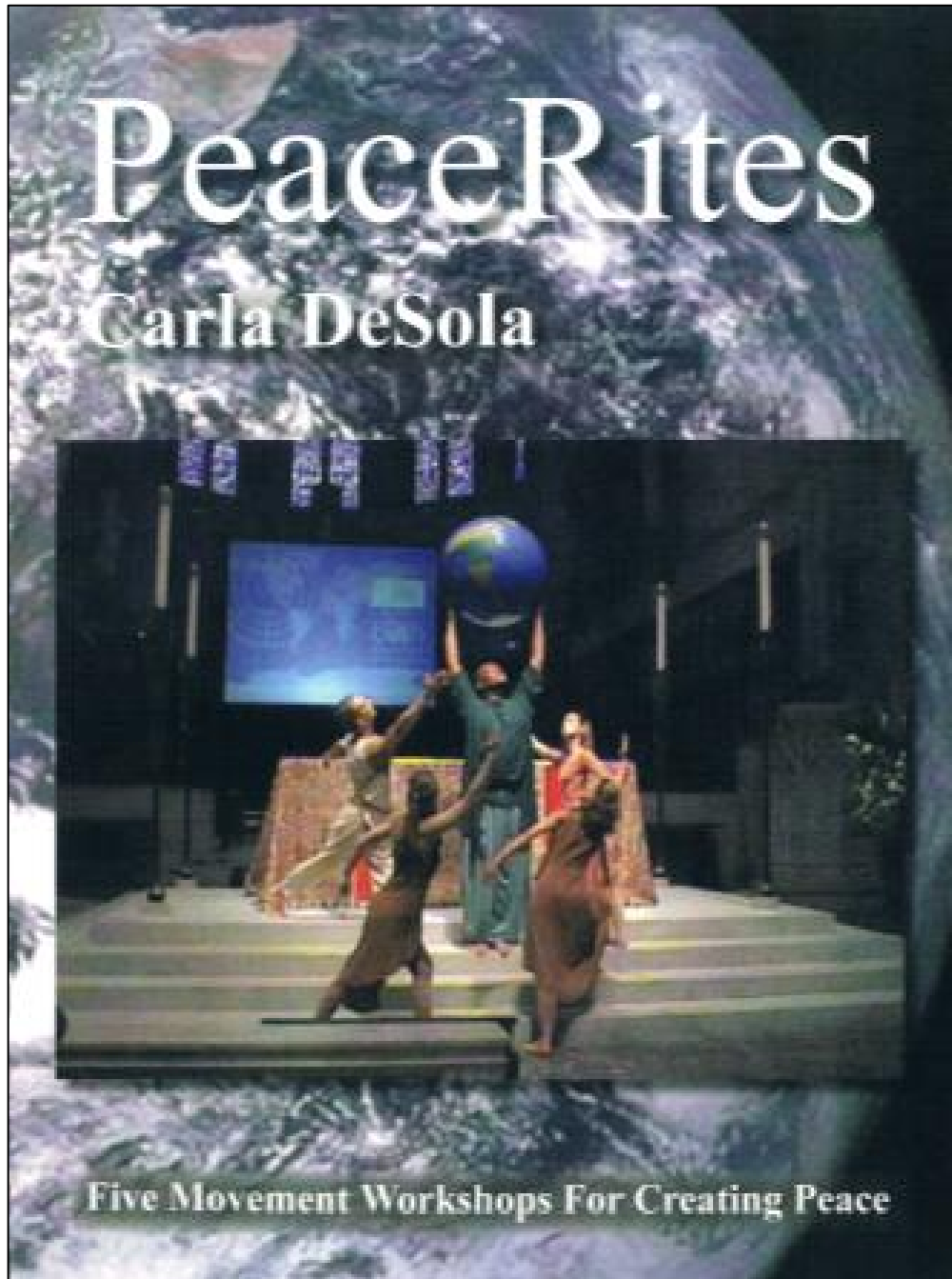
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Abstract

Carla De Sola, a Juilliard-educated dancer, choreographer, teacher, and author, has led sacred dance on issues of peace, the environment, and social justice. Dance and the arts can lead lamentation in the face of evil and nurture imagination and creativity. The fear that leads to violence is often irrational and prompted by emotions. Arts can help to illumine and to heal feelings. The ideas of Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, influenced De Sola and led to the name Omega Liturgical Dance Company. De Chardin's ideas underlie her extensive use of dance based on caring for creation including the annual St. Francis' day *Earth Mass* which annually draws about 5,000 to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. It began in 1985 and continues to this day. Whether dancing for peace with the Soviets or the Irish or leading people in anti-nuclear demonstrations, De Sola's compassion and grace allure people to follow her lead.

