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Using J. L. Austin's Performative Language Theory to Interpret Ritual Music-Making

Both scholars and practitioners of liturgy generally agree that one of the foundational principles underlying the reforms promulgated by Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*¹ is the importance of the active participation of the faithful in the liturgy. However, what is not always so clear, thirty-five years later, is what the active participation of the faithful actually involves and what best promotes the possibility of it actually happening.

The singing of acclamations, hymns, and other forms of ritual music has long been promoted as an effective means for providing a worshipping assembly with the opportunity to participate actively in the liturgy. While experience may have validated this assumption on some levels, questions continue to be raised regarding music's role in ritual prayer. These include questions regarding whether music contributes more than simply "a nobler aspect" to the rites or "a more graceful expression to prayer,"² and why and how music can be described as integral or ministerial to worship.³ Other areas of concern focus on questions of excellence and appropriateness.

The approach which I have taken to examining music's role in the liturgy begins with a consideration of the liturgy as a dynamic

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¹ See articles 11, 14, and 113 as significant examples of the importance given to this principle.

² Sacred Congregation of Rites, "Musicam Sacram," in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 60 (1967) 5. In this article the English translation is taken from *Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press 1982). Hereafter MS and DOL.

³ I address these questions more fully in my dissertation, "Jacques Berthier's Taizé Music: A Case Study of Liturgical Music as Ritual Symbol." This study will be published by Peeters Publishers and Booksellers in 1999 as *Liturgical Music as Ritual Symbol: A Case Study of Jacques Berthier's Taizé Music*, as part of their *Liturgia condenda* series and distributed in the United States by Books International.

complexus of symbols which are not objects, but actions that negotiate and/or disclose relationships.⁴ Within the ritual we call liturgy, music can be described as one of many symbols within that dynamic complexus of symbols. If symbols require that we approach them as dynamic rather than static realities, then it follows that the proper object for the study of music as ritual symbol is not the music printed on the page of a hymnal nor captured on compact disc, but the *action of music-making*. Such a focus would shift the primary concern from the music itself and place it instead on the activity of human subjects as music-makers. Such a focus need not deny the importance of using quality music in ritual music-making. Rather, it could better contextualize that concern and require an anthropological basis for setting up criteria of excellence.

Several recent documents on ritual music, notably *Universa Laus*'s "De la Musique dans les Liturgies Chrétiennes," refer to music as a "symbolic practice,"⁵ thereby highlighting an understanding of ritual music as activity. Similarly, the *Ten Year Report* published by the Milwaukee Symposia for Church Composers describes Christian liturgy as a symbolic event and symbol itself as a dynamic rather than a static reality.⁶

In my own research, I have adopted a musical hermeneutic proposed by the philosopher Lawrence Kramer. Interpreting music, explains Kramer, requires opening a musical work's available hermeneutic windows and treating it as a field of humanly significant action.⁷ His hermeneutic is based on the conviction that although

⁴ Nathan Mitchell, "Symbols Are Actions, Not Objects," *Living Worship* 13 (February 1977) 2.

⁵ *Universa Laus, Musique et liturgie* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf 1988). Translation in Claude Duchesneau and Michel Veuthey, eds., *Music and Liturgy: The Universa Laus Document and Commentary*, trans. Paul Inwood (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press 1992) 1.1. The French title, *Musique et liturgie*, is the title of the publication which includes both document and commentary. The English publication is called *Music and Liturgy*. The title of the actual document found in *Musique et liturgie* is "De la Musique dans les Liturgies Chrétiennes." The English title of the document is "Music in Christian Celebration."

⁶ See articles 9 and 12 of *The Milwaukee Symposia for Church Composers: A Ten-Year Report* (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press and Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications 1992).

⁷ Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1990) 6.

music does not make propositions, it does have referential power. In order to discover the possible meanings to which a particular piece of music may be referring, we need to approach it with the assumption that it resists fully disclosing itself. While the music does not give itself immediately to understanding, it can be made to yield to understanding if we are able to open hermeneutic windows through which our understanding can pass.⁸

Kramer identifies three types of hermeneutic windows available for interpreting music. They number textual inclusions, citational inclusions, and structural tropes. Textual inclusions refer to texts set to music, titles, epigrams, program notes, and sometimes expression marking. Citational inclusions refer to various literary, visual, musical, and historical allusions.⁹ It was the third hermeneutic window, however, what Kramer calls *structural tropes*, that highlights the *activity* of music-making. By *structural trope* Kramer means "a structural procedure, capable of various practical realizations, that also functions as a typical *expressive act* [emphasis added] within a certain cultural/historical framework."¹⁰ According to Kramer, structural tropes are the most powerful type of hermeneutic window. He understands them as units of *doing* rather than of *saying* [emphasis added] that can evolve from any aspect of communicative exchange: style, rhetoric, representations, etc. By describing the performance of music as an expressive act, we are focusing on the *doing* of something rather than the *saying* of something.

