

# ‘COME PLAY WITH ME’

## Exploring New Frontiers of Body Wisdom

*Prashant Olalekar*

WHILE DOING DOCTORAL STUDIES on the spirituality of peace at Berkeley, California, in 2004, I was seeking for new avenues in holistic spirituality that would enrich my ministry as a Jesuit. At the first session of an orientation retreat before the start of my course, I was asked to choose a card suggesting the theme for my retreat. I was pleasantly surprised that the theme that came up for me was ‘God knows only four words: “Come dance with Me”’. This quotation from the Sufi poet Hafiz turned out to be not only the personal theme for my retreat but also a divine invitation to participate as a co-creator in the cosmic dance.

### ***InterPlay: Unlocking Body Wisdom***

During my stay at Berkeley I was extremely fortunate to be introduced to the InterPlay movement.<sup>1</sup> InterPlay, which was founded in 1989 in the USA by Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter, is a spiritual practice to unlock our body wisdom. It is *InterPlay* because it provides a shift from individualistic tendencies to our innate desire to lead wholesome lives in connection with each other and the wider universe. One could say, ‘To play is to InterPlay’, taking a cue from the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, who writes, highlighting our interconnectedness, “‘To be’ is to inter-be”.<sup>2</sup>

InterPlay is about play as a creative process for personal and communitarian transformation. It is very different from the adversarial, consumerist and commercial type of play represented by computer games and competitive sport. Instead of revolving around winning or losing, InterPlay functions within a win-win framework, fostering creative collaboration and co-creation. It advocates playing for fun rather than profit, playing for peace within the global family as an antidote to war

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.interplay.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* (New York: Bantam, 1991), 96.



games. Through InterPlay one discovers that play and music, dance and drama are not the monopoly of privileged, elite performers but are the birthright of everyone who has been freely gifted with a body. The improvised songs and movements contrast starkly with the choreographed performances of Bollywood idols and Western pop stars. People of all ages and sizes, including those with various disabilities and illnesses, can benefit immensely from it.

Like yoga, InterPlay aims at the integration of body, mind, heart and spirit, but it does not entail any intricate poses or intense discipline. Powerful, practical ideas and a system of simple activities rooted in movement, storytelling, song and stillness offer access to our own 'body wisdom'—what works best for us, what kindles our own life passion and mission. A workshop could start with simple activities such as an easy-going warm up, followed by the InterPlay form called 'Walk Stop Run', which uses basic daily movements to prepare the body gradually to give greater expression to the energy locked up within. Another good starter is the form called 'Babbling', which activates the right brain through free expression in gibberish or a made-up language. 'Playing with Sounds' is an InterPlay form involving improvised singing. Stillness, as a privileged state for noticing inner movements, also has a key role. An environment is created in which to listen and give space to the inner voice. Words, sound, story, movement and stillness eventually lead up to the improvised 'Full

Body Story' form, which can be an energetic, passionate communication of the truth of a lifetime, or of where one is in the present moment. Both the witnesses and the storyteller are often amazed at what emerges, as the body never lies.

Improvisation is a major part of InterPlay. When the voice and the body are free to be spontaneous, self-consciousness gives way to self-awareness—an awareness of each part of the body, its connections to other bodies and its relation to the wider body of the universe. We gradually develop the art of letting go, helping us to find the God of surprises in all things. Spontaneity stimulates the natural urge to be playful and creative, resulting in the unalloyed joy of childlike play, akin to heavenly bliss.

### ***Building up the Body of Christ***

When we move freely our true self is revealed. Play can reveal whether we are competitive or cooperative, coercive or compassionate. But there are blocks and biases that impede the free movement of the body, in worship and in many other areas of life, because it makes us vulnerable. Cynthia Winton-Henry, who has taught InterPlay for 25 years, including at a multi-denominational seminary, says: 'Death is a scary word. But here are the words that really, really scare people: Play. Body. Dance. Feel. Touch.'<sup>3</sup> These words scare us to death because, like the reality of death, they call us to let go and let God take over.