“Soviet cosmonaut Gregory Grechko, who has been in outer space three times and for as long as ninety days, was overwhelmed by the experience. ‘It was the best night of my entire life. . . even outer space cannot top that’” (*Soviet-American News*). Here Grechko is talking about his participation in a night of citizen diplomacy, a major component of which was dance choreographed by Carla De Sola at St. John the Divine Cathedral in New York City, February 9, 1988. Was Carla De Sola's dance a small part of this experience, but also a significant part of peacebuilding? The Soviet Union formally ceased on December 26, 1991. The previous day Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev had resigned and given Russian President Boris Yeltsin the nuclear missile launching codes. This marked the end of the Cold War when ordinary people of both the U.S. and the Soviet Union lived in fear of nuclear conflagration.

While dance, drama, music, and visual art are only part of the human experience, they allure and educate. They can transform the human psyche and contribute significantly to opening hearts and minds for justice and peace. The fear that leads to violence is often irrational and prompted by emotions. The arts can help to illumine and to heal feelings.



Omega West Dance Company celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the United Nations is depicted on the cover of *PeaceRites, Five Movement Workshops for Creating Peace* by Carla De Sola. (Used with permission of Pastoral Press, now a part of OCP Publications)

Dance can leap over walls of misunderstanding and hatred. The arts can communicate more powerfully than words. Early followers of Christ used the term perichoresis, dancing around, to describe the activity of the Trinity. The mystery of the Creator, Christ, and the Holy Spirit being one

God was explained with the root words *peri*, meaning around and *chorea*, meaning dance. The three Persons of the Trinity live and move within each other. As dancers move and circle in relationships with each other, so the Divine Ones give and take, respond and initiate in ever new relationships. Humans are invited to live in relationships, to live for the common good. Humans are invited to live gracefully participating in the divine dance.

Carla De Sola, a Juilliard-educated modern dancer and convert to Christianity, has repeatedly been invited to create dance and ritual in the face of evil, violence, and injustice. De Sola is one of the foremost dancers, choreographers, teachers, and authors in the field of religious dance in the United States. This essay will consider her background, give examples and descriptions of her creations, and suggest that dance and other arts are vital components in encouraging justice and peace. Arts lead in the lamentation in the face of evil and they nurture imagination and creativity. Walter Burggeman, a biblical scholar, has emphasized the importance of “prophetic imagination” in creating a better future.

Carla De Sola grew up in New York City and studied dance at Juilliard School of Music for four years, and much of this time was with Jose Limón, whose works are deeply spiritual. De Sola came from a non-religious Jewish home. As she saw Limón’s *Missa Brevis*, she felt the sacramental nature of body joined with spirit. She earned a Diploma in Dance from Juilliard in 1960 and then danced professionally and taught in the New York City area. A few years after the Second Vatican Council, an exciting time in the Catholic Church, she learned of the religion, became a Catholic, and attended Masses daily, deepening her fervor.

Her godmother, Beatrice Bruteau, a philosopher and theologian, encouraged De Sola to attend worship with the Catholic Worker Community started by Dorothy Day. This significant social movement led De Sola to connect compassion for the vulnerable, justice, and faith, qualities at the heart of the gospel. Dorothy Day was a journalist who persistently wrote about the rights of workers, the plight of the poor, and reasons for pacifism in the face of wars. Day founded communities which welcomed the homeless and the hungry and also had educational programs about the roots of social evils. De Sola’s first dance in worship was at a Catholic Worker House in New York City. Her experiments with religious dance in the late 1960s opened the door to her lifetime vocation of sacred dance. As God’s love took bodily form in Jesus Christ, De Sola’s bodily prayer has invited compassion, justice, and peace. Through the years, De Sola’s dance has not been an elitist pursuit, but a work of service. Her dance incarnates many of the ideas of the Second Vatican

Arts lead in the lamentation in the face of evil and they nurture imagination and creativity.

