

# The Morality of Unmarried Couples Dancing Together

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**Once I had a brother who was in a serious accident.** This brother was in the military and was stationed in Virginia. He decided to visit a friend in New England over a long weekend. He planned to stop by the dormitory where I was going to college in Connecticut on his way back. Visitors weren't allowed to go into the dormitory, so if someone had a visitor, a messenger would be sent to one's room (this being in the days before cell phones). I knew he would only be able to stop by briefly since he had a long drive, and so I didn't want to leave my room so the messenger would find me quickly. During the afternoon, I left to go to the bathroom, and sure enough, when I returned, there was a note on my desk that my brother had stopped in. I rushed down to see if I could still catch him, but he had already left, because he did have a long drive ahead of him from New England to Virginia.

I returned to my room disappointed... but something kept nagging me. I kept thinking, 'what if that was the last time I would ever see him?' I tried to brush the thought off, but I couldn't shake it for some reason. It persisted so much and became so strong that I got very, very worried that I would never see him again. I knelt down in my room and began praying – praying hard for him... My prayer was that he be kept alive...

About six hours later a messenger came to my room to tell me my father was on the phone. I knew what the call was: as I picked up the phone I already knew what my father was about to say; "Your brother was just in a car accident..." I'll return to that story in a moment.

God granted a *certainty*, a *warning*, that something bad was going to happen that night. However, the certainty I have about *another* warning (the topic of today's sermon) is *much* greater. Allow me to read a series of quotes from the Saints regarding this topic, so that hopefully you can arrive at that same certainty.

**St. Charles Borromeo** said that "rarely or almost never does one dance without sin." **Now what is the moral problem he is addressing?** It is dancing between males and females who are not married to each other. Dancing between couples who are married to each other is not what is being addressed, for this is permitted. The problem is dancing between males and females who are not married to each other. Irish step-dancing, modesty being observed, is not a problem – that is *not* what is being addressed here.

**Why is this a problem?** Our Lord said, "Whosoever looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery in his heart." (**Matthew 5:28**) There is such enticement to *start* to look in this way when a man has *any* kind of physical contact with a woman in dancing. *St. Charles Borromeo* addresses this question: "The dance is ingenious for corrupting morals: it is the cause of *bad thoughts, impure expressions, of adulteries, of the most shameful acts of impurity, of quarrels...* it turns many persons from their religious duties, from prayer, holy reading. One cannot go there without *frequently* and *grievously* offending God. Can anyone desire his salvation, and expose himself to so many and so great evils, which are the unhappy fruits of dancing?" **St John Vianney** said, "You keep an eye on their dress; you cannot keep guard over their heart. He knew that a mortal sin of desire can easily be committed in the heart at a dance. He spent 16 hours a day in his confessional; do you think he knew his parishioners' moral life? And this priest, with such experience in the

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confessional said, “The dance... is the rope by which the devil drags the greatest number of souls into the abyss of hell”.

Now, the saints & doctors of the Church opposed dances that were even *more* modest than swing dancing or waltzing today; because the phenomena of men and women ***dancing together in any bodily contact*** was virtually unheard of in public before the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. [MODERN, DANCES by Rt. Rev. Mgr. DON LUIGI SATORI, St. Joseph's Printing Office, Collegeville, Ind. 1910.]

**So in which centuries** has the Church opposed the young dancing together? **St Anthony Mary Claret** who in the pulpit and his writing fought hard to stop the dances in Spain, in his book *The Basket of Moses* **notes that in the first 3 Centuries** the Church didn't have to say anything about dances because the Christians avoided them, being of pagan origin. But after the fourth century, little by little they were introduced among Christians and immediately the ***Ecclesiastical Authority came to prohibit them.***”

**(3<sup>rd</sup> Century) The Church Father Tertullian** said that the devil stopped using idols and temples to lead people from the faith, but the devil uses dances instead. **Origen** tells us that the devil sometimes wars against men by the *sight* of woman; sometimes by the *sound* of her voice; at other times by *touch*; but in the dance ***all*** these arms *combined* are used.