Like education in most places, theology and spirituality tend to emphasize head-level knowledge. In many cultures people have become accustomed through the socialisation process, whether religious or secular, to look at their bodies with suspicion. We have been trained to trust the mind and distrust the body. The mind is considered as separate from the body and superior to it. The ongoing conflict between our bodies and minds results in a lot of stress. Resistance to freedom of movement and the sensuality of the body confirms that much of our spirituality is still plagued by dualism. Thanks to the post-Vatican II renewal there have been several significant attempts to develop spiritualities which are more integrated and holistic. However, centuries of patriarchal conditioning and dualistic thinking cannot be expunged overnight.

Unbalanced lifestyles, unhealthy work habits and consumption of junk food are indicators of a negative attitude to the body. No wonder our bodies protest through pains and illnesses, and may eventually break

<sup>3</sup> Cynthia Winton-Henry with Phil Porter, *What the Body Wants* (Kelowna: Northstone, 2004), 21.

down. Lack of respect and reverence for the body can lead to the abuse of ourselves, others and creation too. Too often our approach not only to our own bodies but also to other human bodies and the body of the universe is one of domination and violence. Is it not strange that in our spiritual explorations we seek for God in all things except in our own body, our true home, which remains largely unexplored territory?

Devaluing or degrading the body is an insult to the incarnation. Jesus is the Word made Flesh (John 1: 14). He is the enfleshed, embodied sacrament of God. In Jesus Christ the human and divine are inseparably interconnected. In his person we see the harmonious interplay of human and divine. In Jesus, God fully embraced humanity, taking on human flesh and indicating its sanctity. Jesus chose to be remembered through the eucharistic embrace of his body and blood. Not only were Jesus' birth and death full, bodily experiences, but even his resurrection was a bodily experience. It is significant that in his post-resurrection encounters the common message was 'Peace be with you!'. One of the most evocative images of Church is the Body of Christ. Embodiment is so central to our faith that when we honour the bodies of the poor by feeding and clothing them we are honouring Jesus (Matthew 25:31–46).

By giving importance to the human body, InterPlay takes the incarnation seriously. It reminds us that we are temples of the Holy Spirit, created in the image and likeness of God. The body is treated as a friend to be embraced and not a foe to be fought against. Trusting and befriending the body serves to make us more fruitful sacraments for God's greater glory. A stressful lifestyle gradually gives way to more graceful and grateful living. InterPlay helps to build joyful communities because it bonds people together in simple yet amazing ways. It breaks through individualism to foster equality and collaboration. It is a creative tool to promote active participation, healthy interaction and interdependence among all members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

***InterPlay takes the incarnation seriously***

### ***Movement Meditation***

On returning to India in 2006 after my studies, I developed a new approach to InterPlay called 'Movement Meditation', which integrates it with Eastern spiritual practices. Movement Meditation serves to ground InterPlay more firmly by deepening insights evoked through apparently simple forms. For instance, in an adaptation of 'Walk Stop Run', participants are guided to imagine that they are in turn birds, trees, fish or animals. The various movements are interspersed with prolonged moments of stillness. Participants are often surprised at the absence of distractions

and the ease with which they can dwell in the present moment. Some feel transported momentarily into another world. They experience a deep sense of oneness with the universe and feel an integral part of the cosmic dance of life—‘in the stillness is the dance’. Stimulating the creative imagination gives this awareness a mystical quality of its own. The session usually concludes with the relaxing ‘One Hand Dance’ and a deep, quieting meditation that facilitates union with the divine.

In Movement Meditation the focus is on awareness in movement and stillness. Simple techniques of awareness of breath, sound and bodily sensations lead to greater centring and heightened sensitivity to inner movements. Appropriate physical movements, when combined with these static forms of meditation, can make the whole experience more meaningful and rewarding. Mindfulness, deep relaxation, creative visualization and cosmic awareness also enhance the meditative effect. The prayer experience is deepened through embodiment so that we learn to walk on earth, smell the flowers, breathe the fresh air, sip the water and taste the food mindfully in daily life. We acquire the art of being present in the sacrament of the moment. We can thus taste and relish the extraordinary in the ordinary, which is a true encounter with the divine.