Council: the universal call to holiness, reading the signs of the times, connecting ancient faith with the modern world, and engaging in the pursuit of justice and peace.

Father Robert McGuire, a Jesuit priest who was teaching the spirituality of Teilhard de Chardin, invited De Sola to assist him using dance. In 1974 De Sola started a dance group called Omega inspired by Teilhard de Chardin's concept of evolution towards the Omega point, a Christ center of energy. In 1975 this became the Omega Liturgical Dance Company at the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. The Dean of the Cathedral, James P. Morton, invited Carla and her husband Arthur Eaton to build a sacred dance studio in the crypt and to have Omega as a company-in-residence there. The company continued for over twenty-five years at St. John the Divine and is now at Middle Collegiate Church. From the favorable reviews in the *New York Times* and *Dance* magazine in the 1960s to her choreography for gatherings of the United Nations, the National Council of Churches, the Catholic Liturgical Conference, and myriad other groups, De Sola has had a profound impact.

This limited essay will follow threads of her passionate care for creation and her dance performances and workshops focusing on peace during hostility between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and conflicts in Northern Ireland.

In 1974 De Sola started a dance group called Omega inspired by Teilhard de Chardin's concept of evolution towards the Omega point, a Christ center of energy.

Compassion and Creativity during the 1970s

“The Passion According to Mary”

in the 41st International Eucharistic Congress

Carla De Sola has led the Omega Liturgical Dance Company and developed a prayerful process of reflection and exploration calling forth the gifts of all in the company. During the mid-1970s the group developed a dance that both deals with the story of Jesus and is a universal invitation to compassion in the face of suffering. “The Passion According to Mary” was choreographed by Christopher Reynolds with music by J.S. Bach and with De Sola as the principal dancer. During the U.S. Bi-Centennial year, 1976, the Catholic Church held the 41st International Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia, the place of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Pope Paul VI chose the theme “The Hungers of the Human Family.” Not only Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Dorothy Day who fed the physically hungry were invited to share but also was Carla De Sola who nurtured the spirit through dance. At the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul in Philadelphia De Sola danced “The Passion According to Mary.” Mary overwhelmed with grief remembers Jesus as a baby in her arms as she moves in and out of the horrors of crucifixion. De Sola’s

incarnated grief invited people to compassion as much or more than other stories, sermons, and pictures concerned with hunger and the human family at the Eucharistic Congress. *Dance*, the most prestigious magazine in that field in the U.S., in December 2001 had a cover picture of De Sola sharing that poignant dance and an article with more on the dance.

The following Laetare Sunday, March 20, 1977, the Omega Liturgical Dance company presented an Earth Day Performance which included the Dream Sequence and the Mother and Child parts of the “The Passion According to Mary.” The printed program began with the words of Teilhard De Chardin: “I have no ability to proclaim anything except the innumerable prolongations of your incarnate Being in the world of matter: I can preach only the mystery of your flesh, you the Soul shining forth through all that surrounds us.” Dance and readings from Teilhard’s *Hymn of the Universe* followed (Cathedral of St. John the Devine, 1977).



Christopher Reynolds and Carla De Sola dance “The Passion According to Mary.” (Photo by Beverly Hall)

De Sola was teaching dance to many different groups and that led her to write *Learning Through Dance* in 1974 which was published by Paulist Press. De Sola had often collaborated with a Paulist priest, Thomas A. Kane, CSP. Kane is an internationally respected theologian, videographer, and ritual maker who now teaches at Boston College School of Theology

and Ministry. His doctoral dissertation in anthropology had focused on De Sola's dance company. This collaboration also led to her publications by The Liturgical Conference based in Washington, DC. It has its roots in the 1940's when US Benedictine abbots began annual "liturgical weeks" for education and inspiration. In the years after the second Vatican council the Liturgical Conference brought together about 20,000 people for educational programs. A number of times De Sola was invited to give workshops for their gatherings and to dance in the liturgies. De Sola was invited to write a regular column for their magazine *Liturgy*. In June 1977 the Liturgical Conference published her book *The Spirit Moves: A Handbook of Dance and Prayer*.

