

2009 Hovda Lectures

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Sing to the Lord: A Theological Perspective

BY JAN MICHAEL JONCAS

Earlier presentations in this series of Hovda Lectures explore the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' recent document *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (hereafter STL)¹ from a variety of perspectives. My friend (and fellow Minnesotan), chant scholar and factotum for the National Catholic Youth Choir, Benedictine Father Anthony Ruff, provides a fine overview of the document, noting the advances it makes on the earlier documents *Music in Catholic Worship* and *Liturgical Music Today* as well as the challenges it offers to contemporary practices. (As a member of the committee charged with developing the document, his perspective is especially valuable; see pages one through eleven.) Sister Kathleen Harmon, long-time collaborator with Sister Joyce Zimmerman in programs of liturgical catechesis, the journal *Liturgical Ministry*, and the development of the sung prayer of the hours, explores STL as it cautions and encourages the Church's ministry and its liturgical ministers in connection with *Co-Workers in the Vineyard* (see pages thirteen through twenty-two). Kevin Vogt, outstanding organist and accomplished composer of liturgical music, highlights one of the dialectical tensions in the document: maintaining the so-called "treasury of sacred music" (*thesaurus musicae sacrae*) while fostering a new repertoire responsive to the ritual demands of the reformed rites (see pages twenty-three through thirty-eight). He calls our attention to the document's attempt to find common ground between (for want of better terms) progressive functionalists and conservative aesthetes, a dichotomy recognized in STL 68 and 69, where the ritual and spiritual dimensions of sacred music are placed side by side. How appropriate, then, that Paulist Father Ricky Manalo's presentation unpacks STL 70, where both the ritual and spiritual dimensions of liturgical music are placed in cultural context (see pages thirty-nine through fifty-three)! As one who has credentials in

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both the theoretical world (as a doctoral candidate) and the practical area (as a priest serving a variety of linguistic and ethnic communities), Father Manalo emphasizes the need for pastoral musicians to be attentive to the findings of the social sciences in any discussion of liturgical music's expressive and formative potentials.

My presentation stands in conversation with these four lectures; it focuses explicitly on the operative theologies espoused by *Sing to the Lord*. To that end my talk comprises a prelude, a theme and variations, and a postlude. First, I will offer a succinct introduction to the discipline of theology, distinguishing its perspective from other disciplines such as philosophy, history, or the natural or social sciences, as a prelude to the central task. Second, I will read the text of STL closely to see what assumptions and assertions it makes about the Triune God, God's creation, the Church, the Church's worship, and music—in effect, exploring the theme of the theological dimensions of music in the particular variations the document offers. Finally, I will offer a poem as postlude, reinforcing this study's insights.

Prelude: A Succinct Introduction to Theology

Debates on the definition, purview, and method of theology have marked every era of this discipline's life, and those debates continue to be quite lively today. Here I will simply cite three acknowledged masters in this field to gain some insight into each of these areas.

St. Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033–April 21, 1109) is the source of a commonly cited definition of theology. He termed it “*fides quaerens intellectum*” (faith seeking understanding). Each word of that definition is important.

By placing the discipline of theology within the realm of **faith**, Anselm clearly situates the would-be theologian in the community of faith; theology is thus faith speaking to faith. Theologians do not approach their task by assuming an Olympian “objectivity” by which they can neutrally assess the religious claims of various peoples and institutions in a grand comparative scheme (at least as traditionally understood; those who claim to do this are not theologians but practitioners of religious studies).

Theologians also do not approach their task by simply reporting on their own religious experience (at least as traditionally understood, those who do so are not so much theologians as witnesses, evangelizers, and catechists—all of whom, it must be said, employ theology if they are to be effective). Rather, theologians, situated within a religious faith, attempt to explicate that religion's values and loyalties, its assertions and claims, its history and cultural artifacts both for fellow believers and for other interested humans. The American theologian and Catholic priest David Tracy speaks of theologians addressing three distinct publics: the church, the world, and the academy. I've conceived of this talk primarily as addressing the church (presuming that you and I share a common religious faith – Christianity – although we may have denominational differences). I would have crafted it in a very different way if I were addressing people whom I presumed did not share my Christian faith (i.e., “the world”) and even more differently if I were addressing colleagues at a secular university, carrying on this discussion there according to commonly accepted standards of academic discourse.

By placing the discipline of theology as “faith **seeking**,” Anselm of Canterbury clearly recognized the conversational and progressive character of this discipline. Theology is not the same thing as exegesis of the Scriptures, although it employs scriptural study as part of its toolbox. Theology is not the same thing as personal meditation, although theology well-conceived and presented can certainly be spiritually enriching and lead one to new depths of prayer. Rather, theology recognizes that it can never have the final word about faith, since faith deals with realities that cannot be comprehended in a definitive way. If faith arises from the encounter with God, we finite and contingent humans with our finite and contingent understandings of our own world of space and time are even more limited in thinking about and expressing the world of the supra-cosmic and the eternal. If we humans remain mysteries to ourselves, discovering that there is always more to discover about ourselves, how much more is there to discover about the Transcendent Mystery that subsumes all others!

Finally, by placing the discipline of theology as “faith seeking **understanding**,” Anselm highlights the explicitly intellectual character of this discipline. To use a limping comparison, one might distinguish between conservatory and graduate school education in music. At conservatories vocal and instrumental music students apprentice themselves to other human beings who have had long-standing engagements with music pedagogy in order to gain some of the same love for and delight in the experience that the teachers have, to learn whatever techniques the teachers can impart, and to receive constructive criticism on their developing skills. The goal of such mentoring is not primarily theoretical insight but practical knowledge: a set of skills that assist the students to perform music well. In contrast, graduate studies in musicology at universities are less oriented toward practical skills in music making and more toward mastering a body of theoretically informed knowledge about music: its history (musicology), its impact in human life (sociology and anthropology of music), its function as a sign system (psychology and semiotics of music), its being and evaluation (philosophy of music and aesthetics). Similarly, initiation into and ongoing development in the life of faith through, e.g., retreats, days of recollection, spiritual direction, spiritual reading, spiritual exercises, and similar practices corresponds to conservatory studies; theology corresponds to graduate school university studies. Notice, of course, that without the actual existence and performance of music, one would have nothing to study at a theoretical level. Similarly, without the existence of God and the practice of faith, there could be no theology. But theology is not the same as faith, as our second thinker makes abundantly clear.