Since ritual is a combination of both "articulate speech and purposeful action,"¹¹ an approach which views ritual language as action can provide a framework for interpreting music-making as an example of ritual speech acts. J. L. Austin's performative language theory provides an important perspective on ritual language because it is built on the premise that, in certain instances, language as action takes precedence over language as assertion. This insight is important for investigating ritual music's power to generate meaning because it provides the possibility of locating meaning in

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 9–10.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Wade T. Wheelock, "The Problem of Ritual Language: From Information to Situation," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50 (1982) 50.

articulations other than assertions or truth claims. For if, as Kramer asserts, meaning begins with—that is, forms around or clings to—a truth claim—whether that claim be implicit or explicit, real or fictive—then music has no meaning in the ordinary sense.¹² If, however, meaning can be found, not only in a grid of assertions, but embedded in "a field of humanly significant actions,"¹³ then there is the possibility of using performative language theory to locate meaning in ritual music-making.

APPROACHING MUSIC AS A TYPE OF LANGUAGE

Before using performative language theory to interpret music, it is important to justify the possibility of approaching music as a type of language. Jean-Jacques Nattiez has observed that "since music is not, after all, language in the literal sense, the use of linguistic theory in musicology is always metaphorical, so that its value is heuristic. . . ."¹⁴

Justin London has used speech act analysis to interpret musical structures as compositional utterances made by composers. He argues that, "as a result of our enculturated belief that music is a kind of language, we can and often do treat music as a linguistic phenomenon. That is, we acquire our mechanisms for dealing with intentional communicative behavior through our acquisition of a linguistic framework."¹⁵ In other words, London believes that it is possible to use speech act analysis to interpret music because language is the prototypical framework we have adopted in order to deal with other kinds of meaningful communicative behavior.¹⁶

London explains that it is possible to describe musical structures in terms of language and linguistic behavior because a MUSIC IS LANGUAGE metaphor structures the actions a listener performs in apprehending music. As long as this metaphor is operative, it is

¹² Kramer, 5.

¹³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴ Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Fondements d'une sémiologie de la musique* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions 1975) 400. Cited in Francis Sparshott, "Aesthetics of Music," in *What Is Music? An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music*, ed. Philip Alperson (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press 1987) 79.

¹⁵ Justin London, "Musical and Linguistic Speech Acts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54 (Winter 1996) 49.

¹⁶ Ibid.

possible to treat a composer and his or her works in the same way in which we would treat a speaker and his or her utterances.¹⁷ This metaphor, London explains, is acquired in musical childhood and becomes so established in the way a person learns to listen to music that it becomes wholly transparent. As a result, a person takes his or her knowledge structure of language and maps it onto a musical target. However, the listener is unaware of the fact that the MUSIC IS LANGUAGE metaphor functions as a basic conceptual metaphor since this type of metaphor is shared by members of a culture and usually used unconsciously and automatically.¹⁸

One of the advantages of the MUSIC IS LANGUAGE metaphor is that it allows us to evaluate musical gestures as we would linguistic gestures. London's study focuses on recovering the composer's intent in choosing a particular musical gesture in a particular musical context. In my own work, I have adopted London's notion of the MUSIC IS LANGUAGE metaphor in order to be able to interpret music-making in the liturgy as "speech acts" in light of the performative language theory of J. L. Austin.

J. L. AUSTIN'S PERFORMATIVE LANGUAGE THEORY
Fundamental Principles. In his book, *How to Do Things with Words*, the British philosopher, J. L. Austin, offers a key insight when he points out that the uttering of a sentence can be the doing of an action.¹⁹ Initially, Austin made distinctions between statements that represented a situation and those which effected a situation. According to his theory, every speech act consists of a "locutionary act," an "illocutionary act," and a "perlocutionary act." The first is the simple production of an utterance; the second is the effect the

¹⁷Ibid., 49–50. Throughout his essay, London types all phrases referring to metaphors in capitals according to the notation used by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in such works as *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1980); and *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1989). When speaking of metaphor, London does not mean the figure of speech which can be described as an abbreviated simile. Rather, he views ordinary thinking and acting as fundamentally metaphorical.

¹⁸Ibid., 51. Examples London offers to support his thesis include such common statements as "The principle theme is *stated* in the violins" and "The flute *answers* the questioning oboe."

¹⁹John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1962) 5.

speaker intends the utterance to produce in the hearer; and the third is the actual effect the sentence has on the hearer. Later in his career, Austin came to see that all utterances have a performative aspect. In other words, the speaking of a sentence is the doing of an action.²⁰

While subsequent philosophers have further nuanced Austin's categories and distinctions, they are in general agreement that there is a category of utterances which not only says something but actually *does something* in the saying. Such a conclusion has significant ramifications for ritual studies. In the first place, it acknowledges the fact that the purpose of language goes beyond the simple utterance of propositions which can be proven true or false. Secondly, it provides a framework for looking at the function of liturgical language in a new way.