"Having Fun with the Sun"

During the 1970s, De Sola was not only developing very creative modern dances, but also recovering the significant, but often forgotten history of dance and drama in the Abrahamic traditions. Not only does the Bible recount Mariam, the sister of Moses, leading a liberation ritual with dance after being freed from slavery in Egypt, but also European Christian history repeatedly mentions dances and drama inside and around churches to celebrate and to educate. De Sola knew of a Renaissance ceremony where a ball representing the sun had been passed around. In 1978, the Washington-based Solar Action, Inc. organized programs around the U.S. They were a group of activists who wanted to show "the world that the best energy source on earth may not be on earth at all but 93 million miles above it." (*Time*, 1978). They were urging the Carter administration to spend more money developing solar energy. The sun could theoretically provide a fourth of the energy needed in the U.S. by 2000. The article mentioned events in Boston, Washington, DC, Miami, Detroit, Los Angeles, and New York City. Carla De Sola's creativity was noted as part of this movement: "at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the Omega Liturgical Dance Company re-enacted a Renaissance ceremony in which a ball symbolically representing the sun is passed between priests and dancers." (*Time* 1978).

De Sola's significant work had attracted the attention of the *New York Times* and on December 3, 1978, Mark Deitch had a feature article on her, "The New-Old Art of Liturgical Dance." The article also invited people to see the company perform in the new studio area in the crypt of St. John the Divine (Deitch, 1978).

Celebrating and Protecting Earth and People in the 1980s

In 1985 the Cathedral began an annual observance on or near October 4, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, patron of creation, with a celebration

... European Christian history repeatedly mentions dances and drama inside and around churches to celebrate and to educate.

of the *Earth Mass*, also called the *Missa Gaia*, with music by the Paul Winters Consort and movement by the Omega Liturgical Dance Company. De Sola described the Earth Mass:

Paul Winter supplied the music, along with the Cathedral Choir, and about 5,000 people and assorted animals packed the space. We streamed down the aisles to the Kyrie based on the wolf call, and leaped to the Sanctus, imitating the whales. We proclaimed in dance, with St. Francis, the brotherhood and sisterhood of all the creatures, and held back the crowds with our flags as a great, solemn elephant slowly processed down the aisle, followed by familiar and exotic creatures. All of life seemed to give praise, and was honored. (Wear, 2003)



Omega Liturgical Dance Company performing “Canticle to Brother Sun” during the Prelude to the Earth Mass at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York City. The Paul Winter consort is behind the dancers. (Photo from the De Sola Collection)

The Cathedral News describing the second annual Feast of St. Francis explained that at the end of the liturgy animals came in procession to the altar for a blessing. While usually animals would be frowned on in church, the congregation welcomed elephant, camel, pony, parrot, hedgehog, sheep, rabbit, eagle, fish, goose, tortoise, not to mention dogs and cats. Then there was food and fun all afternoon on the lawn surrounding the Cathedral.

**“Blessed Are You Who Mourn,
For You Shall Be Comforted.”**

In Northern Ireland over 3,500 people have been killed in what people there call “The Troubles,” a conflict which started in the late 1960s between persons who believed the area should be a part of Great Britain and those who believed it should be a part of the Republic of Ireland. Though the conflict has often been described as a fight between Protestants and Catholics, the conflict has basically been an ethno-nationalist struggle often connected with different economic opportunities. A courageous ecumenical group called Corrymeela Community in Ballycastle, County Antrim, Northern Ireland, has sponsored numerous educational programs to promote understanding and peace. In 1985 Corrymeela invited Rev. Thomas A. Kane, CSP, of Weston School of Theology, Cambridge, Carla De Sola, and four other dancers to lead a Summerfest, a workshop with people “from both sides.” Doug Baker, a leader in the community, wrote a letter dated March 19, 1985, which explained that one day’s theme was to be “Blessed are you who mourn, for you shall be comforted.” The Corrymeela Community thought that dance would be the best way to lead into this theme of remembering pain. They wanted to open up personal bereavement and then consider the political challenges that had led to violence in Northern Ireland. The Corrymeela leaders also wanted dance to the Beatitude “Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of right, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” This would lead into recognizing the people attending who tried to work for reconciliation and who spoke out against violence, and who were often mocked and put down for doing so. The Corrymeela Community requested dance workshops each day (“Letter to Fr. Thomas,” 1985). The closing ceremony with a large “circle of peace” had about 500 people participating. After the week, both newspapers and letters recounted amazement at how much the language of dance had brought healing and unity among these fearful families.