Movement Meditation, like InterPlay, is not a therapy, but it can be helpful to people suffering from illnesses such as depression, chronic pain and even cancer. In intercultural global communities it can also be a small but significant tool for the healing of a wounded world. Bishops, priests, seminarians, religious, social workers, entrepreneurs, corporate personnel, teachers, students, therapists and others who are hungering for new forms of spiritual practice to meet the challenges of our times, have participated in InterPlay workshops and Movement Meditation retreats ranging from three hours to eight days. Moreover people from a great variety of marginalised groups, such as ethnic minorities, women in sex work, transgendered people, victims of domestic violence and human trafficking, slum-dwellers, street children, multiple sclerosis and cancer patients, deaf and mute, the mentally challenged and differently abled have also participated enthusiastically in sessions designed specially to suit their needs.

### ***Converging Traditions on the Wisdom of Dance and Play***

Explorations into InterPlay and Movement Meditation have provided me with entry points into the elements of dance and play that are deeply rooted in a variety of traditions. In searching for these roots in my own Indian culture I have discovered links with the rich Indian tradition of

Nataraja, who is worshipped among South Indian Hindus as the Lord of the dancers, who dances the cosmos into being. During the dance of Shiva Nataraja, in a divine movement of integration, the dancer becomes the cosmic dancer and the dance.

The place of the dance is the center of the universe—in the heart of every human being. Shiva dances the world out of delight, out of the joy in the dance itself, out of the overflow of his energies .... He is the dancer, he is the dance, and what the dance dances is he himself.<sup>4</sup>

Christian theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann and Raimon Panikkar view the Trinity as engaged in an eternal *perichoresis*, a permanent dance of love and peace which we are invited and empowered to join. As Daniel O’Leary says, ‘To understand God as Spirit is to know oneself as invited into the dance between the Father and Son’.<sup>5</sup> Reflecting on this relational image of the Trinity as dance Catherine LaCugna writes:

There are neither leaders nor followers in the divine dance, only an eternal movement of reciprocal giving and receiving, giving again and receiving again .... The divine dance is fully personal and interpersonal, expressing the essence and unity of God.<sup>6</sup>

During the InterPlay form ‘Lead and Follow’ there comes a stage, called ‘ecstatic following’, when one is not sure who is leading and who is following, and there seems to be another mysterious force, the Spirit, that comes into play. Francis Gonsalves, a creative Indian theologian, uses as an experiential and embodied trinitarian symbol the *naach/nu*, a tribal dance from south Gujarat which involves the whole community singing and dancing, bodies intertwined, in close communion with nature.<sup>7</sup> Participants in InterPlay India’s annual Intercultural Exchange for Global Peace have had the opportunity to join in the *naach/nu*, an ecstatic experience both of tribal solidarity and cosmic communion.

The scientist and theologian Arthur Peacocke suggests:

We can today think of God as the composer of the fugue of creation, as the leader in its dance, as exploring all the possibilities and as actualising potentialities in a spirit of delight and play. Today divine creation is still going on—the fugue is still unfolding in time—the choreography is still being elaborated.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM, 1989), 305.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel O’Leary, *Begin with the Heart: Recovering a Sacramental Vision* (Dublin: Columba, 2008), 121.

<sup>6</sup> Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 272.

<sup>7</sup> Francis Gonsalves, *God of Our Soil: Towards Subaltern Trinitarian Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2010), 175.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Peacocke, *The Palace of Glory: God’s World and Science* (Hindmarsh: AT, 2005), 33.

And in *The Tao of Physics*, the nuclear physicist Fritjof Capra ‘links the energy-based world view of modern physics with the symbol of the cosmic dance found in eastern mysticism and in Indian and Chinese philosophy’.<sup>9</sup>

The ideas of rhythm and dance naturally come to mind when one tries to imagine the flow of energy going through the patterns that make up the particle world. Modern physics has shown us that movement and rhythm are essential properties of matter; that all matter, whether here on earth or in outer space, is involved in a continual cosmic dance. The Eastern mystics have a dynamic view of the universe similar to that of modern physics, and consequently it is not surprising that they too, have used the image of the dance to convey their intuition of nature.<sup>10</sup>

In today’s globalised world we are struck by the amazing convergences between science and spirituality, east and west, urging us to go beyond the conventional boundaries of thought and practice. For those with a contemplative outlook, the whole of creation is one interconnected reality in which there is the fascinating interplay of matter and spirit. In this context the radical insight of Teilhard de Chardin to love God ‘not only with all one’s body, all one’s heart and all one’s soul, but with every fibre of the unifying universe’ makes sense.<sup>11</sup> Growing ecological, scientific and spiritual awareness calls us to approach other creatures as companions or co-pilgrims on the journey. InterPlay and Movement Meditation awaken us to our call to be co-creators in a dancing cosmos.