When the twentieth century Anglican theologian John Macquarrie (June 27, 1919–May 28, 2007) came to define theology in his monumental work *Principles of Christian Theology*, he declared that it was “the study which, through participation in and reflection upon a religious faith, seeks to express the content of this faith in the clearest and most coherent language possible.”² Like Anselm, Macquarrie holds that a theologian must “participate in . . . a religious faith,” reflecting on it as a “member,” an “insider” (although Macquarrie seems to hold open the possibility of a genuine theology being generated by believers outside the Christian faith, e.g., Jewish theology). Macquarrie also aligns with Anselm in holding that theology can

only “*seek* to express the content of this faith” (emphasis added), since its definitive articulation goes beyond what creation-bound human beings can accomplish. Macquarrie advances on Anselm, however, in declaring that theological “understanding” (*intellectum*) is to be presented in “the clearest and most coherent language possible.” For Macquarrie, theology is done in **human language**, honed to communicate as best it can the theological insights achieved and organized so that the variety of theological insights formulated at least do not contradict each other and at best form a fruitful and enriching worldview.

Macquarrie further enriches Anselm’s understanding of theology by citing six “**formative factors**” whose correlations form his preferred way of doing theology. These formative factors include attention to experience and revelation, Scripture and tradition, faith/belief, and reason/knowledge. Thus a theologian should explore how and in what ways religious experience relates to all other kinds of human experience; how religious experience, grounded in this world of space and time, can be addressed from beyond those confines in an act of revelation; how and in what ways Scripture witnesses to and enshrines experiences of revelation; how and in what ways traditions of interpretation of religious experience and the Scriptures that witness to and enshrine them arise and develop; how and in what ways faith is to be conceptualized; and how and in what ways reason assists in formulating and critiquing all of the above.

Our third theologian, the Canadian Roman Catholic Jesuit priest Bernard Lonergan (December 17, 1904–November 26, 1984), shares Anselm’s and Macquarrie’s fundamental understanding of theology. But due to his more highly developed cognitional theory (as exemplified in his masterwork, *Insight*), Lonergan also has a more highly developed division of labor in the theological enterprise. For Lonergan, “knowing” is more than simply “taking a look”; it is a complex interweaving of four distinct yet related operations. Thus *intellectus*, for Lonergan, will involve experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding. Like Macquarrie, Lonergan begins with experience, but Lonergan distinguishes between sensate experience (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching) and cognitive experience (attending to mental images derived from experience, situating them in a cognitive framework, and offering the occasion for simultaneous self-experience) as foundational for this cognitive theory. Interpretation of experience follows, but since interpretations (as Lonergan notes) are “a dime a dozen,” judgment is needed to determine the accuracy of one’s interpretation of experience. Finally, one’s judgment of experience will lead to existential decisions by which such experiences are affirmed, nurtured, and pursued or negated, uprooted, and avoided.

Applying this cognitional theory to the field of theology, Lonergan notes that there are altogether eight **functional specialties** that operate within the field of theology, much as there are specializations in accounting, marketing, or finance within the field of business.

Four of the eight functional specialties recover and investigate what humans believed in the past. These functional specialties—research, interpretation, history, and dialectic—can, according to Lonergan, be engaged in by those who do not explicitly profess a religious faith. Thus investigators may **research** a newly discovered piece of first century CE papyrus covered

with hand-written Greek letters. In addition to transcribing the letters as they appear on the papyrus, the investigators will attempt to determine the status of the text (e.g., Is it complete? Is it a version of a previously known text, or a text that has been mentioned in another work but not known to be extant until now, or a completely unknown new text?). What is needed for this specialty is a particular set of skills: knowledge of ancient languages, handwriting, literature, etc.; these skill sets do not demand explicit religious faith in those who exercise them. Accepting the work of these researchers, **interpreters** will attempt to translate the text, trying to account not only for what it asserts but also how it is to be situated contextually (e.g., What genre does the text represent: private letter, public correspondence, instructional manual, church order, or some other genre?) and what it meant to its original readers. The process of situating particular interpretation of the text leads to a genuine engagement with **history**, since determining its genre and thought content inevitably raises questions about its impact on the stream of human thought and culture. These researchers not only offer a chronology of events based on the data recoverable from the text and other sources but also assess what was going forward or retreating in the culture at the time the text was generated (something that the author of the text might not have known). Since historians working on the same text may offer a variety of judgments about it (e.g., some might hold that the text represents a purely Jewish worldview, while others may aver it enshrines a purely Greco-Roman pagan worldview, or the worldview of a mystery religion, or the worldview of an ancient philosophical system, or even some version of Christianity in conversation with any or all of the above), the functional specialty **dialectic** will unmask these varying historical judgments, adjudicating what horizon of meaning they represent (e.g., organic development, contrary or contradictory worldviews, or a genuine eruption of something new).

Up to this point, the personal religious conversion of the investigator is not an issue, but as dialectic lays bare foundational questions about thought and reality, the investigator's own stance is brought under judgment. (For example, if a historian excludes as a matter of principle the possibility of a text reporting a miracle being true, that historian will not be able to engage a text reporting Jesus' resurrection as revelatory but only as a witness to what some people a long time ago believed about Jesus' afterlife.)