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A Soviet Cosmonaut’s “Best Night”

This essay began with the statement of a Soviet cosmonaut Gregory

Grechko speaking of an experience with the dance of De Sola's company as the best night of his life. De Sola, similar to the cosmonaut, speaks of the "February Fling" with Soviet people as one of the best times in her life. Many people of the U.S. lived in great fear of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. An announcement in the *New York Times* on February 9, 1988, invited people to St. John the Divine Cathedral: "An evening of music and dance, featuring Paul Winter, Paul Halley, the Omega Dance Company, the New York Russian Chorus and Tamir, a Russian actress, is planned tonight at 7:30 p.m. Sponsored by the Center for Soviet American Dialogue, the performance is part of a two-week series of cultural and social events. . . . The Temple of Understanding, an international organization based at the cathedral, will be the host for the evening." (New York Times, 1988).

A poster pictured the onion domes of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow and said, "Join Soviet poets, dancers, actors, cosmonauts, scientists, educators, athletes, politicians, physicians, religious leaders, publishers, military staff, journalists, media reps, television personalities." (Cathedral of St. John the Devine, 1988, Poster). These were people attending the Soviet-American Citizens Summit and all were invited to join them. The evening included a number of musical and dramatic parts including everyone holding candles. The printed program said, "Circle Dance for the Earth. . . . Delegates will dance around the globe. Everyone is invited to participate with gesture or dance." (Cathedral of St. John the Devine, 1988, Program).

After the event the Center for the Soviet-American Dialogue based in Bellevue, WA, sent De Sola a letter of appreciation dated May 20, 1988:

How can we thank you enough for your expertise, the long hours you gave and the true spirit of love you showed in being a citizen diplomat? The Center's staff is overwhelmed with follow-up to the Summit and the activity that has been created by the numerous joint projects. We recently returned from Moscow for joint project follow-up and are getting ready to go again. Our first edition of the "Soviet-American News" will include exciting reports on the Summit and your copy is enclosed. Future issues will cover in-depth articles on "perestroika" and "glasnost", with input from Soviet journalists. We always invite your input and suggestions and are looking forward to working together with you in our future endeavors. (Vernon & Hubbard, 1988)

The newspaper they enclosed had a picture of the dancers with the

earth ball on the first page and the title “Soviets Honored at St. John the Divine Cathedral. Special Edition Soviet-American Citizens’ Summit. A New Way of Thinking: Social Invention for the Third Millennium.” Then the article stated:

One evening, many of the Soviets met at the St. John the Divine Cathedral for an inter-religious service in Celebration of the Third Millennium. The Master of Ceremonies for the evening was the Very Reverend James Morton, Dean of the Cathedral of St. JD. Daniel Anderson of the Temple of Understanding organized the event. The evening was beautifully orchestrated, bringing tears to the eyes when 1,000 people including children and youth lit candles with the Soviets in a gesture of peace and friendship. The high point of the extravaganza was when the earth seemed to float above the heads of the gathering as it floated down the aisle, gracefully choreographed on a moving platform by the Omega Liturgical dance Company. Soviet cosmonaut Gregory Grechko, who has been in outer space three times and for as long as ninety days, was overwhelmed by the experience. “It was the best night of my entire life ... even outer space cannot top that.” (*Soviet-American News*)

Dancing for Peace in the 1990s

De Sola and her husband moved to California in 1990 and she began teaching dance at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley. She earned an MA at the Pacific School of Religion in 1993. She founded Omega West Liturgical Dance Company in the San Francisco Bay area. The company frequently dances in concerts, retreats, churches, and interfaith services. With her extensive experience teaching and creating rituals, she wrote *PeaceRites: Dance and the Art of Making Peace* which was edited by Thomas A. Kane and published by the Pastoral Press in 1993.

De Sola has developed classes in dance and scripture, liturgical dance, sacred dance for healing, women’s spirituality, and PeaceRites. She continues teaching at the G.T.U. in the Center for the Arts, Religion, & Education and at P.S.R. Her workshops and performances have taken her throughout the continental U.S. and Hawaii, as well as to Ireland, Israel, France, Guam, Sweden, Canada, Australia, and Belize. She and Kane collaborated on a film, *Movement Meditations to the Songs of Taize*, which was published by Paulist Press in 1996.

