

Recreation: for the health of the soul: There is a virtue that St Thomas calls *eutropelia*: the virtue of *right* recreation (*Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae q. 168 a. 2). Recreation should re-create us – restore us to where we can accomplish our spiritual and temporal duties: this is its purpose. Note that the virtue regards *right* recreation – there can be ‘recreation’ (entertainment) that is not right.

In the following quotes, one should note that what is largely being addressed is dancing between males and females who are not married to each other. Cultural folk dancing, modesty being observed, is not what is being addressed here. Dancing between married couples is not what is being addressed, for this is permitted.

Here is what the Saints and the Church have said regarding dancing.

The First Plenary Council of Baltimore (1852) protests against round dances especially, because they are ‘highly indecent’.

2nd Plenary Council of Baltimore Pastoral Letter (1866):

Section X – The Laity

“In this connection, we consider it to be our duty to warn our people against those amusements which may easily become to them an occasion of sin, and especially against **those fashionable dances**, which, as at present carried on, are revolting to every feeling of delicacy and propriety, and are fraught with the greatest danger to morals.”

The Second Plenary Council of Baltimore (1868) says: "We consider it to be our duty to warn our people against those amusements which may easily become to them an occasion of sin, and especially against those **fashionable dances**, which, as at present carried on, are revolting to every feeling of decency and propriety, and are fraught with the greatest dangers to morals." And to all those priests who have the care of souls, the same council, in its 472d decree, says: "Let them **ATTACK** and **BOLDLY** condemn immodest dances, which are becoming more and more common every day. Let them admonish the faithful how much they sin. not only against God, but against society, against their families and against themselves, who take part in these dances or at least seem to countenance them by their presence. Let them 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."

This is the literal translation from the Latin text.

https://archive.org/details/conciliiplenarii00cath_0/page/n6

Soon after the council, Archbishop Martin John Spalding enacted in the Diocesan Synod the following statute: "As the Fathers of the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore, in their pastoral letter to the people, 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.**"

The Council of Trent warned clerics about attending dances (Sess. 22, *On Reformation*, Ch. 2).

The Tenth Council of Baltimore issued a Pastoral Letter in which it stated, "We judge that it falls to our pastoral mission to warn you once again to avoid the new kind of dances, where the occasion of sin is increasingly frequent. This whole type of diversion is all the more dangerous to the degree it is considered innocent and persons fling themselves into it as if they did not profess our Religion. Notwithstanding Divine Revelation and ancient wisdom, experience and reason themselves clamor in unison warning against this type of diversion which, even when contained within the limits of modesty, always engenders more or less danger to Christian souls.

"We cannot escape grievous transgressions unless by vigilance in avoiding the occasions of sin, for 'he that loveth danger shall perish in it,' (Ecclesiasticus 3:27) and 'he that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little.'" (Ecclesiasticus 19:1)

The Sixth Council of Constantinople, 681: Canon 62 "Public dances are prohibited under pain of excommunication." (This has changed, but note how the Church used to be this vigilant.)

The Vatican's 1916 Prohibition on Dances:

In 1916, the Vatican issued a prohibition against events whose chief entertainment was dancing. The following is a New York Times article about the prohibition. When asked by American bishops if that prohibition still applied for dances held in the daytime, at church picnics, the Vatican replied in the affirmative that the prohibition still held for such dances.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1916/06/16/archives/popes-dancing-ban-sent-to-churches-cardinal-farcy-issues-decree.html>

Here are the original documents from the Vatican, still accessible on the Vatican's website:

The following are the original documents referred to by the New York Times, from the official acts of the Vatican, the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, from Vatican website:

Sacred Consistorial Congregation, March 31, 1916, in A.A.S., 8 (1916), p. 149.

The Third Plenary Council of Baltimore," in the chapter "*De modis prohibitis pecunias ad pias causas colligendi*," repeated the warning of its predecessor; laid down certain rules to correct abuses connected with picnics, excursions, and fairs, conducted to raise money; and then briefly absolved the matter of dancing with this

strong precept: "*Mandamus quoque ut sacerdotes illum abusum, quo convivia parantur cum choreis (Balls) ad opera pia promovenda, omnino tollendum curent.*"

A decree of the Sacred Consistorial Congregation, March 31, 1916,¹⁰⁰ tells how dances "for pious purposes" began in the United States, how it gradually came about that pastors themselves organized them, how the Council of Baltimore, noting the abuses likely to be connected with dances that go far into the night, had forbidden such dances to be given for Church purposes. The Congregation notes that the abuses condemned by Baltimore have again crept into the United States and have even spread to Canada; it is therefore the purpose of the present decree to insist that the prohibition of the Council of Baltimore be upheld. For this reason, with the approval of Benedict XV, it is decreed that all priests, whether secular or regular, and other clerics are absolutely forbidden to promote and favor the above-mentioned 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.