**(4<sup>th</sup> Century) St. Ambrose** opposed dances because “innocence, is destroyed at them.” **St. Ephrem and St. Basil** opposed dancing also, **St. Ephrem** saying, “don't deceive yourselves: you can't serve two masters at once.” **Council of Laodicea** spoke out against dancing.

**(5<sup>th</sup> Century) St. Augustine** said, “It is better to till the earth on Sunday than to dance.” **St. John Chrysostom** of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century joined this opposition also.

**(6<sup>th</sup> Century) Council of Toledo**, 589, abolished dancing on festival days (the only days people danced in those days).

**(7<sup>th</sup> Century) The Sixth Council of Constantinople**, 681 A.D. – Canon 62: “***Public dances are prohibited under pain of excommunication.***” (Council of **Trullo** in 692 also abolished public dances). **St. Eloi** of Noyon in the same century also excommunicated dancers.

**(9<sup>th</sup> Century) Council of Rome**, 826, condemned the practice also.

**(15<sup>th</sup> Century) St. Anthony of Florence** wrote at length that the devil uses dancers of both sexes in order to attack and seduce the servants of God.

**(16<sup>th</sup> Century) The Council of Trent** condemned dancing no less than bad books and bad songs. It also warned clerics about attending dances (in Sess. 22, On Reformation, Ch. 2).

**(16<sup>th</sup> Century) St. Robert Bellarmine** said, “A young man cannot dance with a young woman without feeling the sparks of an *impure* flame. If adultery and fornication are sins, the dance must be so since it leads to them.”

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(17<sup>th</sup> Century) St. Frances de Sales, well-known for his goodness and gentleness, stated: “Because of the circumstances surrounding dances, it is so propitious to *evil* that souls run the *greatest risks* at them...

(18<sup>th</sup> Century) Pope, Benedict XIV records the unanimous consent of the theologians that the Fathers of the Church held dancing for the most part to be an occasion of sin. (*Inst. Eccles.* 76, N. 5)

(19<sup>th</sup> Century) The Tenth Council of Baltimore issued *a Pastoral Letter telling people to avoid waltzes*, where the occasion of sin is increasingly frequent. Experience and reason [say that] even when contained within the limits of modesty, *[this type of diversion] always engenders more or less danger to Christian souls*. ‘He that loveth danger shall perish in it,’ (Ecclesiasticus 3:27)

The Second Plenary Council of Baltimore (1868) in its 472d decree said, “*Let priests teach parents particularly of how grievous a judgment they become guilty if they expose their young sons and daughters to the danger of losing purity, and innocence of mind by allowing them to be thus entrapped in the snares of the devil.*”

Soon after the council, Archbishop Spaulding enacted the following statute: "As the Fathers of the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore wholly condemned those dances which are commonly called **Waltzes** and round dances, we decree that they are not to be taught nor to be tolerated in the colleges, academies and schools of the diocese, **even for the sake of recreation among persons of the same sex.**"

**Ecclesiasticus 9:4** “Use not much the company of her that is a dancer, and do not listen to her, lest thou perish by the force of her charms.”

What’s the latest official word from the Church?

(20<sup>th</sup> Century) Sacred Consistorial Congregation, March 31, 1916, in A.A.S., 8 (1916), p. 149.

