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Quote: Sophie Lespinasse-Milan, *Danced spiritual life of Teresa of Avila and current witnesses*, Testimony of fray Michel Laloux, online seminar n°12, Dance and Spirituality/Christianity, International Council of Dance, 22/11/2025.

"Danced spiritual life of Teresa of Avila & Current Witnesses" Friar Michel Laloux, testimony of a Franciscan friar dancer

Who is Teresa of Avila for you? (00'20")

Teresa influenced my religious life, my life before it became a life of consecrated religious, my path of faith.

I started reading her around the age of 10 or 11, then I read her, I reread her... What I loved and what I love very much about Teresa of Avila: she is a free woman, very oriented towards prayer, meditation, who is a master teacher.

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I really enjoyed - and still enjoy - reading or rereading Teresa of Avila in all that she expresses because it seems to me a solid, happy, joyful spirituality... demanding, but joyful. I see parallels with Francis of Assisi too.

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Francis would take a piece of wood and begin scraping it on his left arm and spinning when he was overcome by God's love.

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She too could dance before the Blessed Sacrament with castanets. She wasn't stuck in her body!

Dance and Prayer (01'55")

Maurice Bejart, a choreographer, spent an hour of stillness a day, and Teresa of Avila, of course, as we know, spent several hours of prayer a day: she was still. So stillness and movement go hand in hand.

So let's think about writing: between the words, there are silences.

It's the same with dance; if there is no silence, stillness, there is no movement. Amen!

Aneni, Answer Me (02'40")

Dance

Silence and dance (03'20")

When dance is inhabited, when it is prayed by the dancers, it naturally leads to silence, to interiority, and to stillness, as when we danced during a Eucharist at Chaillot, or when, here, with the Franciscans, at certain moments, we feel a silence after the dance and people don't want to speak because they are in this movement that continues in silence.



It's a bit like when we have just read a poem or when there is a beautiful piece of music, in fact, anything artistic too, often provokes this silence.

There is a kind of integration, an internalization of what has been experienced.

So, moving toward silence, toward movement, from movement to silence, stillness... it's a bit of a back-and-forth.

Kecharitomene, Filled with Grace (04'45")

Dance

What dances do you pray with? (06'10")

I like very calm, very internal dances, but I also like very expressive dances. I just did a sacred dance workshop, which suits me halfway. I like some very slow, very expressive dances, but I also like them to be moving, to be fast, so both.

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This is the whole meaning of Hasidic dances.

Hasidism is the movement that began in 1800 [in the 18th century] with the Baal Shem Tov, the master of the "Good Name," so it's a Jewish movement but one that sought to rediscover joy, and Hasidic dances are very energetic, very bouncy. So it's also important that they be inhabited. Moreover, in these dances, there are often gestures toward the sky. Yes, it's entirely possible, but it must come from there, from deep within, for it to be inhabited and for it to be prayer.

Heya Heya, Acclamation (07'30")

Dance

(08'00") It's a very joyful dance, I was going to say "explosive". It so happens that the first time I danced this dance at the Clarisses Sisters, in Poligny in the Jura, I asked the Abbess: "Don't you think it's too dynamic?" She said : "No, not at all."

For the record, Heya Heya is a dance that I danced in 2004, when my father died. I don't think I was very much into choreography, but in any case it was a very strong moment for me to dance in front of Dad's coffin.

Resistance and obedience (08'45")

It's the inner resistance that I can have, that we can have, in relation to what makes us feel good, and what makes us feel very good!

For me, this was the case with dance. There's a kind of resistance to being drawn to dance, to dancing. This made me question this resistance I might have towards dance, because I asked, "But why?" Because when there's something very powerful that a human being experiences, and if we say "yes" to that, we say "yes" to life and we also take on a responsibility.

Responsibility, that is, not to make a fool of it...



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I have to be faithful to that too. And so, to work on it. It's like a discovered talent. Christ speaks of someone who discovers a talent: they mustn't bury it, because they're actually afraid of its fruitfulness. So it can be strange, or I can say it, "I," I'm afraid of the fruitfulness that I can produce through dance: to accept that I have received something from God around dance and to communicate it.

Confirmation by the friars (10'30")

My question was also about the Franciscans, obviously, about my friars.

It's true that reactions can be very varied: there are friars who are not sensitive to this artistic aspect, to dance, etc.