To clear up a doubt created by this decree, the Congregation was asked: "Are dances given in the daytime, or at night but not protracted to a late hour, or not accompanied by a dinner, but conducted in the manner commonly called a picnic, included in the condemnation of March 31, 1916?" The reply, dated December 10, 1917,¹⁰¹ and again approved by the Pope, states that such dances are included in the condemnation. Clerics, therefore, are forbidden to promote or sponsor them, even in the circumstances mentioned, and they are forbidden to attend them if they are promoted by others.

⁹⁹ *Acta et decreta*, η. 290.

¹⁰⁰ AAS, VIII (1916), 147-149. The text of the mandatory section is as follows: "... *sacerdotes quoslibet sive saeculares sive regulares aliosque clericos prorsus prohiben, quominus memoratas choreas promoveant et foveant, etiamsi in piorum operum levamenet subsidium, vel ad alium quemlibet pium finem; et insuper clericos omnes vetari, quominus hisce choreis intersint, si forte a laicis viris promoveantur.*

¹⁰¹ AAS, X (1918), 17; cf. *Canon Law Digest*, I, 137-38.

See the original in the official Acts of the Holy See, the *Acta*, online:

<http://www.vatican.va/archive/aas/documents/AAS-08-1916-ocr.pdf>

The 1917 response:

<http://www.vatican.va/archive/aas/documents/AAS-10-1918-ocr.pdf>

Ecclesiasticus 9:4 "Use not much the company of her that is a dancer, and hearken not to her, lest thou perish by the force of her charms."

MODERN DANCES UNKNOWN TO THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH AND ANCIENT THEOLOGIANs

The saintly Fathers of the Church, as well as the theologians who wrote on dancing previous to the beginning of the nineteenth century, were not aware of the abomination of the modern dances and had in mind only square dances which did not demand bodily contact between the sexes, and they thought that such dances could possibly be performed without sin, though they were dangerous.

The Saints on Dancing

Benedict XIV., A.D., 1758, records the unanimous sentiment of theologians, which is that the saintly Fathers speak of those dances as leading to and involving sin. (Inst. 76, No. 3)

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... I have the same opinion of dances, Philothea! that physicians have of mushrooms; as the best of them, in their opinion are good for nothing, so I tell you, the best balls are good for nothing... Although balls and dancing be recreations of their own nature indifferent, yet on account of the manner in which they are generally conducted, they preponderate very much on the side of evil, and are consequently extremely dangerous.” (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, III, 32, 33).

St. Charles Borromeo says that “rarely or almost never does one dance without sin.”

St. John Marie Vianney, the Holy Cure of Ars, said: “The dance is the means the Devil uses to destroy the innocence of at least three-quarters of our youth. How many girls - because of dances - lost their reputation, their Heaven and their God!”

St. Anthony Marie Claret, who in the pulpit and his writing fought hard to stop the balls in Spain, in his book *The Basket of Moses* affirmed, “The Devil invented balls for girls to be lost, and extended them throughout the world like an immense net in order to catch the young people and submit them to his tyrannical domination... The truth is that dances are of pagan origin - and as for those practiced today [i.e., the 1800s] - only the Devil could have invented them for the corruption of youth. In the first three centuries of our era, the persecutions and the opposition of the Church to all things that came from Paganism were obstacles against the use of the balls among the faithful. But after the fourth century, little by little they were introduced among Christians and immediately the Ecclesiastical Authority came to prohibit them.”

St. Augustine says, "it is better to till the earth upon Sunday than to dance.”

Fr. Remigio Vilarino of the Society of Jesus even had the opinion published in an article in 1916 that: “*Balls are gravely sinful and illicit* because the way of dancing strongly incites one to sin.” (*American Ecclesiastical Review*, Vol. 27, Issue 2)

Catholic Authorities.— Pope, Benedict XIV, says: (*Inst. Eccles.* 76, N. 5) "On account of the manner in which it is now carried on, dancing is scarcely to be permitted, as for the most part it is the occasion of sin.”

St. Ambrose wrote, "Let mothers who love chastity and modesty, give to their daughters lessons of religion and not lessons of dancing. And you, O men, who pride yourselves upon your gravity and prudence, learn to detest those abominable places of resort, and shun those who frequent them." The same Holy Father calls the dance, "the choir of iniquities, the destruction of innocence, and the grave of modesty."