Investigators who appropriate their own intellectual, moral, and religious conversion may then objectify their own stance in the functional specialty **foundations**. Having accounted for their own acceptance of the text under investigation as genuinely revelatory of a divine encounter in foundations, they can then offer to co-believers the content of the revelatory encounter as **doctrines** (i.e., they explore not only what the text meant to past believers but also what claims it makes and might make on present and future believers). Further investigators will attempt to bring the various doctrines discovered and formulated in the earlier functional specialties into some coherent and fruitful framework in **systematics**. Finally some will find themselves attempting to communicate the religious worldview generated in systematics to people operating in a variety of thought-worlds (common sense, theory, and metatheory) and with a variety of values (pre-conventional, conventional, post-conventional) by all the cultural means available for **communications** (art forms, literature, learned journals, ritual performances, and other means).

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I hope that this sketch of theology and its tasks illuminates the rest of this presentation. Frail and faltering though it may be, I claim Christian faith within the Roman Catholic communion. I am seeking today to share with you an understanding of what this faith believes about five topics: the Triune God, God’s creation, the Church, the Church’s worship, and music. I have explored each topic in the light of experience and revelation, Scripture and tradition, belief and knowledge. This has involved me in research, interpretation, history, and dialectic applied to a close reading of *Sing to the Lord*. I am attempting to share with you what I have discovered in an act of communication called a “Hovda Lecture.” Questions relating to foundations, doctrine, and systematics will not be explicitly addressed here, but they may arise in the conversation we will have triggered by my and my colleagues’ presentations in this year’s series.

Theme and Variations: Theological Assumptions and Assertions in *Sing to the Lord*

Before offering a critique of the theological dimensions of STL, I want to signal my profound appreciation for the attempt that the authors of the document made to frame the practical exhortations of the text in the context of explicitly theological thinking. The lack of sustained theological discourse in both *Music in Catholic Worship* (1972/1983) and *Liturgical Music Today* (1982) was a significant omission in both of those documents.³

While theological assumptions and assertions permeate the text presently under study, Chapter One, entitled “Why We Sing,” is the most explicitly theological section of STL. Here the Latin Church Catholic bishops in the United States offer their most sustained discussion about God, creation, the Church, the Church’s worship, and the music employed in that worship in the document.

The Triune God. Since STL is the product of a national body of Catholic bishops and is addressed to “priests, deacons, liturgists, music directors, composers, cantors, choirs, congregations, and faith communities throughout the United States,”⁴ it is not surprising that the document robustly assumes a shared faith in God’s existence and characteristics in its readers. Rather than addressing either the world (as in the USCCB’s earlier documents on war and peace and the economy) or the academy (as in various writings about the role of the episcopal *magisterium* in relation to Catholic institutions of higher learning), STL addresses Christian believers, and especially those within the Latin Church of the Roman Catholic communion of churches. Since the mysteries of God’s “triunity” and of Christ’s incarnation may be considered the most important of the revealed “hierarchy of truths” that Roman Catholic Christians affirm, it is not surprising that STL grounds its reflections in these mysteries, even though the amount of verbiage spent on them is comparatively slight.

There are only two explicit references to the Triune God in the document. The first asserts that the “inner life of God” (recognizing the faltering character of human language to capture this mystery) is not a juxtaposition of three unrelated monads but a dance of eternal giving and receiving that Eastern theologians have termed *perichoresis*: “[T]he life of the Blessed Trinity . . . is

itself a communion of love. In a perfect way, the Persons of the Trinity remain themselves even as they share all that they are" (STL, 10). We will see later that this understanding of God as Divine Persons in a communion of love will be cited as a model for the Church as a community of human persons gifted, elevated, and living by the same communion of love through grace. I believe the authors lost a chance to enrich both musicians' understanding of their ministry and the world of theological discourse by not using a musical illustration of *perichoresis*, e.g., how in triadic harmony one can distinguish a foundational tone generating a fifth and third (imaging the procession of the Son and Spirit from the Father), that the "same chord" is recognizable in myriads of inversions (imaging infinite *perichoresis*), and that all three tones are perceived by the hearer as one chord (imaging the differentiation of each Divine Person united in a single Godhead).

The second reference notes that the "hymn of [Christ's] Paschal Sacrifice [is] for the honor and glory of the Most Blessed Trinity" (STL, 14). We will explore in a later section of this presentation how STL enriches our theological discourse by conceiving Jesus' passion, death, resurrection, and sending of the Holy Spirit as a hymn. Here I will simply say that the formulation strikes me as a little odd. Normally one would speak of God the Son associating the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit with the honor and glory he gives God the Father. I am not sure how God the Son would both generate (as the subject of Paschal Sacrifice) and receive (as a member of the Most Blessed Trinity) honor and glory.

Taking for granted the theological assertion that when God acts "*ad extra*," the Divine Persons act in union with one another (although the particular action may be ascribed by appropriation to a particular Divine Person), most of STL's theological assertions about the Triune God relate to particular Divine Persons.

God the Father (by appropriation). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* associates God the Father especially with creating, sustaining, and bringing to fulfillment the created order under the notion of "blessing." STL repeatedly asserts that song takes its place among the blessings bestowed by God on God's people. In its very first article the document states: "God has bestowed upon his people the gift of song" (STL, 1). While I agree with this formulation as far as it goes, I would have preferred the document to state that God blesses what he has created with sound itself, with music, and with song. Because aspects of God's creation reveal themselves through sound, sound becomes a medium of communication and self-expression; it may even become a means of revelation. Music, as a particularly ordered aspect of sound, enlarges its revelatory possibilities, and song, as music conjoined to human language, is even more equipped for these functions.

I would also have preferred that the text not limit this blessing to "God's people," since the gift of sound enriches all beings who have the capacity to decode and employ acoustic signals, while music and song enrich all human beings. In addition, a narrow reading of the assertion in article one suggests that God only bestows the blessing of song on a limited range of human beings, taking "his people" to mean those bound to God by covenant, i.e., Jews and Christians. Fortunately in a parenthetical remark, STL 71 clearly ascribes the divine blessing of music to all humans: "With gratitude to the Creator for giving humanity such a rich diversity of musical styles . . ." It also sees

diversity of musical styles as a good intended by the Creator, thus placing music in a different category from language, since the biblical story of the building of the Tower of Babel views the diversity of human languages not as an enriching expression of varied cultures but as a divine punishment for human hubris.