Dr. Doug Adams, who was a professor at Pacific School of Religion, an author, and a major person promoting the revival of dance and the arts in worship and theological studies, wrote a memo on September 3, 1993,

... the earth seemed to float above the heads of the gathering as it floated down the aisle, gracefully choreographed on a moving platform by the Omega Liturgical dance Company

to the faculty, staff, and students of the Dominican School of Theology at the GTU:

With great pleasure, we learned this week that Carla De Sola who teaches at DSPT has been named “the most influential performing artist of the last 20 years” by a nationwide poll conducted by *Modern Liturgy*, the largest circulation magazine in the field of worship. A Juilliard graduate, founder of the Omega Liturgical Dance Company at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine for many years, Carla moved out here to Berkeley and now teaches courses. . . . Her new book (PEACERITES: explorations of how dance and social justice issues engage each other) has just been published by the Pastoral Press. (Adams, 1993)

Then Adams included the text of the award citation:

Modern Liturgy 20th Anniversary BENE Most Influential performing artist Carla De Sola: Carla De Sola is one of America’s pioneers in liturgical dance. She has performed throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. She has encouraged the participation of the liturgical assembly through simple group movement, and she has insisted on quality training and discipline for the individual dancer. Carla De Sola has advanced the art of liturgical dance by encouraging her students to reach the highest standards of dancing while allowing a process of inner discovery for new movement patterns. Her books, articles, and workshops have influenced a whole generation of dancers and non-dancers to explore the spirituality of the body. With an eye not only on ecumenical, but interfaith dialogue, her art embraces peace and justice. She dances on holy ground, always seeking to awaken people to the needs of planet Earth. Such a caring artistry, combined with a deep concern for liturgy, makes Carla De Sola the most influential performing artist of the last 20 years. (Adams, 1993)

“She dances on holy ground, always seeking to awaken people to the needs of planet Earth.”

Assembly Mennonite Church in Goshen, IN, has continuously had a group of dancers. They hosted “Peacemaking in Relationships: A Sacred Dance Worship with Carla De Sola,” October 21-23, 1994. The invitation said that De Sola’s

key insight, that dancing is the opposite of war, is embodied in her long experience as a dancer and master teacher. In an atmosphere of prayer, we will explore our connections with others through movement. ... One does not have to be a 'dancer' to take part in this workshop (Peacemaking in Relationships, 1994).

The Mennonites are one of the historic peace churches like the Religious Society of Friends, called the Quakers, and the Church of the Brethren who hold that Jesus was nonviolent. These traditions suggest that all war is immoral, a failure of the human community. What does De Sola's idea that dancing is the opposite of war mean? Dance connects. Dance connects spirit and body. In dance the awareness of one's material self with its limits and potential connects one with the rest of material creation. Dance connects humans to each other, sometimes through touch, other times through empathy or an invisible union of energy. Dance both uses and generates energy. Dance and war both use energy, but in dance the bodies usually renew each other; in war the bodies often destroy each other. De Sola's book *PeaceRites: Dance and the Art of Making Peace*, came out of extensive teaching and experience. The book is a manual with physical and spiritual exercises leading people to explore inner and outer peacemaking.

Dance connects humans to each other, sometimes through touch, other times through empathy or an invisible union of energy.



Carla De Sola leading people to the Nevada Nuclear Test Site was pictured in *The Las Vegas Review-Journal*. (Photo by Clint Karisen/Review-Journal)

The front page of *The Las Vegas Review-Journal* August 7, 1995, depicted Carla De Sola with her arm raised holding an olive branch and leading people. The caption said, "Carla De Sola of Berkeley, Calif., leads a group of anti-nuclear protestors Sunday to the entrance of the Nevada Nuclear Test Site. The Activists marked the 50th Anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan." Below the picture, the article was titled "Anti-nuclear activists stage protest. Demonstrators converge peacefully at the Nevada Test Site to voice objections to the testing of weapons." Keith Rogers wrote:

More than 184 anti-nuclear activists crossed the Nevada Test Site border on Sunday to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan, and voice their objection to the worldwide nuclear weapons testing. Department of Energy spokesman Darwin Morgan said the 92 women and 92 men were cited for federal trespassing and released. Organizers of the civil disobedience action, hosted by the Nevada Desert Experience, said a group of 350 protesters who rallied after sunrise outside the Mercury entrance to the test site, 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas hailed from at least 26 states and several foreign countries.