The great prophet and mystic Thomas Merton invites us:

To hear His call and follow Him in His mysterious, cosmic dance ... when we see the migrating birds ... when we see children in a moment when they are really children .... For the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness. The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast .... Yet the fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance.<sup>12</sup>

To refuse to respond to this call is to adopt instead the hard-hearted stance of the scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus chastises:

<sup>9</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 307.

<sup>10</sup> Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (New York: Bantam, 1984), 228–229.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, translated by Bernard Wall (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 297.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: Penguin, 1972), 296–297.

But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn’. (Matthew 11:16–17)

God’s creation has been portrayed not only as dance but also as play in various ancient traditions. In the Old Testament the creation of the world has the character of play, giving joy and delight to God and humans. The book of Proverbs, speaking about God creating heaven and earth through his daughter Wisdom (Sophia), evokes a delightful mood of play: ‘I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race’ (Proverbs 8:30–31). The spiritual theologian Hugo Rahner also refers to a mystical idea of divine play alive among the Greek Fathers of the Church, speaking of ‘... the playing of God, who through this creative pouring out of himself makes it possible for the creature to understand him in the wonderful play of his works’.<sup>13</sup> Rahner infers that, since God plays, man too must be a creature who plays.<sup>14</sup> He goes on to show that ‘in the game of grace Christ has actually become the playmate of man’ and writes of ‘a playing Church signifying the body of all those who have found gladness in Christ’ and ‘liturgy as a divine game’.<sup>15</sup>

In the Indian tradition, the Sanskrit word *leela* has a richer connotation than the English ‘play’, indicating the ‘divine play’ of creation, destruction and re-creation. *Leela* is simple and spontaneous, childlike and charming, delightful and disarming, the play of God—all qualities that are vital to InterPlay. Anthony de Mello’s beautiful wisdom story on play is quite enlightening in this context:

The Master once referred to the Hindu notion that all creation is ‘*leela*’—God’s play—and the universe is his playground. The aim of spirituality, he claimed, is to make all life play.

This seemed too frivolous for a puritanical visitor.

‘Is there no room then for work?’

‘Of course there is. But work becomes spiritual only when it is transformed into play.’<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Hugo Rahner, *Man at Play* (London: Burns and Oates, 1965), 24.

<sup>14</sup> Rahner, *Man at Play*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Rahner, *Man at Play*, 47, 51, 54.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony de Mello, *One Minute Nonsense* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1992), 96.



### ***Come Play with Me: Spiritual Exercises for Our Times***

One of Ignatius' favourite images was that of a labouring God. He understood God not only present but also at work in all things. In the Kingdom Meditation the eternal king extends an invitation: 'Therefore, whoever wishes to come with me must labour with me, so that through following me in the pain he or she may follow me also in the glory' (Exx 95). Labour is mentioned several more times in the *Spiritual Exercises* (Exx 107, 116, 224). But what would it mean to reinterpret Ignatius' call 'to labour with Christ' from the perspective of play?

At an international conference on 'Networking Jesuit Higher Education for the Globalising World', held in Mexico City on 23 April 2010, the Jesuit Superior General, Adolfo Nicolás, drew attention to the novel findings of a Japanese researcher. In a study of neurobiology and education the researcher claimed his study showed that Chinese rural children had better developed brains than the children of Tokyo as the former learnt by playing.<sup>17</sup> Would adopting the use of a playful pedagogy in giving the Spiritual Exercises attract genuine seekers and transform them into contemplatives in action in this globalised world?