A later sentence in STL 1 again acknowledges the Creator God's blessing by the gift of song: "God, the giver of song, is present whenever his people sing his praises." Once again this assertion is fine as far as it goes, but it has to be read carefully. To suggest that God is absent unless God's people sing his praises contradicts the theological doctrine of God's omnipresence, and to suggest that God's people singing somehow constrains God's freedom contradicts the theological doctrine of God's absolute freedom. It might have been more accurate to write that human communal singing has a particular value for evoking God's presence among the many modes by which God makes the divine self present to creation ("If you believe and I believe")

Finally, STL 3, quoting the command of Moses in Deuteronomy 31:19, notes that "our ancestors reveled in this gift, sometimes with God's urging. 'Write out this song, then, for yourselves,' God said to Moses. 'Teach it to the Israelites and have them recite it, so that this song may be a witness for me.'" It should be clear that STL emphasizes the creative and sustaining energies of God, traditionally ascribed in Christian theology to God the Father by appropriation.

Jesus Christ/God the Son (by appropriation). If the Church by appropriation ascribes the blessing, sustaining, and consummating of creation to God the Father, it ascribes by appropriation the salvation and redemption of creation to God the Son. STL treats the ascribed activities of the second Divine Person in two categories: the activities of the earthly Jesus and the power of the heavenly Christ.

STL 8 reports Jesus' activity close to the beginning of his earthly ministry, when he serves as reader and preacher in a synagogue service, as in some way a model for the ministry of Christians: "The words Jesus chose from the book of Isaiah at the beginning of his ministry become the song of the Body of Christ" (Luke 4:18; see Isaiah 61:1-2; 58:6). STL treats this passage as though it were a simple report of what happened on a particular day in Jesus' ministry. Such an interpretation would be more characteristic of fundamentalist biblical interpretation than Roman Catholic exegesis. Since we do not have multiple attestations to this incident, historical-critical method would be reluctant to take this narrative as a verbal snapshot of an uncontested event. Rather, bracketing the question of the incident's historical veracity, we should explore what the sacred author was trying to communicate to his hearers/readers by recounting this story. Making some reference to the presumed custom of cantillating a biblical text in the original Hebrew before offering a vernacular translation and preaching could have made even clearer the connection between Jesus' practice of liturgical singing and the "song of the Body of Christ."

STL 4 reports Jesus' activity close to the end of his earthly ministry, when he and those who shared table fellowship with him for the last time before his execution concluded their time together with song: "Jesus and his apostles sang a hymn before their journey to the Mount of Olives" (see

Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26). As is well known, there is much debate about whether this final meal was a Passover Seder, since the timing of the meal offered by the Synoptics differs from that in the Gospel of John. Nonetheless the so-called “Petrine” Gospel writers (called so by presuming that the Matthean account is a very lightly edited version of the Marcan account and that Peter’s preaching is the apostolic authority underlying Mark’s Gospel) clearly want to present Jesus’ final meal in a Passover context. Therefore the “hymn” that he and his disciples shared in these accounts of the Last Supper would have signaled to the original hearers/readers the biblical chants ending the Passover meal.

Presumably the authors of STL wanted to show Jesus’ engagement with the liturgical music of his Jewish heritage throughout his earthly ministry by offering these citations from the beginning and end of the Gospel accounts of that ministry. It is somewhat disappointing, however, that a more extensive account of Jesus’ own worship and its relation to music making as found in the New Testament texts, as well as the implications of Jesus’ own characteristic worship for the worship of those who claim to follow him, does not appear in STL. (However, as we will see, the scriptural foundations of a theology of music in STL are quite rudimentary.)

The other two references to the second Divine Person in STL do not treat the activities of the earthly Jesus so much as they evoke his role as heavenly Lord. Perhaps reflecting the *ad intra* and *ad extra* goals of the Second Vatican Council, as articulated in the opening articles of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, STL 14 notes Christ’s ongoing invitation to the Church at prayer (*ad intra*): “Christ always invites us . . . to enter into song, to rise above our own preoccupations, and to give our entire selves to the hymn of his Paschal Sacrifice for the honor and glory of the Most Blessed Trinity.” I would certainly concur with this sentiment, but I’m not sure how this Christic invitation is derived: It certainly doesn’t appear explicitly in the spoken texts of the Lord Jesus recounted in the New Testament.

In contrast STL 8, citing the teaching of Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, reminds us that the Christian life is not totally directed toward its own members but reaches out *ad extra*: “Christ . . . remains with us and leads us through church doors to the whole world, with its joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties.” I hear in this assertion the final sentence of Matthew’s Gospel (“Behold, I remain with you until the end of time”) conjoined to the tradition of Catholic social teaching, made especially articulate in our day from Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* (1891) through Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in Veritate* (2009).

God the Holy Spirit (by appropriation). If by appropriation the Church ascribes creation to God the Father and redemption to God the Son, it ascribes the sanctification of creation to the Holy Spirit. I find the only direct reference to the Holy Spirit in STL 1, and even then it is not explicit: “God dwells within each human person, in the place where music takes its source.” What is most interesting about this assertion is that it yokes divine indwelling to the human capacity to make and appreciate music. Such a bald assertion is very suggestive, but it cries out for a much more developed theology of the Holy Spirit in STL.

Since Western Christians display a less robust theology of the Holy Spirit than our Eastern brothers and sisters, it is not surprising that STL would

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have an underdeveloped pneumatology, but even slightly more attention to the role of the Holy Spirit would profoundly enrich this document. For example, we will see that STL notes both the unity and the differentiation of roles in the Church, and since the Holy Spirit is the Divine Person who both differentiates and unifies the other two Divine Persons, a similar function can be ascribed to the Holy Spirit’s work in the Church. Corporate singing and music making can serve as a powerful image of such unity-in-differentiation, when choirs create a single choral sound out of the diversity of individual voices, or when a conductor creates a single music out of the diversity of individual instruments.