Carla De Sola, of Berkeley, Calif., led a string of demonstrators to the cattleguard crossing at 9:40 a.m. The string approached the cattleguard in a serpentine fashion, with most of the demonstrators holding hands or linking arms. Then, after Western Shoshone spiritual leader Corbin Harney shook hands and chatted with Sgt. Wes Fleetwood of the Nye County Sheriff's Department, 184 demonstrators, in groups of mostly three to five people, walked on to the test site to the waiting arms of police who directed them to a fenced-off detainment area. "I told him we're here to do what we've been doing for many years, and we're going to do it peacefully," Harney said, clutching a fan of golden eagle feathers, a symbol of the Shoshone spirit. (Rogers, 1995)

Before this there had been an inter-faith service where Horney explained that the land has belonged to the Shoshone people. He spoke of how the test site was harming the environment. Before the police gave the demonstrators citations saying they had no right to be there, the Shoshones gave demonstrators permits from the Shoshone nation saying the people had a right to be there. The Shoshones are grateful that the demonstrators want to protect their land. The Franciscans, that is the

followers of St. Francis of Assisi, began the prayer vigils and protests at the test site. De Sola was invited by the Franciscans to dance as St. Francis often did. She sees these demonstrations as part of her call to protect God's precious creation.

Deepening Themes in the New Millennium



Struggling with the Minotaur, a symbol of the human shadow, in the dance "Wisdom's Way: A Passion Dance for the Earth" performed by David McCauley and Nona McCaleb. Costumes by McCauley and Minotaur created by Louise Todd Cope. (Photo by Susan Self)

In 2000, the Stewardship of Creation Environmental Ministry of Grace Cathedral and St. Gregory's Episcopal Church invited Carla De Sola to develop a prayer service. "Wisdom's Way: A Passion Dance for the Earth" was first shared June 2, 2000, at St. Gregory's. The program said:

The dance is inspired by the biblical figure of Wisdom, "who in every generation passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets" (Wisdom of Solomon 7:27). Wisdom, present with God from the beginning of time, is resplendent as the Spirit of the Earth. However, humankind, though created in God's image, has broken covenant with God and creation. Viewing the patterns of destruction on earth, Wisdom weeps with the celestial beings. To teach us to avoid further devastation and pillage, she re-imagines the Cretan labyrinth myth, revealing to her children the "tempers of wild animals, the powers of the spirits and the thoughts of human beings." She teaches us to look more closely at even the smallest part of our "shadow" so as not to project our own fears and "demons" onto other people or the Earth. Human survival may now depend on each individual's capacity to come to terms with the shadow so that it no longer be projected onto some other person, group, or nation." Joan Chodorow, *Dance Themes & Depth Psychology* ("Stewardship of Creation," 2000).

The choreography was conceived by Omega West Dance Company and directed by Carla De Sola. The costumes were designed by David McCauley who is not only a fine dancer, but also a sensitive visual artist.

"A Wounded Earth & A Crucified Christ"

Bishop Marc Handley Andrus of the Episcopal Diocese of California invited people to come to Grace Cathedral, April 22, 2011, in these words:

You are invited to a unique event of sacred expression — an interactive service of music, dance, and art exploring the rich meaning found in the conjunction of Good Friday and the observance of International Earth Day. Over the centuries, people of Christian faith have meditated on the life of Jesus and the scope of divine love — Jesus' simple and profoundly powerful acts of including all the dispossessed at the table. Christ is understood to embrace the whole earth within self-

giving love. The service is open to all people seeking to gain spiritual strength for the great work of environmental justice and to all people of faith who feel called to explore this profound moment. (Andrus, 2011)

Invitations explained that the service would include De Sola of Omega West, Sam Jackson's "Vibrant Stillness" Singing Bowls, and the artwork of Mel Ahlborn. Ahlborn is a visual artist and a member of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Orinda, CA. She is the former president of the Episcopal Church and Visual Arts organization. She has collaborated with Carla De Sola for the Earth Day service and also for the creative prayer of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in California in 2011.

