

I did not always believe that my Catholic faith and my love of dance were compatible. As a sophomore in college who felt disturbed, shaken and overwhelmed by the enormity and pervasiveness of injustice, I often viewed my time spent dancing as indulgent and wasteful. If I were truly committed to social justice, I told myself, I wouldn't be squandering so much time in a dance studio. However, despite these feelings of guilt and social irresponsibility, I found myself drawn back to dance again and again.

In the same year, I attended Dr. Cornel West's lecture, "The Vocation of a Christian Intellectual." After having been involved in student responses to several displays of bigotry on UR's campus, I was elated to encounter the ideas of this scholar, which to me represented the synthesis of an academically informed commitment to justice and a fierce devotion to the Christian faith. Equally important to me were Dr. West's commitment to socially conscious hip-hop and his description of *paideia* as "a danceable education"—for the first time, someone had articulated what I felt had been secretly inscribed into my very being. And yet, I was still not entirely willing to allow myself to acknowledge that dance and Catholicism as a lived faith could be mutually reinforcing.

In the coming months, I continued to stumble upon the ideas of theologians such as Karen Baker-Fletcher and C.S. Lewis who used imagery of dance to describe God's divinity, and I slowly came to delight in these illustrations. After endless hours of reflecting upon the relationship between dance and faith, I began to realize that Catholicism and this particular artistic expression were, in fact, mutually reinforcing. In addition to serving as an intimate expression of my own faith, I've come to acknowledge that movement often allows its viewers to embrace the vulnerability of humankind and serves as a conduit through which others can experience some glimmer of future transcendental glory. In fact, I've come to believe that art is truly necessary for the nourishment of the soul; just as we use the faculty of speech to express what is conceived in the mind, humans also need art to express what is conceived within the spirit.

This year, I had the privilege of choreographing a piece for the University of Richmond's dance company. As a dancer who was trained in classical ballet throughout her childhood and during high school, I never imagined that as a university student I would ever learn hip hop or contemporary dance, let alone choreograph it for someone else. However, the experience of setting my own work, entitled *Paideia*, on a group of dancers has been both emotionally cathartic

and overwhelmingly rewarding. My Catholic faith has undoubtedly informed this choreography, and I hope that its audience will see in the movement a beauty that reflects the larger spiritual reality which inspired it.

I've also found that this artistic expression is a mode of processing my intellectual work. Currently, I am working on my senior honors thesis, "Hurricane Katrina: An Act of God?" under the supervision of Dr. Douglas A. Hicks. This project explores how various conceptions of theodicy, as reflected in sermons, have affected the way citizens understand the rebuilding of the city. The struggle to grasp the presence of suffering is a theme of my thesis as well as of *Paideia*, and both works have developed alongside one another throughout the year.

I am greatly looking forward to continuing my academic work at Yale Divinity School, and I hope to also apply my artistic sensibilities to studies at ISM/YDS. I've found that YDS has successfully struck a balance between intellectual rigor and truly vibrant spiritual life—a balance I've also sought in my own life. The close-knit community of students, faculty and staff at YDS is equally impressive, and I am particularly excited about engaging the larger New Haven community as well. Furthermore, I believe that participation in ISM will nourish my spirit in a very particular way, and I hope to continue the exploration of the relationship between religion and the arts.