Further Developments. In his own research and analysis, G. J. Warnock nuanced Austin's performative language theory by saying that "*sometimes* saying is doing."²¹ Distinguishing those cases which count as doing from those which do not depends on conventions in virtue of which saying counts as doing. These conventions are extra-linguistic.²²

John Searle continued to develop the work begun by J. L. Austin by focusing on the absolute centrality of the concept of the speech act in the analysis of language. For Searle, the unit of linguistic communication is not the symbol or word or sentence, but "the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of the speech act."²³ Furthermore, Searle reaffirms Austin's point that it is the illocutionary force of an utterance — language's power to produce the intended effect in the act of speaking — that is the most important concept for analyzing speech acts.

In analyzing the illocutionary force in speech acts, John Searle makes some important distinctions. He explains that each sentence has a propositional indicator and an illocutionary force

²⁰Wheelock, 52–53.

²¹Geoffrey James Warnock, "Some Types of Performative Utterance," in *Essays on J. L. Austin*, ed. Isaiah Berlin, et al. (London: Oxford University Press 1973) 69.

²²Ibid., 73.

²³John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1969) 16.

indicator. It is the illocutionary force indicator with which he is concerned in looking at statements as speech acts. He explains that the illocutionary force indicator shows what illocutionary act the speaker is performing in uttering the sentence. He lists as devices which serve as these illocutionary force indicators the following: word order, stress, intonation contour, punctuation, the mood of the verb, and the so-called performative verbs. He adds that often the context of the actual speech situations makes the illocutionary force clear without invoking it explicitly. For example, a speaker's tone of voice may give his statement the force of a warning, without his having to begin by saying, "I warn you . . ." ²⁴

Elsewhere Searle reiterates this point in another way when he says: "The principle that the meaning of a sentence is entirely determined by the meanings of its meaningful parts I take as obviously true; what is not so obviously true, however, is that these include more than words (or morphemes) and surface word-order. The meaningful components of a sentence include also its *deep syntactic structure* and the *stress* and *intonation contour* of its utterance. Words and word-order are not the only elements which determine meaning" (emphasis added). ²⁵

To summarize John Searle's point, performative language theory acknowledges that in certain instances utterances possess what has been termed "illocutionary force," the power to effect what is being stated. This force is produced not simply by the words or the word order, but also by deep syntactic structure, stress, and intonation-contour.

Lastly, Jacques Derrida's critique of Austin's speech act theory provides a decisive corrective when he points out that all acts of communication presuppose the possibility of being repeated in new contexts. In other words, in order to function at all, a speech act must be *iterable*. This means that the speech act is capable of functioning in situations other than the occasion of its production, among persons other than those involved in its original production. ²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., 30.

²⁵ John R. Searle, "Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts," in *Essays on J. L. Austin*, 151.

²⁶ Kramer, 8. See also Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The Chicago University Press 1982) 307-30. Stanley Fish also discusses

This focus on the iterability or repeatability of all acts of communication is pertinent to an analysis of ritual performance since, by its very nature ritual is behavior which displays observable repetition in its structural and chronological framework. ²⁷ In addition, by its nature ritual involves communicating some message by means of a dynamic interaction of several symbol systems. Within this context, ritual communication, whether it be in the form of speaking, singing, or gesturing is intimately and essentially connected with the action context of the ritual. As a result, ritual activity becomes not just an instrument for conveying ideas, but a means to accomplish the ends of the ritual. That is, ritual performance is an instance when saying something counts as doing because by its nature ritual includes those extra-linguistic conventions which enable saying to count as doing. ²⁸

Implications for Liturgical Language. Before using performative language theory as a tool for interpreting liturgical music, it will be helpful to examine efforts which have already been made to interpret liturgical language using J. L. Austin's theory. Liturgical scholars such as Wade T. Wheelock, Jean Ladrière, and Joseph Schaller have used performative language theory as an interpretive tool.

Wade T. Wheelock has taken Austin's theory and John Searle's development of it and applied his conclusions to the study of ritual language. As a result of his synthesis, Wheelock defines ritual language as "that set of utterances which is intimately and essentially connected with the action context of a ritual. Ritual language is not just an instrument for conveying ideas, but is directly used in accomplishing the ends of the ritual operation." ²⁹

Wheelock's definition identifies the key distinction between propositional discourse and ritual language: the first is a locutionary act while the second is an illocutionary act. In other words, propositional discourse is concerned with the production of an utterance, while ritual language is concerned with the effect the

this at length in his essay "With the Compliments of the Author: Reflections on Austin and Derrida," in *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1982) 693-722.