Donald Miranda, the former novice director of the Jesuit Province of Patna, describes his experience at a creative Ignatian retreat, called 'Prophetic Play and Mystical Movement: Spiritual Exercises for Our Times':

The guided meditations, using InterPlay and shared liturgies accompanied by appropriate and deeply moving music, opened my body to explore newer ways of embracing Ignatius' ideal of finding God in all things and all things in God. The body as the principle and foundation, and therefore the starting point for this exploration of interconnectedness and interrelatedness, is a discovery I wish to carry forward in the Mind–Body–Spirit continuum encapsulated by Ignatius in the Spiritual Exercises as Application of the Senses.

In the Spiritual Exercises (Exx 76) Ignatius advises paying special attention to bodily positions in prayer and suggests that the retreatant takes care to choose what is most suitable. Besides the use of meditative movements to calm the mind before prayer, appropriate movements followed by prolonged stillness within the contemplation exercise itself can help the retreatant to enter the scene more wholeheartedly and fully. Movement Meditation is powerful in opening up pathways to the divine mystery thus increasing the transformative impact on the retreatant.

<sup>17</sup> Adolfo Nicolás made these remarks in discussion after his address.

Together with reflections to stimulate the mind and imagination to feed the heart, embodying the contemplations will help to nurture the whole person. Body prayer exercises such as the ‘Walking Meditation’ and the ‘One Hand Dance’ can greatly enhance the discernment process as they enable information from deep within to come to the surface. While our minds tend to be preoccupied with reasons to justify our choices, bodily signs may tell a different story. In the Second Week, St Ignatius introduces the Application of the Senses as the final period of prayer, deepening the other prayer exercises and demonstrating the key importance of embodied prayer. There is considerable scope to reinterpret key meditations from the Spiritual Exercises from the perspective of play and dance. For example the relationship between the Creator and a retreatant could be seen as an improvised dance sequence in which leading and following are an experience of the mutual sharing of lover and beloved similar to that suggested in the Contemplation to Attain Love (Exx 231).

In the Spiritual Exercises the image of Christ is pivotal. As Thomas Merton observes, ‘Every man becomes the image of the God he adores’.<sup>18</sup> And David L. Fleming points out that when we seek to find God in all things it is important to take note of the kind of God we seek.<sup>19</sup> A paradoxical painting by Hildegard Hendrichs depicts Jesus after the scourging and crowning with thorns with an almost playful smile and arms open in an inviting gesture. The caption beside it is striking: ‘Come play with me’.<sup>20</sup> The Indian Jesuit artist Roy Thottam has painted a mesmerising androgynous Christ by playing with masculine and feminine facial contours, together with other complementary symbols such as yin and yang, loaves and fishes, light and shadow, offering



<sup>18</sup> Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1983), 239.

<sup>19</sup> David L. Fleming, ‘Finding a Busy God’, in *A Spirituality for Contemporary Life: The Jesuit Heritage Today*, edited by David L. Fleming (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1991), 24.

<sup>20</sup> See Rudolf Pöhl, ‘*Dei Verbum* Meets *Homo Ludens*: Bibliodrama in South-East Asia’, *The Way*, 47/3 (July 2008), 73.

a holistic portrait in which the masculine embraces the feminine and vice versa. Such an image can be brought into Ignatian contemplations, acknowledging and fostering the interplay of masculine and feminine energies in all of life. If the Christ we seek has such a compassionate face it will help us to enter a new era of collaboration between Church and laity (especially women), to become peacemakers in a patriarchal world of violence.

### ***InterPlay and the Jesuit Mission to New Frontiers***

InterPlay is committed to making life feel less like work and more like play. This countercultural play ethic has transformative implications for the identity, community, mission and spirituality of Jesuits, in particular, in a globalised world dominated by a neo-capitalist work ethic. Jesuits often stand out owing to their individual brilliance but can come across as poor team players. The 'win-win' approach of InterPlay could make a valuable contribution to Jesuit companionship and community. What would happen if Jesuits, whether in education or social action, pastoral ministry or formation, were to adopt a more playful approach to life?