Origen tells us that the devil sometimes wars against men by the sight of woman; sometimes by the siren sound of her voice; at other times by the voluptuous touch; but in the dance she uses all these arms combined.

SQUARE DANCES.

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 17th Century. [MODERN, DANCES by Rt. Rev. Mgr. DON LUIGI SATORI, St. Joseph's Printing Office, Collegeville, Ind. 1910.]

Modern square dances are no longer left as a refuge for the more modest dancers. Young men and young women are eager for the pleasure of the sexual contact. For this reason the Waltz is inseparably wedded to the quadrille. If one speaks against dances he will be told that square dances are allowed, and that "all the societies have them." Only an indecent girl or young man would give utterance to such words.

Modern square dances contain a great deal of the indelicate French dance of the eighteenth century, called the "Branle," consisting of several persons joining hands, leaping in circles and keeping each other in continual motion. Though it was not our intention, as we have said, to quote modern theologians, we cannot refrain from quoting Bouvier, Gury, Sabetti and Genicot, all theologians of recognized ability in the Roman Catholic Church. They all teach that round dancing should not be permitted. The weight of their authority may carry conviction to some who have charge of souls, especially Roman Catholic clergymen.

Bouvier says: *Interesse choreis graviter "inbonestis ratione nuditatum, modi saltandi, verborum, "cantuum, gestuum est peccatum mortale: hinc "saltatio germanica, vulgo dicta 'Walse,' numquam "permitti potest ."*

The translation: "To be present at balls seriously "indecent by immodest dress, manner of "dancing, words, songs, jests is a mortal sin: "hence the German dance, vulgarly called Waltz, can never be permitted." (J. B. Bouvier, Edit. 3 Mechelin iuxta 7 Ed. Cenomanensem. Cap. iv. art. iii. iii., 1 page, 91.)

Gury, speaking of modern dances, says: " *Chorae "inbonestae ratione nuditatum, modi saltandi, verborum, "gestuum, cantuum, sunt semper graviter "illicitae ut patet. Inter illas autem a pluribus "recensentur saltationes recentiores quae gallice "dicuntur: la Walse, la Polka, le Galop, et aliae istis "similes ."*

The translation: "It is evident that indecent "balls by reason of immodest dress or of the manner of dancing, words, jests, songs are always "grievously illicit. Amongst such according to "many theologians must be numbered the modern "dances called in French, la Walse, la Palka, le "Galop and others of the same kind." (Gury I., No. 242. II. Ratisbona Edit. 4, 1868.)

MODERN, DANCES BY Rt. Rev. Mgr. DON LUIGI SATORI.

St. Joseph's Printing Office, Collegville, Ind. 1910.

NIHIL OBSTAT AUGUST SEIFERT, C. PP. S. Censor Deputatus.

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<http://archive.org/stream/danceman208/danceman208.txt>

The Church on Dancing, through the Centuries

(3rd 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.

(4th Century) **St. Ambrose** wrote, "Let mothers who love chastity and modesty, give to their daughters lessons of religion and *not* lessons of *dancing*. And you, O men, who pride yourselves upon your gravity and prudence, learn to shun those who go to them." 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."

(4th Century) **Council of Laodicea** spoke out against dancing.

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

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

(7th 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.

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

(15th Century) St. Anthony of Florence said that love of dancing is inspired by the devil, and that the devil uses dancers of both sexes in order to attack and seduce the servants of God.

(16th 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).

(16th 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.”

(17th 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...

(18th 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)

(19th Century) St. John Marie Vianney, the Holy Cure of Ars, said: “The dance is the means the Devil uses to destroy the innocence of at least three-quarters of our youth. How many girls - because of dances - lost their reputation, their Heaven and their God!”

(19th Century) St. Anthony Marie Claret, who in the pulpit and his writing fought hard to stop the dances in Spain, in his book *The Basket of Moses* affirmed, “The Devil invented dances for girls to be lost, and extended them throughout the world like an immense net in order to catch the young people and submit them to his tyrannical domination... The truth is that dances are of pagan origin - and as for those practiced today [i.e., the 1800s] - only the Devil could have invented them for the corruption of youth. In the first three centuries of our era, the persecutions and the opposition of the Church to all things that came from Paganism were obstacles against the use of the dances among the faithful. But after the fourth century, little by little they were introduced among Christians and immediately the *Ecclesiastical Authority came to prohibit them.*”

(19th Century) The Tenth Council of Baltimore issued a Pastoral Letter in which it stated, “We judge that it falls to our pastoral mission to warn you once again to avoid the new kind of dances [i.e. 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**)

Finally, in the **20th Century** we have the 1916 documents issued by the Vatican referenced above.