***DANCING*** *WITH GOD* ***THROUGH THE ARTS***

**Part One - Nature**

In the last part, Introduction, I began with a quote from Genesis, Chapter Two, Verse One. The emphasis was that God *rested* from all the work God had undertaken. God was exhausted! The biblical writers uses anthropomorphism a lot, like exhausted, angry, repented, and so forth. The Yahwist authors are known for their almost exaggerated anthropomorphism in describing God’s feelings. I feel justified in using the word “dancing” with God, since I believe that God wants to dance with us. God *desires* such a close relationship with us and wants to dance with us through creation in everything we do.

In John’s gospel, Chapter 14, Verse 23, “…and we will come to him/her and make our dwelling with him/her.” NJBC notes that “There is no longer any separation of the believers from God/Jesus, so they need not lookto *heavenly habitations* to experience salvation in the presence of God!” This intimate relationship with God means that whatever we do God and Jesus are also along for the ride to experience what we experience from within! But it is also more than this intimate relationship since God can still experience (God’s) creation from without, or however one might imagine the unlimited experiences of God, like dancing.

Dancing can mean more than just bodily movement in the context that I have presented here as “dancing through the arts.” I mean with all our senses as we experience life through our body, mind, spirit, whether separate or together, as in the experience of an opera with music, singing, dancing, costumes, stage sets, etc. I also will show that dancing with God can be outside of what we usually call the arts, like math, nature, and birdwatching, just to name a few!

Let me begin with something simple in this **Part One -** **Nature**. Professor Yoshifumi Miyazaki recently wrote a book about a program called *Go Back To Nature With The Japanese Way of shinrin-yoku*, in his book titled, “Walking in the Woods.” “*shinrin-yoku*” is Japanese for ‘forest-bathing’, which means to immerse yourself in the atmosphere of the forest, similar to ‘sun-bathing’ or ‘sea bathing.’ You don’t literally take a bath, but you do bathe in the environment of the forest using all your senses to experience nature up close.

Professor Miyazaki offers a guide to the practice of forest bathing and the science behind it that reveals the healing powers of trees. When the phrase was first coined, the idea was more of a marketing exercise to attract people to the many beautiful forests of Japan. Since then Professor Miyazaki and a number of other scientists in Japan and other countries around the world have begun to study the physiological and psychological effects of nature on human health and wellbeing.

A close-up of some plants

Description automatically generated with low confidenceStress and stress-related diseases have become a burden to modern society and attention is turning to the forests and the natural world, an environment familiar to us for millions of years, to offer a solution. Nature therapies are a new concept that use a preventative approach to lower stress levels, improve quality of life and potentially reduce the cost and strain on health services that stress -related illnesses cause.

This is interesting coming from a country known for their workaholic culture beginning early in life with education. On the other hand, Zen Buddhism is the national religion of Japan which involves serious time for meditation. Several of their cultural ceremonies that are well known around the world lend themselves well to a simple Zen focus of action, like “*Ikebana*” - the art of flower arrangement, “*Cha-no-yu*” – tea ceremony. I am not surprised that a walk in the forest would become a Zen Buddhist prayerful act that is now backed by the scientific research of Professor Miyazaki to be quite medicinal.

A meditative walk through the woods with God could be pictured as a slow dance as between two lovers. To the Japanese, is would certainly be an art similar to that of “*Tai chi”* even though it is Chinese.

You are probably wondering why I started with *Nature* when the title mentions “Arts”? There are several reasons, the first is that ancient humans certainly developed the arts from living in nature, beginning with basic appreciation of all that is around them from plants, animals, even rock formation. Certainly, being aware of nature was part of their survival, especially when they couldn’t afford to get lost, but also noticing food sources besides meat or fish. The rock drawings in ancient places testify to the fact that early humans began with a primitive reproduction of what they saw.

As mentioned above, the natural world has been an environment familiar to us for millions of years, so not surprising that early representations of what they saw and even what they heard, like bird calls, were reproduced to some extent. My intent is to start with nature and move inwards. That is why I have included the art of mathematics. So let us move to birdwatching.