Another aspect of pneumatology that might be of interest to STL is the Spirit’s vivifying power. Musicians can attest to the mysterious quality of “inspiration” operating in composers, performers, and hearers alike. It might be possible to illustrate the Spirit’s power to transform the reading of the Scriptures from a simple engagement with the literature of a past civilization to a life-transforming encounter with the living God by reference to a parallel encounter with a piece of music, transformed from simple acoustic events to an encounter with a wellspring of human thought and emotion in an “inspired” performance. These two examples should suggest how much the document we are studying could be enriched by more attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in creation, Church, worship, and worship music.

Creation. A commonplace of theological reflection among Western Christians is that the Catholic ethos delights in God’s creation as the matrix for sacramental encounter with God, while the Protestant ethos tends to view creation implicated in human sin and so fallen that it impedes one’s encounter with God. STL 123 is a forthright statement of the “symphonic” character of Catholic liturgical worship, reveling as it does in the transformative potential of the gifts of creation:

Each particular liturgical celebration is composed of many variable verbal and non-verbal elements: proper prayers, scriptural readings, the liturgical season, the time of day, processional movement, sacred objects and actions, the socio-economic context in which the particular community is set, or even particular events impacting the life of the Christian faithful. Every effort should be made to lend such disparate elements a certain unity by the skillful and sensitive selection and preparation of texts, music, homily, movement, vesture, color, environment, and sacred objects and actions. This kind of ritual art requires that those who prepare the Liturgy approach it with artistic sensitivity and pastoral perspective.

Notice that in Catholic Christian liturgical worship what is offered to God is not creation “raw” but creation transformed by human thought and will. Sounds are structured by human culture to produce the language in which proper prayers and scriptural readings are spoken and sung. Solar and lunar cycles are observed by humans and shaped by believers into liturgical seasons through the calendar of fasting and feasting and liturgical days through the liturgy of the hours. Movement of bodies through space becomes a complex choreography of posture, gestures, and actions in the ceremonies of the liturgy. We do not offer wheat and grapes (“nature raw”) as our Eucharistic elements but bread and wine, i.e., wheat and grapes transformed by human ingenuity and intention into culturally marked food, which in turn is taken

up by divine thought and will as a means by which God genuinely encounters us in sacrament.

This fundamentally positive view of creation with its accompanying potential for sacramental encounter leads to a recognition of the symbolic character of worship. Liturgical celebration employs the significant and the symbolic aspects of creation because human beings are sign making and symbol perceiving kinds of beings. Quoting the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1146 and 1148, STL 6 states this well: “In human life, signs and symbols occupy an important place. As a being at once body and spirit, man expresses and perceives spiritual realities through physical signs and symbols . . .” [CCC, 1146]. In Liturgy, we use words, gestures, signs, and symbols to proclaim Christ’s presence and to reply with our worship and praise.” And “inasmuch as [signs and symbols] are creatures, these perceptible realities can become means of expressing the action of God who sanctifies men, and the action of men who offer worship to God” [CCC, 1148].

Notice that this robust situating of liturgical worship in the complex sign-systems of human beings acting in this world of space and time challenges a more Platonic understanding of worship which would be suspicious of earthly worship as a mere shadow of the real, unchanging, “heavenly” worship. While I believe that the relation of the Divine Persons is worshipful and that the ranks of the angels worship and adore the living God, I do not believe that this form of worship has any need of sign-systems, since the worshipers are pure spirit. I believe that some of the “culture wars” being fought out in liturgical preferences and operative theologies really stem from a contrast between an Aristotelian-Thomist understanding of worship mediated through causal signs and a Platonic-Augustinian understanding of worship in which earthly signs are to be surmounted in an “ascent” to the heavenly realms. (Thus a contrast between liturgical music chosen for its ability to function appropriately in a complex sign-system activated by music makers and music chosen for its ability to evoke transcendence by drawing auditors first from the world of mundane acoustic events to the “higher” world of musical events until one reaches the goal of silence, where the time-bound succession of tones gives way to an eternity transcending sound. The practical challenge for the music minister is to find a way to mediate between these competing understandings of worship.)

The Church. As we have seen, STL does not offer a complete theological treatment of the Triune God or of creation but presents some assertions that both orient the reader and invite deeper thought. The same is true of its treatment of the mystery of the Church. Theological assertions concerning ecclesiology in STL are meager but suggestive.

Wisely, the document notes that the Church arises from and in some sense stays forever connected to Judaism, yet also offers a distinctive proclamation and worldview. The document quotes Benedict XVI (then Joseph Ratzinger) to this point in STL 7: “For Israel, the event of salvation in the Red Sea will always be the main reason for praising God, the basic theme of the song it sings before God. For Christians, the Resurrection of Christ is the true Exodus. . . . The definitively new song has been intoned. . . .” (Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* [Ignatius Press, 2000] 137–138). What Benedict XVI asserts in this quotation is true but problematic. Without careful nuance, one could read the “definitive newness” of the resurrection of Christ

As one might expect, STL's theological concerns are more developed in the areas of worship and music.

as something repudiating the Exodus from Egypt rather than bringing its trajectory to fulfillment (e.g., liberation from human slavery becoming a type of liberation from death and sin). We will see that STL offers the merest sketch of the music-making traditions of the Jewish people, but it should be clear that a more adequate theology would examine these traditions deeply to discover what about them could be genuinely revelatory for Christians. (For example, both Jews and Christians sing psalms in individual and communal devotions and liturgy, but the contexts and resonances of these sung texts are quite different. In what sense could Christians “see Christ” in the Psalter?)