A decree of the Sacred Consistorial Congregation, **March 31, 1916**, which specifically mentions that this was a problem in the United States and *forbade dances to be given even for Church purposes*. For this reason, with the approval of Benedict XV, it decreed that all priests and other clerics are absolutely forbidden to promote and favor dances, even though they be held to aid pious works or for some other holy purpose. Moreover, all clerics are forbidden to attend such dances, should they be given by lay people. <http://www.vatican.va/archive/aas/documents/AAS-08-1916-ocr.pdf>

A later clarification, dated **December 10, 1917**, again approved by the Pope, states that even dances given in the daytime or not protracted to a late hour, *are* included in the condemnation. AAS, X (1918), 17; cf. *Canon Law Digest*, I, 137-38. <http://www.vatican.va/archive/aas/documents/AAS-10-1918-ocr.pdf>

The 1-3<sup>rd</sup> Century, the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, the 6<sup>th</sup>, the 7<sup>th</sup>, the 9<sup>th</sup>, the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries: Councils, Saints, Popes, Doctors of the Church, from both the East and the West; from Africa, Europe and Asia – Can we see that the position that holding dances, for the danger to the unmarried youth, is immoral has been held by Ecclesiastical Authority, Doctors of the Church, and Saints, in every century that the Church has existed? This means the position *hasn’t changed* depending on culture or time. If we *do* find priests who allow the unmarried to dance with each other, we should conclude that they are unaware of the teaching of the Church in this area. To remedy this, a few years ago the District Superior of the Fraternity of

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St Peter sent the information about the Vatican's forgotten decree to every priest in the North American District of the Fraternity.

If you still support the unmarried dancing with each other, with which saints, Councils or Doctors of the Church that I quoted do you disagree? If one *doesn't* see it, can't one at least say, "Okay, Father, I still don't get it, but I'll go along, because either *all* these saints, Doctors and Councils throughout *every century* of the Church are wrong, or *I'm* wrong?" Even if every Catholic in the world *today* were in favor of it, because "morals have changed", do we realize what a tiny part of the history of the Church the church *today* is? What I find disturbing is when one hears this information and disregards it, spreading a lie that, "That's just Father's opinion." If you are spreading that lie, please stop killing the souls of *my* parishioners.

**Consider this:** do people with whom you work seem to constantly turn conversation and jokes into matters that are impure? In the times wherein the saints I have cited were writing, people *didn't* constantly turn conversations into matters that were impure, yet the saints warned against dancing because it would turn tempt people with impure thoughts. How much *more* in *today's* world when impurity is *so much more* on people's minds and words than in times past should we avoid *adding more* occasions of temptation? Men, I ask you, do have a perfect handle on purity – do you get temptations, especially how people dress in the *summer*? Then what do we think will happen when a youth is *touching* one in a dance?

I'm not interested in winning a popularity contest. I **am** interested in getting you to heaven. This may sound so counter-cultural, but remember the Vatican mentioned specifically that this was a problem in the U.S. – in other words, ***we are living in the problem country***. But by holding the correct moral position, we put do ourselves in line with every other good Catholic that has lived everywhere in EVERY past century.

**One more story:** when Moses came down Mt. Sinai with the 10 Commandments, freshly carved by the hand of God, he saw ***two things*** that made him *so* angry that he smashed the stone tablets on which God had written the Commandments. Everyone remembers the *first* thing that made him angry, the golden calf: few know about the *second* thing that made him so angry. **Exodus 32:19** tells us: "When [Moses] came near to the camp, he saw the calf, ***and the dances***: and being very angry, he threw the tables out of his hand, and broke them at the foot of the mount."

**Let's return to the story of the car accident.** A State Trooper showed up to the scene of the accident. He found my brother outside the car – he was alive and unhurt. The Trooper took one look at the car and the first thing he said to my brother was, "Do you believe in miracles?" He said, "You should, because, you should be dead right." My brother himself says that he owes his life to the fact that someone corresponded to a grace to pray and to *act* when he knew something bad was going to happen. *Thanks* be to God someone was given a warning that something bad was going to happen, and *did* something about it. Just because we pray doesn't mean we can tempt God by putting ourselves *into* the danger of sin, which dances are; a danger worse than any car accident. A warning prevented a person's death. The ***Church*** in *every century* has given us a warning regarding unmarried males and females dancing together. What are *we* going to do about it?