Carla De Sola said,

the day began at Livermore Lab doing a dance protesting nuclear weaponry and that was six in the morning and this was an alternate service in the afternoon at Grace Cathedral. I was proud that I was involved in one way with the earth early in the morning. ... a wonderful artist [Mel Ahlborn] created a Jesus made of wires and coated with leaves and an earth ball covered with the same leaves. ... It started with this high image of this figure on a cross near the high altar with dancers lamenting. ... They take the crucifix to take Jesus off the cross and the procession began down the aisle. (De Sola, 2013)

She explained that the mood suggested both Jewish lamentation and Christian-Arabic-Byzantine prayer. Darkness was used to help lead to deep prayer. They moved towards the entrance of the Cathedral where the congregation was encircling the labyrinth. The service was described in *Pacific Church News*:

A contemporary millennial Passion play, *A Wounded Earth & A Crucified Christ* was celebrated at the conjunction of Good Friday and International Earth Day. It is particularly fitting that this service was held in Grace Cathedral. Earth Day was first proclaimed at the 1969 UNESCO Conference held in San Francisco. *A Wounded Earth & A Crucified Christ* was a solemn liturgy exploring the relationship between Christ's self-giving love and humanity's stewardship of the earth. This interactive service was held on the labyrinth of Grace Cathedral on Friday, April 22. Sacred dancers enacted the deposition of the corpus of

Christ from the cross and created a living Pietá in the center of the labyrinth. Scripture readings and prayers that recalled Christ crucified were interlaced with words of Hildegard of Bingen, Teilhard de Chardin, and others. An urgent call for participants to care for creation was especially present in the movements of the sacred dancers, the sound of the indigenous flute, and the tone of the singing bowls. Those gathered joined in singing the Taizé chorus and blessed the symbols of the “Wounded Earth” as sacred dancers passed it around the labyrinth. (Ahlborn, 2011)

Denouncing Weapons, Announcing Resurrection

In an interview about the Good Friday in 2011 when *A Wounded Earth & A Crucified Christ* was shared, De Sola mentioned being at a demonstration against Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. For many years she has designed movement for the annual early morning Good Friday nonviolent protest against Livermore’s role in creating weapons of mass destruction. The traditional Catholic prayer of the Stations of the Cross is the format for stories of persons suffering today. For thirty years Tri-Valley CAREs (Communities Against a Radioactive Environment), the Ecumenical Peace Institute and the Livermore Conversion Project have been educating and protesting. Like prophets of old, De Sola condemns what brings death and she announces what gives hope of new life. For the Holy Saturday Easter Vigil at Holy Spirit Catholic Church in Berkeley, De Sola has choreographed dances expressing resurrected life. Her dances have been important in drawing many people to pray there. Tradition has often poetically spoken of the resurrection of Christ as a leap to new life. Her choreographies celebrate the “Lord of the Dance” (Picclix, 2013; Sacred Dance, 2011).

A major professional organization, the Sacred Dance Guild, acclaimed Carla De Sola a “Living Legacy” in 2008 at the Golden Anniversary Festival, and the Pacific School of Religion gave her the “Distinguished Alumni Award” on January, 27, 2010. Whether her dances are based on biblical ideas, the Canticle of St. Francis, or texts from the mystical writings of the scientist Teilhard de Chardin, De Sola is a contemporary prophet in the current ecological crisis. Like John the Baptist she has been crying in the wilderness for almost half a century. This cry is more important than ever as rain forests burn and glaciers melt. Growing up in the midst of the Cold War, she also persistently dances for peace and invites all to join her. She helped people of Northern Ireland to mourn the violence and resolve to change. She teaches dance for inner peace and outer transformation.

*Like prophets of old,
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Carla De Sola (center) leading movement for the Stations of the Cross, Good Friday prayer and protest against making nuclear weapons, outside of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Livermore, CA. (Photo by Amanda Scarr)

Incarnation means that the spiritual takes flesh. Religious arts participate in the work of incarnation. Theologians reflect on the divine as goodness, truth, and beauty. The arts explore beauty and can be a window to the divine. Pope Francis, in addressing the Brazilian bishops on July 27-28, 2013, said, “Only the beauty of God can attract. God’s way is through enticement, allure.” The Pope explained that God “reawakens in us a desire to call our neighbors in order to make known his beauty. Mission is born precisely from this divine allure, by this amazement born of encounter” (Winters, 2013). De Sola attracts people to the beauty of God. She entices and allures people to compassion, justice, and peace. She has encountered the Holy One and leads others to the divine dance. Blessed is she who dances for justice and peace!

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