A second area of ecclesiological concern for STL is the mystery of the Church in its unity and diversity, carefully brought together in article 10. The article begins with the differentiated character of the Church. It is not a mere assemblage of identical elements but an organic corporation of diverse skills and responsibilities: “Holy Mother Church clearly affirms the role within worship of the entire liturgical assembly (bishop, priest, deacon, acolytes, ministers of the Word, music leaders, choir, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, and the congregation).” Although it lists ordained ministers in first place, it makes no assertions about the ontological difference between clergy and laity, a difference that will have both liturgical and musical implications. Notice that the differentiation as conceived in article 10 will serve as the basis for STL Chapter Two on the Church at prayer. The skills and responsibilities of each of these offices and ministries are treated in greater detail there.

But even though ecclesiological differences might be highlighted in STL 10, the unity of the Church's members is strongly affirmed: “For our part, ‘we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another’ [Romans 12:5–6]. The Church urges all members of the liturgical assembly to receive this divine gift and to participate fully ‘depending on their orders [and] their roles in the liturgical services’ [Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 26].” Readers of the document might want to explore how *Musicam Sacram* 5 emphasizes the role of liturgical music in both unifying (all voices and instruments making one music) and differentiating a liturgical assembly (there are distinct roles for assembly, priest, deacon, cantor, choir, instrumentalists, etc.).

The Church's Worship.⁵ As one might expect, STL's theological concerns are more developed in the areas of worship and music. Its teaching on the Church's worship can be considered in three areas: the practice of, the participation in, and the consequences of Catholic Christian worship.

The Practice of Catholic Christian Worship. In broad strokes, STL 5 paints two aspects of Catholic worship: gathering on the Lord's Day and using song as a key aspect of communal prayer: “Obedient to Christ and to the Church, we gather in liturgical assembly, week after week. As our predecessors did, we find ourselves ‘singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in [our] hearts to God’” (Colossians 3:16). The first has certainly remained an ideal of Catholic Christian worship, indeed, the key expression of the *ekklesia* — the Body of Christ — at worship, though in practice it has often required legal support as an obligation (see *Code of Canon Law*, 1246), while it has not as often been celebrated as a *right* as well as a duty of all the baptized (SC, 14). No matter the form of support, however, gathering as an assembly for

worship on the Lord's Day has become a *minority practice* among American Catholics, with only about one-third of the Catholic population attending Sunday Mass regularly.⁶ The self-absenting of Catholic Christians from the key act of ecclesial worship, therefore, poses a theological challenge that goes beyond the scope of this article. But one might ask: Using Lonergan's functional theological specialties, how would one unpack the faith experience of a community that does not gather for its key ritual action? The reference to the musical practices of our "predecessors," is similarly irenic and similarly challenging for a theology of music, particularly since the reference to Colossians quotes an exhortation to sing, within a general invitation to the virtues of Christian community (Colossians 3:12–17), and not a description of the actual practice of the Church at Colossae. And, in fact, through much of Christian history, congregational song at Sunday Mass has been more of an ideal than an actuality. However, given current practice, in which congregational singing is presumed to be part of Sunday Mass (the issue of actual participation in that singing remains a question, as we shall see), this invocation of ideal early Christian worship is actually more supportive of and descriptive of reality today than it may have been of liturgy sixty years ago.

Participation in Catholic Christian Worship. Who worships? All of creation worships the Creator, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Since tradition holds that creation reveals God's glory, then all creation worships God by being just what the Creator intended. The theme of all creation's praise of God is prominent especially in the psalms (65:12–13; 69:34; 96:11–12; 98:7–8; 103:22; 148; 150:6; cf. Isa 42:10). But such worship is ineffective for transforming creation's defects, according to traditional theology, because only God can create or transform that which has been created, i.e., only God can bring salvation. In other words, argues the Letter to the Hebrews, only God can truly worship God in a way that is effective for transforming creation (Hebrews 5:9). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, in communion with the exalted Christ, liturgy joins the Church to this act of perfect worship. Liturgy, therefore, is an act of the whole Christ—Christ the Head and we his members (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1136). Therefore "it is the whole *community*, the Body of Christ united with its head, that celebrates" (*Catechism*, 1140). STL 10 takes up this affirmation of the ecclesial nature of liturgy as the act of the "entire liturgical assembly." The document focuses on the act of worship as an act of communion: "Through grace, the liturgical assembly partakes in the life of the Blessed Trinity, which is itself a communion of love." Still it notes the transformative aspect of this communion, for "the Persons of the Trinity remain themselves even as they share all that they are": It is that sharing which transforms creation.

While acknowledging the key roles of the ordained, STL echoes the focus of the twentieth century liturgical movement on the ecclesial nature of worship and on the role of the congregation within the *ekklesia*: "Within the gathered assembly, the role of the congregation is especially important" (STL, 11). It does not, of course, go into extensive theological analysis of this role, but it does repeat and expand descriptions of congregational participation's effects and ways to achieve that participation. The key declaration behind most of postconciliar liturgical renewal is quoted in STL 11: "The full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all

else, for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit" (Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14). Because we are embodied spirits, all of our actions have at least two parts: the internal intent and its external performance. So it is with participation in the liturgy: "Participation in the Sacred Liturgy must be 'internal, in the sense that by it the faithful join their mind to what they pronounce or hear, and cooperate with heavenly grace'" (Sacred Congregation for Rites, *Musicam sacram*, 15, quoted in STL, 12). It "must also be external, so that internal participation can be expressed and reinforced by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes, and by the acclamations, responses, and singing" (STL, 13; see *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 30).

Results and Consequences of Catholic Christian Worship. Actions have effects; intentions have consequences. The arena in which liturgical participation acts is the arena of faith—faith as a foundational affirmation of our belief in the way things are and as action following upon that foundation (*ad intra* and *ad extra*, as previously noted). "Participation in the Sacred Liturgy both expresses and strengthens the faith that is in us" (STL, 13). Without referencing *Music in Catholic Worship*, STL 5 quotes one of its key affirmations to describe the relationship between faith and liturgical celebration: "Faith grows when it is well expressed in celebration. Good celebrations can foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken it."