A moment that really touched me in my life was during a general chapter.

It was the day before the end of the chapter, and the Minister General, so this was happening in Assisi, said to me: "Michael, there's something missing."

I was quite surprised. Then this friar, Michael Perry, said to me: "Something you haven't done, you haven't danced!" So they arranged for me to dance solo, in front of all the Provincials from around the world. It was in Assisi, in the great Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli [Saint Mary of the Angels], so I danced alone.

So afterwards, he said to me: "It was very good Michel, but you could have danced with it too, with the Chasuble being added to the movement." So there you have it, the confirmation that comes at a time when I least expect it, in a context where I least expect it.

Erev Shel Shoshanim, The Evening of Roses (12'00")

Dance

Dancing around the altar (12'45")

Katonti, Little before you (12'50")

Dance

The first time I danced Katonti around the altar was in Brive-la-Gaillarde, in a Franciscan church, and I was amazed at how I felt like I was dancing a different dance, with a different depth than when I danced in a hall.

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Because dancing around an altar or dancing in a church has a very strong influence on the body language. The dance is transformed.

Praying alone and together (14'20")

It's true that it's quite different – even if there are some overlaps – between dancing alone, dancing in a group, or dancing in front of the audience.



Dancing alone can truly be a moment of prayer, even in my room: if there's an icon, and especially with gestures toward heaven, with beautiful music, beautiful choreography. It's a prayer, truly, in its own right, and it can already prepare for a prayer, mobilize the body for prayer, for stillness. That's the first thing, dancing alone.

In a group, whether there are 4, 8, 12, or 20 of us, truly, each other, we can help each other enter into prayer, as we do for a Eucharist or any other moment. We help each other and we pay attention to others, and we pray together. So there's something special about being in a group too. We can help each other in prayer, we support each other.

What I didn't know, it took me a long time to develop this, in relation to an audience. I didn't know that being in an audience, that is, watching and listening to a dance, could also help with prayer. I had experienced what it did to me and then what it did to the group, so this relationship with God that is modified by gestures, but with all the reflections I had about dance, seen and heard by people, I realized that it could touch hearts too.

The greatest praise for me is when someone says: "It helped me with prayer."

Making the gesture: it's something, but also watching it can be a path of prayer, of interiority, of joy, for those who watch it.

Liturgical dance group Dancing God (16'50")

Hagan Habil'adi, Secret garden

Dance

T'Filati, My prayer (Psalm 55)

Dance

Recreations (17'50")

Rabbi Jacob (18'00")

Dance

Hine Ma Tov, It is good to be together, Psalm 132 (18'45")

Dance

You have turned my mourning into a dance, Psalm 29 (19'10")

I had a friend who died of cancer and who, in her will, wanted to include a request, and the request was that I dance around her coffin. So I danced around her coffin. So perhaps there, it wasn't joy that was highlighted but the act of honoring, honoring Monique.

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It was also a word, a danced word, from one artist to another.

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There can also be several of us dancing around the coffin. I did it when Sophie lost her husband, and we both danced together outside.



International Dance Council, official partner of UNESCO
Dance and Spirituality Program, Dance and Christianity Group
Seminar n°12 of November 22nd, 2025
"Danced Spiritual Life of Teresa of Avila and Current Witnesses"
Friar Michel Laloux, testimony of a Franciscan friar dancer
Film directed by Sophie Lespinasse-Milan (21'30")



Kecharitomene, Filled with grace (20'10'')

Dance in the cemetery

It was a very touching, very striking moment.

Like words, the words of God, dance is also consoling, in the sense of softening the separation, softening the departure with beauty...

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...like a bouquet of flowers can visibly remind us that beauty has the last word and that the dead do not have the last word.

Credits (21'00'')

Filming locations:
Saint-Francis convent in Paris
Levallois-Perret cemetery

Friar Michel Laloux was Provincial of the Franciscans
of France and Belgium between 2013 and 2025.

Work by Sophie Lespinasse-Milan,
based on excerpts From a corpus
collected between 2012 and 2025.

Final image (21'20'')

"Danced Spiritual Life of Teresa of Avila & Current Witnesses"
Presented for the first time on November 22, 2025,
during seminar no. 12 of the Dance and Christianity group.

Dance and Spirituality Program
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