The use of InterPlay takes its place within a little-known, yet significant, Jesuit tradition of finding God in dance. In the *Yearbook of the Society of Jesus 2008*, John O'Malley informs us that 'of the ten French books on the history and theory of dance published between 1658 and 1760, five were by Jesuits'.<sup>21</sup> The French Jesuits developed a modern system of education, giving a prominent place to the performing arts, particularly dance, that was widely adopted throughout Europe. Jesuits have contributed to the rich history of the performing arts as teachers, choreographers, innovators and dancers. One cannot forget a limping Ignatius doing a Basque dance to dispel the depression of one of his serious-minded former disciples!<sup>22</sup>

At the 35th Jesuit General Congregation, Pope Benedict XVI called on Jesuits to explore new frontiers as the Church expected them 'to reach those physical and spiritual places which others do not reach or have difficulty in reaching'.<sup>23</sup> The decrees of the Congregation made a

<sup>21</sup> John W. O'Malley, 'The Cultural Mission of the Society of Jesus', *JESUITS: Yearbook of the Society of Jesus 2008* (Rome: General Curia, 2007), 72.

<sup>22</sup> Hedwig Lewis, *With Jubilant Hearts* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2005), 24.

<sup>23</sup> Benedict XVI, 'Allocution to the General Congregation', n.2, in *Decrees and Documents of the Thirty-Fifth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (Oxford: Way Books, 2008), 142.

creative response appropriate to the changing context of our times: "Nations" beyond geographical definitions await us, "nations" that today include those who are poor and displaced .... There are new "nations" and we have been sent to them.'<sup>24</sup>

At every level we are witnessing an unprecedented upsurge of violence and rapidly increasing disparity between rich and poor. Never before have we more desperately sought for peace in both the domestic and the global family. In the USA an insightful woman religious once posed the following questions to an Anglican priest who is one of our committed co-pilgrims.

'What is the greatest problem facing humanity and the planet today?'

Pat came the reply, 'Extreme poverty'.

She said, 'Correct'.

When she asked him what the only antidote for this would be he said,

'The redistribution of wealth.'

This time she said, 'Incorrect. The correct answer is GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS.'

InterPlay is gradually emerging as a tool for building such partnerships and reaching out to the new nations of the poor. The Intercultural Exchange for Global Peace programmes are opening our eyes to the connections between peace on the intrapersonal and interpersonal, structural and cosmic levels. They constitute a small but significant step towards forging lasting relationships between rich and poor, resulting in changes of consciousness and structures. The peace pilgrimages are turning out to be wonderful opportunities to engage in the 'triple dialogue', advocated by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, between cultures, religions and the poor.<sup>25</sup> At every step of the way we are constantly confronted by the challenges of a 'globalisation in solidarity, a globalisation without marginalisation'.<sup>26</sup>

When it comes to any dialogue involving words the privileged are at an advantage because of their greater economic and educational resources.

<sup>24</sup> *Decrees and Documents*, decree 2, n. 22.

<sup>25</sup> See *For All the Peoples of Asia: Documents from 1970 to 1991* (Manila: Claretian, 1997), xxv.

<sup>26</sup> John Paul II, 'From the Justice of Each Comes the Peace of All', World Day of Peace Message, 1 January 1998, n.3, available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_08121997\\_xxxi-world-day-for-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_08121997_xxxi-world-day-for-peace_en.html).



But on the level of the body there is a much better chance of establishing connection as equals: play is a way of levelling the unbalanced power relationship. InterPlay can be explored as an effective pedagogy for empowering the poor, whose most precious resource is their bodies. Gerard Manley Hopkins was fascinated by the discovery of a Christ who ‘plays in ten thousand places’.<sup>27</sup> While playing with more than ten thousand people in the past seven years, we have been dazzled by the Christ who plays in ten thousand faces. I have seen the beautiful face of Christ in a mentally challenged abuse victim, and the suffering face of Christ in a woman oppressed four times over as poor, tribal, woman and leper. It is a privilege to learn from the poor and to discover the beauty of the impoverished face of Christ. Such play operates at the frontiers of the human body as well as of the exploited body of the earth. In response to the invitation of the cosmic Christ, ‘Come play with me’, this is our humble contribution to ‘co-creating a universe interplaying for peace’, the vision of InterPlay India.

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<sup>27</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, ‘As Kingfishers Catch Fire’, in *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie (Oxford: OUP, 1970), 90.

# *The* FURROW

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