Like all true worship, STL 9 affirms, Catholic liturgy is transformative of the participants and of the world through their action in faith. "Particularly inspired by sung participation, the body of the Word Incarnate goes forth to spread the Gospel with full force and compassion. In this way the Church leads men and women 'to the faith, freedom and peace of Christ by the example of its life and teaching, by the sacraments and other means of grace. Its aim is to open up for all men a free and sure path to full participation in the mystery of Christ'" (quotation from Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 5). But the proclamation of the Gospel is not just a matter of proclaiming doctrine, as the late Pope John Paul II taught: "We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (cf. Jn 13:35; Mt 25:31–46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged" (Apostolic Letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine* [October 7, 2004], 28). Or, as STL 9 puts it: "Charity, justice, and evangelization are . . . the normal consequences of liturgical celebration."

Music in/for Catholic Christian Worship. From a theological point of view, STL has the most to say about music itself and its role in worship. Here it will be considered under five headings: the "being" of music, music making in the Scriptures and in the liturgy, the purpose of liturgical music, the functions of liturgical music, and two culturally contextualized dimensions of liturgical music.

The "Being" of Music. This is the most disappointing part of the document. STL needs to engage the insights of philosophers of music, especially those (like Boethius) whose writings were especially influential in the development of Western liturgical chant. At the very least it would have been helpful to distinguish sound, music, and song, as well as what is meant by sacred, religious, ecclesial, liturgical, and devotional music. In STL 2 we have an example of the tension I mentioned earlier between an Aristotelian-Thomist

understanding of worship mediated through causal signs and a Platonic-Augustinian understanding of worship in which earthly signs are to be surmounted in an “ascent” to the heavenly realms—a contrast between liturgical music chosen for its ability to function appropriately in a complex sign-system and music chosen for its ability to evoke transcendence. Music is described first in Platonic-Augustinian terms as a “cry from deep within our being, . . . a way for God to lead us to the realm of higher things.” This is followed by what I consider an Aristotelian-Thomist understanding: “Music is . . . a sign of God’s love for us and of our love for him. In this sense, it is very personal.”

Woven through these two theologies of music are elements drawn from acoustics (the study of sound and how it operates) and audiation (the study of hearing and comprehending music). Sound is essential to music, at least as it is understood in this document: “But unless music sounds, it is not music, and whenever it sounds, it is accessible to others” (STL, 2). Does this exclude those who cannot hear from the realm of music? No, because sound vibrates a medium—air—and those who are hearing-impaired can also receive these vibrations and even “audiate” them as sound. It is this aspect of music-as-sound—vibration of air—that gives it its initial communal dimension. Those who receive music, either as vibration or as sound, become part of the sonic event, whether they will to do so or not. When they choose to participate in the event, then music takes on a second communal aspect, as other voices join in the song they hear or actively “audiate” the sound as song. This is why STL 2 can affirm: “By its very nature song has both an individual and a communal dimension. Thus, it is no wonder that singing together in church expresses so well the sacramental presence of God to his people.”

Music-Making in the Scriptures and the Liturgy. Since the biblical Scriptures occupy a privileged place in the Christian tradition as witness to and enshrining of divine revelation, much more of this document could have been spent on the role of music in ancient Hebrew/Israelite/Jewish civilization in continuity and contrast with its Mesopotamian and Egyptian neighbors, with an eye toward how music was used in individual, domestic, and Temple worship. This is the religio-musical tradition that shaped Jesus and his earliest followers. Once the contours of this tradition are established it will be easier to see how the Christian movement adopted, adapted, or rejected parts of this formative tradition. Though the psalms are frequently mentioned throughout STL, this collection so closely associated with the Second Temple is only alluded to (through a reference to David), in STL 3, which summarizes the role of music in Israel through three main images: at the Sea, in the time of the judges, and when the Ark of the Covenant entered Jerusalem: “The Chosen People, after they passed through the Red Sea, sang as one to the Lord [Exodus 15:1–18, 21]. Deborah, a judge of Israel, sang to the Lord with Barak after God gave them victory [Judges 4:4–5:31]. David and the Israelites ‘made merry before the Lord with all their strength, with singing and with citharas, harps, tambourines, sistrums, and cymbals’ [2 Samuel 6:5].”

Similar limitations mark STL’s treatment of music in the New Testament. To the passing reference to the final song of the Last Supper, previously noted, STL 4 adds three examples of song from the collection of letters: “St. Paul instructed the Ephesians to ‘[address] one another in psalms and hymns and

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spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts' [Ephesians 5:18–19]. He sang with Silas in captivity [Acts 16:25]. The letter of St. James asks, 'Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone in good spirits? He should sing praise' [James 5:13]."

There is a brief description in STL 7 of the unique content of Christian song, which sets it apart from all other songs in worship, by reference to the key fact of the Paschal Mystery: "The primordial song of the Liturgy is the canticle of victory over sin and death." And there is a reminder that this song is proleptic, leaping ahead toward completion, though for now it remains unfinished because it will only be completed in the heavenly kingdom, when our liturgical song is brought to completion in union with the "song of the saints" caught up in the "song of the Lamb." Finally, there is a reminder of the fact that song in the liturgy, like the whole of liturgy itself, is oriented beyond itself to a lived proclamation of the Gospel in all that we do beyond the liturgy: "The Paschal hymn, of course, does not cease when a liturgical celebration ends. Christ, whose praises we have sung, remains with us and leads us through church doors to the whole world . . ." (STL, 8).

The Purpose of Music in/for Catholic Christian Worship. Despite the high praise heaped on music—and especially on singing—in this document (see, e.g., STL, 124), it is clear that music in worship has a servant function, particularly a role in uniting the assembly for its ecclesial liturgical act: "The role of music is to serve the needs of the Liturgy and not to dominate it, seek to entertain, or draw attention to itself or to the musicians The primary role of music in the Liturgy is to help the members of the gathered assembly to join themselves with the action of Christ and to give voice to the gift of faith" (STL, 125).