²⁷ George S. Worgul, Jr., "Ritual," in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press 1990) 1101.

²⁸ Warnock, 73.

²⁹ Wheelock, 50.

utterance produces. According to Wheelock, the most essential difference between ritual utterances and ordinary language is the purpose of the two. On the one hand, the purpose of making a propositional statement is to communicate information that the hearer does not already know. Ritual utterances, on the other hand, are speech acts that convey little or no information. Rather, they are meant to create and allow participation in a known and repeatable situation. Instead of information, repetition is the norm and metaphors and ambiguity abound.³⁰

Wheelock reasons that if the conditions governing the performance of a ritual speech act are different from ordinary speech, then the purpose or illocutionary force of the two must be different. In effect, Wheelock concludes, the language of any ritual must be primarily understood and described as *situating* rather than *informing speech*.³¹

What does Wheelock mean when he says that ritual language is situating speech? He means that the speaking of the text presents the situation, expresses and actually helps to create the situation, and/or facilitates the recognition of the situation. Furthermore, situating speech has the capacity to constantly repeat the transformations it brings about. Situations represent "being" or "action" rather than simply knowing. They must and can be concretely realized at every repetition, since they are the chief means by which the physical and cultural entities unite in the production of a situation.³²

In his efforts to discover how liturgical language works, Jean Ladrière has also applied the findings of J. L. Austin and John Searle to his own linguistic analysis. Ladrière's concern is to discover ways in which linguistic analysis can be used to understand the expression of Christian faith in liturgy. In order to do so, he identifies a threefold performativity of liturgical language: that of "existential induction," "institution," and "presentification."³³

³⁰ Ibid., 56–59.

³¹ Ibid., 59.

³² Ibid., 59–63.

³³ Jean Ladrière, "The Performativity of Liturgical Language," in *Liturgical Experience of Faith*, ed. H. Schmidt and David N. Power, Concilium series, no. 82 (New York: Herder and Herder 1973) 50, 55.

By existential induction, Ladrière means an operation by means of which "an expressive form awakens in the person using it a certain affective disposition which opens up existence to a specific field of reality."³⁴ An effect is produced. The question is what kind of language function enables it to produce an effect. Ladrière's explanation is that the function of language is not to indicate the existence of the attitude nor to describe it, but to *speak the attitude*. This is done through the use of personal pronouns and such characteristic performative verbs as "pray" and "give thanks." In other words, the language makes the attitude exist by virtue of the illocutionary act underlying its enunciation.³⁵

Ladrière refers to the second aspect of performativity as institution. By institution, Ladrière means the effect whereby liturgical language not only disposes individuals to welcome that which it suggests, but, by the same means, institutes a community. In other words, language is the location in which and the instrument by means of which the community is constituted.³⁶

Ladrière considers the third aspect, presentification, to be the most fundamental aspect of the performativity of liturgical language. He explains it this way: "By all those acts which it effects, this language makes present for the participants, not as a spectacle, but as a reality whose efficacy they take into their very own life, that about which it speaks and which it effects in diverse ways. . . ." ³⁷

According to Ladrière, Christian liturgy, as ritual activity engaging language, produces this effect by means of repetition, proclamation, and sacramentality.³⁸ By repetition, Ladrière means that the liturgy repeats texts which announce events yet to occur or which have already occurred in Jesus Christ. This repetition is not a mere quotation of the past, but the resumption into speech acts of today of words written or spoken in the past. In this way, by reforming the words which announce the mystery of salvation, the community actively enters into that mystery.

³⁴ Ibid., 56.

³⁵ Ibid., 56–57.

³⁶ Ibid., 58–59.

³⁷ Ibid., 59–60.

³⁸ Ibid., 60–61.

For Ladrière, the confession of faith is the culmination of this process of repetition. That is, it is an act of proclamation whose illocutionary power is that of an attestation, ratification, and commitment. In declaring the mystery of salvation, it becomes active and present.³⁹

Ladrière admits that linguistic analysis cannot suffice to explain sacramental performativity. However, he points out that language is a kind of structuring field which enables faith to express itself in accordance with the exigencies of the reality to which it corresponds.⁴⁰

As a result of this three-fold performativity, therefore, liturgical language expresses faith and awakens its full flowering in the community constituted by its very expression and also in the individual. Thus it acts as a kind of structuring field which gives voice to faith, echoes the Word made flesh, and becomes the location of his presence.⁴¹

Building on the work of Wheelock and Ladrière, Joseph Schaller points out that performative language theory is a helpful tool in liturgical studies because it provides a method which examines the relationship of *meaning* and *text* in the context of ritual. In addition, the theory is pertinent to the study of liturgy because it views language more as "doing" than simply communicating *about* a state of affairs. Rather, a state of affairs is *established* in communicating.⁴² By interpreting liturgical language as speech acts, Schaller concludes that the act of pronouncing liturgical texts has the potential to effectively change the existential situation of the participating members of a community.⁴³

Because performative language theory focuses primarily on performative rather than propositional discourse, it can be successfully employed to interpret liturgical language as speech acts. By using the MUSIC IS LANGUAGE metaphor outlined by Justin London, it is possible to approach liturgical music-making as a type of liturgical language. Thus, by using linguistic theory

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Joseph J. Schaller, "Performative Language Theory: An Exercise in the Analysis of Ritual," *Worship* 62 (1988) 416.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

metaphorically, it is possible to interpret liturgical music-making as a performative speech act. Our next step is to investigate the feasibility of such an interpretation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LITURGICAL MUSIC

If, as is evident in the work of Wheelock, Ladrière, and Schaller, several principles of performative language theory can serve as useful tools in investigating the nature of ritual language and its function in the liturgy, these same principles should be able to be applied to an investigation of the nature of ritual music, particularly ritual song. Those principles can be summarized as follows: 1) that speaking an utterance can be the doing of something, since, by virtue of its illocutionary force, language has the power to produce an intended effect, 2) that, because of its illocutionary force, ritual language is situating rather than informing speech; and 3) that the meaningful components of a sentence include deep syntactic structure and the stress and intonation contour of its utterance.

Our intention is to employ these principles in an analysis of ritual singing. Reformulating them to apply to ritual song, they read as follows: 1) that ritual singing can be the doing of something, since by virtue of its illocutionary force, ritual song has the power to produce an intended effect, 2) that, because of its illocutionary force, ritual music-making is situating rather than informing discourse; and 3) that the meaningful components of a song include deep syntactic structure and the stress and intonation contour of its utterance.

It is important to note that, just as liturgical theology understands symbol not as object but as activity, the focus of performative language theory is likewise not on language as object, but language as activity. Austin's initial insight that the uttering of a sentence can be the doing of something and Searle's point that it is not the symbol or word, but the *production* of the symbol or word that is the unit of linguistic communication indicate that it is the activity of speaking itself that is their central concern. Therefore, just as performative language theory does not focus on language as an object, but as an activity of speaking, so, too, is our focus on the act of music-making rather than on music as an object that can be captured in a written score or in a recording.

In developing a musical hermeneutic, Lawrence Kramer provides a rationale for applying performative language theory to musical processes when he says: "Any act of expression or representation can exert illocutionary force provided, first, that the act is iterable and, second, that in being produced the act seeks to affect a flow of events, a developing situation. In their illocutionary dimension, therefore, speech acts exemplify a larger category of expressive acts through which illocutionary forces pass into general circulation. Musical processes clearly count as expressive acts according to the terms just given. If we can learn to recognize them as such, to concretize the illocutionary forces of music as we concretize its harmonic, rhythmic, linear, and formal strategies, we can then go on to interpret musical meaning."⁴⁴

Based on the criteria Kramer gives for an act of expression to exert illocutionary force, liturgical music-making possesses illocutionary force because it is an example of an iterable act which has the potential to affect the flow of the liturgical event. Music-making affects the flow of ritual particularly by means of the illocutionary force indicators identified by John Searle, that is, stress and intonation contours. In terms of performative language theory, these illocutionary forces can serve as keys to interpreting musical meaning.

If we agree that it is possible to apply language theory to an analysis of ritual music-making because Western culture often approaches music from within linguistic frameworks, our next step is to examine additional aspects of J. L. Austin's theory to discover more specifically how music-making can be interpreted as a speech act. Austin distinguishes five general categories of speech acts: commissives, expositives, verdictives, exercitives, and behabitives.⁴⁵ The first two, commissives and expositives, are dependent on language because they require the use of tenses or propositional components. For this reason, Justin London points out, they cannot be mapped onto music since music cannot fulfill the requirements of tense and/or predication.⁴⁶ Commissives are typified by promising. They *commit* a person to doing something. They also include declarations of intention. Expositives, on the other hand, indicate how our utterances fit into a conversation. They are

⁴⁴ Kramer, 9.

⁴⁵ Austin, 150.

⁴⁶ London, 56-57.

expository and can include such expressions as "I reply," and "I concede."⁴⁷

Verdictives, exercitives, and especially behabitives are less dependent on language and so offer the possibility of being expressed as musical speech acts.⁴⁸ Verdictives are typified by giving a verdict, usually by someone in an official capacity such as an umpire, jury, or priest. Similarly, exercitives are the giving of a decision either in favor of or against a course of action.⁴⁹ Thus, both verdictives and exercitives require that these speech acts be uttered by someone speaking in a specifically-defined institutional role, as, for example, speaker-as-umpire or speaker-as-priest. In Justin London's judgment, musical gestures cannot be described in these terms because composers do not fulfill these institutional roles.⁵⁰ However, in the liturgy, worshipers and other ministers can take on specifically-defined institutional roles in the singing of certain ritual elements. Therefore, in the case of ritual music, musical speech acts may have the potential to operate as verdictives and exercitives.