The Functions of Music in/for Catholic Christian Worship. STL highlights an aspect of human communication that is drawing more attention now than in previous ages. The tonal or musical aspect of human speech does not simply add beauty to speech or convey feeling; it evokes and communicates *meaning*. "Music does what words alone cannot do. It is capable of expressing a dimension of meaning and feeling that words alone cannot convey. While this dimension of an individual musical composition is often difficult to describe, its affective power should be carefully considered along with its textual component" (STL, 124). Faith, it is to be noted, is an aspect of human experience that is enriched by the addition of tone, of music: "This common, sung expression of faith within liturgical celebrations strengthens our faith when it grows weak and draws us into the divinely inspired voice of the Church at prayer" (STL, 5). Any theological exploration of music's role in worship, then, must take account of the "added meaning" that music brings to the language and act of worship.

One example of the importance of this aspect of tonal value in communication—most evident because of its absence—is in e-mail exchanges. Without the tonal qualities of speech, receivers of an e-mail often misunderstand or take offense, and writers are often apologizing and explaining. "Emoticons" help, but their addition to our written communication only serves to indicate the need for tone to communicate meaning as well as feeling. Still, that feeling quality is important not only in our daily speech but also in our worship. This aspect of liturgy was once downplayed as insignificant, but recognition of its importance to human communication has reinforced its

role in worship: “Good music ‘make[s] the liturgical prayers of the Christian community more alive and fervent so that everyone can praise and beseech the Triune God more powerfully, more intently and more effectively’” (STL, 5; internal quote from *Musicae sacrae disciplina* 31; see 33).

The Dimensions and Context of Music Making in/for Catholic Christian Worship. We end with what I believe to be the greatest contribution that STL makes to our ongoing discussion, a contribution potentially as helpful as the musical, liturgical, and pastoral dimensions of judgment in MCW back in 1972. That is the recognition of three other aspects of music for worship: its ritual and spiritual dimensions that occur within a cultural context. As I mentioned, these aspects of music in worship have been addressed from other perspectives by Kevin Vogt and Ricky Manalo in their essays, so for now I will simply quote the relevant section of *Sing to the Lord*; this rich statement in paragraphs 67–70 needs much more theological unfolding than is possible in this article:

“Sacred music is to be considered the more holy the more closely connected it is with the liturgical action, whether making prayer more pleasing, promoting unity of minds, or conferring greater solemnity upon the sacred rites” [Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 112]. This holiness involves *ritual* and *spiritual* dimensions, both of which must be considered within *cultural* context.

The *ritual dimension* of sacred music refers to those ways in which it is “connected with the liturgical action” so that it accords with the structure of the Liturgy and expresses the shape of the rite. The musical setting must allow the rite to unfold with the proper participation of the assembly and its ministers, without overshadowing the words and actions of the Liturgy.

The *spiritual dimension* of sacred music refers to its inner qualities that enable it to add greater depth to prayer, unity to the assembly, or dignity to the ritual. Sacred music is holy when it mediates the holiness of God and forms the Holy People of God more fully into communion with him and with each other in Christ.

The *cultural context* refers to the setting in which the ritual and spiritual dimensions come into play. Factors such as the age, spiritual heritage, and cultural and ethnic background of a given liturgical assembly must be considered. . . .

Postlude: Music as Portal to the Transcendent

After this lengthy excursion into theological analysis, I feel it is important to end with an expression of theological insight into the role of music in divine and human self-communication from a different perspective. Anne Porter’s “Music,” drawn from her 2006 volume *Living Things: Collected Poems*, is deceptively simple. The poem begins by evoking the experience many of us have had of being drawn by music in childhood into shattering rapture. Acknowledging the mystery at the heart of music making and music hearing, the author extrapolates from that experience a deeply Christian stance toward our sin-broken yet redeemed and cherished world. The poem ends by reminding us that we finite and contingent humans meet the God who comes to meet us not only in the Temple of Truth and on the Path of Goodness but also in the Abyss of Beauty.

When I was a child
I once sat sobbing on the floor
Beside my mother's piano
As she played and sang
For there was in her singing
A shy yet solemn glory
My smallness could not hold

And when I was asked
Why I was crying
I had no words for it
I only shook my head
And went on crying

Why is it that music
At its most beautiful
Opens a wound in us
An ache a desolation
Deep as a homesickness
For some far-off
And half-forgotten country

I've never understood
Why this is so

But there's an ancient legend
From the other side of the world
That gives away the secret
Of this mysterious sorrow

For centuries on centuries
We have been wandering
But we were made for Paradise
As deer for the forest

And when music comes to us
With its heavenly beauty
It brings us desolation
For when we hear it
We half remember
That lost native country

We dimly remember the fields
Their fragrant windswept clover
The birdsongs in the orchards
The wild white violets in the moss
By the transparent streams

And shining at the heart of it
Is the longed-for beauty
Of the One who waits for us
Who will always wait for us
In those radiant meadows

Yet also came to live with us
And wanders where we wander.⁷

Notes

1. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007), hereafter STL.
2. John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 1.
3. Admittedly, MCW proffered “The Theology of Celebration” in a few articles, but these paragraphs did not address the great themes that STL at least adverts to.
4. STL, “Foreword,” xi.
5. Dr. Gordon E. Truitt contributed to this section and the following section on music by expanding my working outline into a connected narrative.
6. According to the *CARA Catholic Poll*, taken every few years by the Center for Applied Research on the Apostolate in Washington, DC, between 2004 and 2009, the percentage of those surveyed who report that they attend Mass once a week or more has hovered between thirty-three (in 2004) and thirty-six (in 2009) percent. See <http://cara.georgetown.edu/bulletin/index.htm>.
7. Anne Porter, “Music,” from *Living Things: Collected Poems* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Steerforth Press, 2006).

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