However, the fifth category, behabitives, appear to offer the greatest potential for being mapped onto music. Austin describes behabitives as a very miscellaneous group that have to do with *attitudes* and *social behavior*. Examples include apologizing, commending, thanking, and blessing.⁵¹

There are two reasons why behabitives offer the best possibility for treating music gestures as speech acts. The first is that behabitives often involve little or no propositional content, and as the coins of social exchange are usually produced in the present tense, or in a tenseless fashion. The second is the fact that behabitives are strongly marked by intonation and other paralinguistic features. In other words, behabitives involve those musical qualities of pitch, tone of voice, loudness, rhythm, and articulation which specify the illocutionary act.⁵² These are the very features which John Searle pointed out are among the illocutionary indicators in speech acts.

⁴⁷ Austin, 150-51.

⁴⁸ London, 56.

⁴⁹ Austin, 152-54.

⁵⁰ London, 57.

⁵¹ Austin, 151, 159.

⁵² London, 57.

The use of stress and variation of voice pitch has always assisted in the communication of meaning, even in spoken utterance. Joseph Gelineau's comment on the role of musical elements in ritual speech in pre-Christian and early Christian usage provides an important insight: "As soon as speech turned to poetry, or when public and ceremonial speaking was involved, rhythmic and melodic features were incorporated which today would be classified as musical or at least pre-musical. Music and singing could be present even though none of the vocabulary associated with musical performance might be met with."⁵³

In other words, the incorporation of rhythmic and melodic features is more likely to occur in situations which can be described as ritual activity since such activity sets up a situation where speech naturally moves toward an incorporation of musical elements. The result is the enhancement of the speech act by what performative language theory calls the illocutionary force indicators of stress and intonation. Because music possesses these components, it is an important partner with language in the communication of meaning.

Returning, then, to the three principles of performative language theory outlined earlier, the next section will investigate when singing can be said to be the doing of something in the particular ritual called Christian liturgy.

FIRST PRINCIPLE: LITURGICAL SINGING AS DOING
Sacrosanctum Concilium states that the purpose of Christian liturgy is twofold: the "glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful (SC 10, 112). In light of J. L. Austin's performative language theory we propose that singing within Christian liturgies can be described as "doing something" that in some way accomplishes one or both of the purposes of the liturgy.

Like the category of speech acts which J. L. Austin calls behav-
itives, liturgical singing can be the speaking of attitudes. In other words, singing draws the worshipers into the action of praying and becomes the vehicle for speaking attitudes of prayer. As a result, the action of singing is fundamentally confessional because, in the

⁵³Joseph Gelineau, "Music and Singing in the Liturgy," in *The Study of the Liturgy*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press 1978) 444.

context of the liturgy, it speaks or expresses faith in God and in the possibility of a relationship with God.

According to Ladrière's notion of existential induction, it is possible to say that the singing of such attitudes as praise, thanksgiving, contrition, and petition can awaken in the person singing "a certain affective disposition which opens up existence to a specific field of reality."⁵⁴ The effect which is produced, through the repetition of singing the attitude, is a gradual transformation whereby the singer becomes a person who, for example, is thankful or contrite. When Don Saliers asserts that liturgical song has the power of transformation by forming over time the imagination and affectivity of the Christian assembly, he is referring to the illocutionary dimension of singing without using the term.⁵⁵

In light of performative language theory, then, we can say that singing such Christian attitudes of prayer is an act of prayer which gives glory to God. In addition, by enabling participation in a known and repeatable act, liturgical singing can bring about transformation, that is, the sanctification of the worshipers, by forming them, over time, in those Christian dispositions which are expressed in the act of singing.

Furthermore, it is possible to say that understanding the language of the song is not always critical because, as Wheelock points out, the most distinguishing feature of ritual utterances as speech acts is that they convey little or no information. In the case of liturgy, the ritual includes memorized sets of utterances or traditionally prescribed patterns that are known or accessible to the worshipers before they engage in the prayer. The actual texts of hymns, acclamations, or chants, normally do not convey information that the participants do not already know. This is because the purpose in singing them is different from the purpose of ordinary language utterances.⁵⁶ Ritual communication is intimately connected with the action context of the ritual. The ritual is set in motion by the interaction of a complexus of symbols such as Scripture, icons, the music, the community of believers, and postures of reverence or meditation which together accomplish the

⁵⁴Ladrière, 56.

⁵⁵See Don Saliers, "The Integrity of Sung Prayer," *Worship* 55 (1981) 293.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 58-59.

purposes of the ritual: the glory of God and the transformation of the assembly.

SECOND PRINCIPLE:

LITURGICAL SINGING AS SITUATING SPEECH

Wheelock's thesis that the language of ritual must be primarily understood as *situating* rather than *informing* speech is especially pertinent to liturgical song. In performing ritual song, members of the assembly create an acoustic space in which they become *situated*. The music which they make fills the space and surrounds those who are present within it, thereby providing a sonic environment in which the assembly engages in prayer. Walter Ong describes the dynamics whereby singing situates an assembly when he says: "Habits of auditory synthesis give rise to a special sense of space itself. For besides visual-tactile space there is also acoustic space (which, through voice and hearing, has its own associations with the kinesthetic and tactual not quite the same as the kinesthetic and tactual associations of sight). We can apprehend space in terms of sound and echoes. . . . Space thus apprehended has qualities of its own. It is not spread out in front of us as a field of vision but diffused around us. Sound . . . can be apprehended from any direction, so that the hearer is *situated* [emphasis added] in a center of an acoustic field, not in front of it (so that it is indeed hardly a field)."⁵⁷

This ability of music to *situate* worshipers in a sonic environment provides an experience, not only of the worship space, but also of the activity of music-making and of the worshipping assembly engaged in that activity. It is in this way that singing as situating speech creates and allows participation in the liturgy.

Such participation enables members of the assembly to become a part of the whole. In this way, singing can situate the singers in a community thus bonded by the activity of music-making. This phenomenon corresponds to Ladrière's description of *institution*, his term for the second aspect of performativity of liturgical language. Ladrière explains: "Language is not the expression of a community constituted before it and apart from it and is not the

⁵⁷ Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1970) 163.

description of what such a community would be, but the *location* (emphasis added) in which and the instrument by means of which the community is constituted. In so far as it gives to all participants — as co-locutors — the chance to take on the same acts, it establishes between them that operative reciprocity which constitutes the reality of a community."⁵⁸

This community aspect is an essential element both in an understanding of language as a speech act and of an understanding of ritual music. Just as language becomes the location and instrument of community, so too, the making of the music is the means by which the community is constituted.

Music-making embodies the experience of community by providing the assembly with a physical and psychological experience of unity and harmony. Not only the sense of hearing and seeing, but the intellect, emotions and the entire body are taken up into the rhythms, melody, and harmony of the music. The music thus mediates an embodied experience of that community or "People of God." In no other experience of liturgical art can each individual member of the assembly be so drawn into an awareness of and a participation in the larger group.

This experience of community in many ways corresponds to Victor Turner's notion of *communitas*, a key notion in his theory of ritual as meaningful and transformative performance. Through participation in the singing, worshipers experience a oneness whereby distinctions of wealth, class, gender, race, and denomination can be suspended in favor of unity and harmony.⁵⁹ In this way, liturgical singing does more than communicate *about* a given state of affairs. Rather, as Schaller has pointed out, a state of affairs is established *in* communicating.⁶⁰ Furthermore, it is this establishment of a "state of affairs" which creates and allows participation in a known and repeatable situation.⁶¹

Lastly, liturgical music-making — that is, active involvement in singing, playing, dancing, listening, or moving with the rhythms of liturgical song — situates worshipers in the experience of the

⁵⁸ Ladrière, 59.

⁵⁹ See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company 1969) 83, 114.

⁶⁰ See Schaller, 416.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

already/not yet of ritual. This is possible because the situation thus enacted in liturgy is idealized.⁶²

THIRD PRINCIPLE:

THE ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE INDICATORS

J. L. Austin's five categories of speech acts provide for the possibility of mapping certain speech acts onto music, particularly music which has the ability to express or "speak" attitudes and involve such social behavior as apologizing, commending, thanking, and blessing. These behaviors serve as "coins of social exchange" and are strongly marked by such musical qualities as stress and intonation. That is — appropriately wedded to song texts — the pitch, melodic contour, volume, and rhythm of the music serve even more powerfully to produce the illocutionary effect. Often the most effective liturgical hymns, acclamations, and chants qualify as behaviors because, while they usually involve little or no propositional content, they do speak such attitudes of prayer as praise, thanksgiving, contrition, petition, and confession which, exchanged among the worshipers, produce the intended effect of praising, etc.

A musical analysis of Jacques Berthier's Taizé chant, "Adoramus Te Christe" is offered as an example of the role of the illocutionary force indicators of stress and intonation contour in the wedding of text and music in song.

The English translation of the Latin text reads as follows: "We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your cross you have redeemed the world." The parallelism and brevity of the first two phrases provides a strong focus on the word "Christus" (Christ), which is the object of both verbs, "adoramus" (adore) and "benedicimus" (bless). The repetition of the same pitch and the lowness of the pitch in each voice, provide a weightiness to both phrases. The words, "adoramus te" (we adore you), are sung on the lowest pitch of the song in each voice, a melodic device that parallels such gestures as kneeling or bowing. By contrast, the highest pitches of the first two phrases are for singing the words "Christus" (Christ) and "tibi" (you) in reference to Christ, again a possible melodic device for expressing Christ's exalted position as Son of God.

Fig. 1. "Adoramus Te Christe"⁶³

The syncopated rhythm of the third phrase relieves the heaviness of the first two phrases. The text, "quia per crucem tuam" (because by your cross), is set to a lilting phrase expressing an attitude of joy and wonder without actually using those words.

The fourth phrase, "redemisti mundum" (you have redeemed the world), begins on the lowest pitch of the melody line, the dominant note, and ends on the tonic. Underlying the melodic movement, there is a parallel harmonic movement from dominant to tonic that creates a sense of rest or resolution. The third and fourth phrases are repeated with each single performance of the complete ostinato. Thus, each time the assembly expresses adoration and blessing, they repeat the reason twice.

⁶³Jacques Berthier, *Music from Taizé*, vol. 2, ed. Brother Robert, vocal edition, (Chicago: G.I.A. Publications, Inc. 1982) 2.

⁶²Wheelock, 105.

The linguistic and musical elements work together to express the attitudes of adoration, blessing, faith, and gratitude. Furthermore, several means are employed to reinforce the illocutionary force of the chant. For example, in each case, the verbs are placed on the downbeat at the beginning of each new phrase.⁶⁴ In addition, the contour of the melody highlights the sense of the text and the underlying attitude. Lastly, the choice of the minor key of f-sharp minor, the use of repeated notes, and the low tessitura⁶⁵ provide a somberness which is balanced by the syncopated rhythm and the ascent of the melodic line in three of the four phrases.

As in the case of the first two principles of performative language theory, the third principle regarding stress and intonation contour is also influenced by context. This can include other songs, prayers, Scripture readings, the visibility of sacred icons, lighting, architecture, color, and incense. As these elements change or are rearranged, the illocutionary power of the singing can also change.

J. L. Austin's performative language theory is a useful tool for describing the dynamics involved in ritual music-making since it allows us to describe liturgical singing as an instance when *singing* is the *doing of something*. What is accomplished in the singing is the *speaking of attitudes* which, because of its illocutionary power can, over time, bring about the transformation of those who participate in the liturgy, even as the participants perform the act of worshipping God. Furthermore, performative language theory provides a framework for explaining how music *situates* the assembly in a sonic environment which draws worshipers into its movement, enabling participation in a known and repeatable act of worship within an "acoustic space." Lastly, performative language theory allows us to identify the musical elements of stress and intonation contour as the illocutionary force indicators which give the singing the power to effect what is being sung. As a result, we can say that

⁶⁴In the case of "Adoramus te Christe," the Latin verb comes first and is sung on the strong beat, that is the downbeat. In English, the pronoun would come first, thereby moving the verb to a weak beat.

⁶⁵Tessitura is a musical term used to describe the range of a vocal compass in which most of a piece is located. It does not include the total range of the piece. So, for example, one may say the tessitura of the soprano was either low or high, depending on where in the range the voice most consistently sang.

ritual singing is a speech act which is capable of *accomplishing* an action in the act of *music-making*.

Thus we can say that ritual singing is a means whereby the faithful may actively participate in the liturgy. Furthermore, we can say that this interpretation can, by extension, apply to other modes of ritual music-making — whether it be dancing or moving with the rhythms of a song, playing musical instruments, humming, or ululating — insofar as these actions enable worshipers "to accomplish" the ritual by means of the action of music-making. By thus entering into liturgical music-making, worshipers enter into the performance of the liturgy and thus open themselves to the possibility of accomplishing its purposes: the praise and glory of God and their own transformation or sanctification.

Maxwell E. Johnson

The 1998 *Libro de Liturgia y Cántico* of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: An Evaluation of its *Sección de Liturgia*

Published in 1998, after four years of detailed work, debate, and compromise, Spanish-speaking clergy, members, and congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in the United States, Puerto Rico, and elsewhere now have their own version of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (LBW), containing in Spanish the complete liturgical-sacramental rites of the Church as well as a comprehensive hymnal reflecting a wide Hispanic-Latino/a musical diversity. Prior to the appearance of this significant *Libro de Liturgia y Cántico* (hereafter, *Libro*),¹ Spanish-speaking Lutherans were dependent for liturgical texts, liturgical music, and hymnic

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¹ Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 1998.