

Universa Laus – Document II
Music in Christian liturgies
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God creates through the Word. All human beings are called to associate themselves with this work of creation. The Word stirs up a people which speaks and which is constantly listening. All Christians are invited to make themselves ready and waiting to give their response to God.

1. Listening

- 1.1 Listening involves the totality of the individual body. The state of listening through which human beings “open their ear” places all one’s senses on the alert, to such an extent that the entire body is put into a state of listening. The ear rules the body which is engaged in listening. Human beings exist because their entire beings are called forth by the act of listening.
- 1.2 In listening to the word of other people, those who were “*in-fantes*” learn to talk, they integrate the image of their own body in the process of listening or speaking, and they come to be “born” to themselves and to the world. Our way of being and our quality of listening depends on the way in which we ourselves have been welcomed and listened to.
- 1.3 The way in which we listen is capable of offering hospitality to anyone else, no matter who he or she is. In listening to what other people express, we can be attentive to what they say, to their silences, to their relationships with God, to the murmur of the world in them and around them. Listening tunes us in to others and, with them, to the Unheard One who is revealed by the words and silences of those others.
- 1.4 There can be no liturgy without a communal listening to the word of God and without that word generating listening to each other on the part of the members of the assembly. When everyone together devotes themselves to listening to the Word of God, this is the source of all instances of people listening to each other.
- 1.5 Listening is the primary form of participation. To participate consciously, with devotion, and actively in the liturgical action therefore goes beyond the simple execution of the prescribed rites. It is in listening that we are led to respond through prayer, song and actions, in such a way as to take part together in the mystery of Christ.
- 1.6 In order to listen, we say that we “keep silence”, but, properly speaking, silence is actually engendered by our listening. Silence is not to be defined as the absence of noise. Silence allows itself to be perceived when our bodies are still and when they are placed in a state of alert listening.
- 1.7 Inner silence is the origin and the condition of the word and of singing. Word and song are intimately linked to silence. They take their value from the silence from which they are born, from the silence which animates them, and from the silence which they aim for or which they bring about.
- 1.8 Silence is the attitude of heart and mind of those who turn aside from all useless verbiage in order to turn towards the Word. Inner silence is the essential quality of all liturgical acts. In this sense, we can say that it is actually possible only to modulate silence, whether by speaking, singing, playing, walking, prostrating oneself, etc.

- 1.9 In the celebrating assembly the ministers, servants of the Word, must have a disciple's ear, a "liturgical ear". These people are the "listening ones", and they create — through word, song, action, posture or silence — the conditions necessary for the ear of the assembly to be opened, for its listening to become taut and alert.
- 1.10 The minister of the Word is the first hearer of the Word. The role of ministers of the Word is to listen to the Word in the scriptures and to offer their entire body to the Word, in order that the assembly in its turn may hear it, listen to it and allow the Word to become flesh in that assembly. For their part, the role of ministers of song is to listen to the assembly in order to awaken in that assembly its own voice and in order to set free its own song.
- 1.11 At the end of the day, the problems of our daily lives can render us deaf. The liturgy has the power ceaselessly to educate and re-educate us in listening, to the word and to singing.

2. The act of singing in liturgy

- 2.1 The act of singing marks a stage of achievement in the evolution of human language: a standing posture has allowed the spinal column to resonate and thus the entire body; lips, tongue and jaw, originally linked to a prehensile function, have become available for articulated language; primitive bodily action was transformed into crying, then into singing and speech. In this slow process of humanization, human beings have progressively identified themselves with the *logos* which intersects with them; they acquire the capacity to give of themselves through the word and through singing.
- 2.2 The act of singing brings the whole human being into play. It demands of us that our bodies be available for use, and that we have an intelligence and a memory which are on the alert. In moving from the word to singing, the voice tends to become richer: it seems to be clearer, more sonorous, "higher", but not louder. The singing voice illuminates the word and one's entire being,
- 2.3 Singing unifies both the individual person and the assembly. Singing encourages a posture of listening, of compassion, of joy, of serenity . . . Human beings who are listening and singing with their entire bodies are fully aware of themselves both in their senses and in their actions. Singing also tends to unify human groupings. Singing in common, animated by the Spirit, calls into unanimity all those whom Christ saves in order that they might give praise with a single voice and a single heart, thus forming a holy assembly, united in the same act of listening.
- 2.4 Christian practice is essentially something communal: it involves singing together, which presupposes that we must also be listening to each other. One does not listen in the same way when listening together with others. Since the voice can only reproduce what the ear hears, if we interiorise the voices of others we also interiorise what those others are listening to. This process of adjustment protects everyone from turning in on themselves, tests what is happening in the communal "fire", and opens up the individual's act of listening to the world outside. Thus our voices can unite us to form but a single response elicited by the same Spirit.
- 2.5 Mutual listening in singing produces a new quality in the relationship between persons. If it draws our attention to the vocal presence of members of the assembly, it also makes us aware of the daily concrete presence of those who are our brothers and sisters. The vocal action involved in singing together sets off an action of service which is in the realm of the ethical.
- 2.6 By its nature, singing invites one to give of oneself. Through its ministerial nature, liturgical singing little by little leads singers to offer themselves in sacrifice of praise in the Spirit,

through Christ: liturgical singing therefore has a pedagogical and a mystagogical function. The New Song is the song of the New Humanity which actualises the Word: we sing not only with our voices but with our lives. Thus it is that a singer becomes praise which is pleasing to God.

- 2.7 In liturgy, no type of singing or instrumental music is in itself sacred. In Christian worship, it is not music which is sacred but the live voices of the baptized singing in and with Christ.
- 2.8 In liturgy, what makes up the beauty of a type of singing or instrumental music does not exist by itself, independently of the celebration, the place, the rite or the assembly which includes such singing or music. Certainly singing or instrumental music can manifest and magnify the truth of what the assembly is in the course of living through; but what is primary is the state of listening and the singing of that assembly. It is this "availability" which embellishes the assembly and which opens it to the beauty which is to come.
- 2.9 The song of the assembly is imprinted with a new joy, but it remains marked by the limitations of our individual and communal listening. We find it a sore trial that we have these limitations, but our suffering turns out to be something different: it comes from the fact that we are not yet completely renewed by the "new song" that we intone and the "newness" of the One that we sing.
- 2.10 Singing by the assembly is always possible but is always in search of its own fullness. In this way the singing is a witness of the Promise: it proclaims that the Kingdom is already present. At the same time it is a prophetic sign: it announces that the Kingdom is yet to come. In the presence of the Kingdom and in waiting for the coming of the Kingdom, our songs add nothing to what God is, but they draw us closer to God.
- 2.11 The chants, hymns, refrains and acclamations used in Christian liturgies form a specific corpus. They have a deep significance for us, since singing binds together text and music and thus makes both of these enter into our memory. Like the prayers, the prefaces and the other words of the liturgy, they are an important *locus* of mediation between the Word and our own human words.
- 2.12 The singer's body is the holy place where he or she stands in the presence of God. In Christian liturgy, the song of the assembly requires the body of each individual, handed over and linked to everyone else, in order to form a single body. Believers, rendered capable of forming a body through their singing, and united by the Spirit in order to be the Body of Christ, participate in the mystery of the Incarnation and tell out the glory of God.

3. Celebrating with a single heart and a single voice

- 3.1 In liturgical celebration, instrumental music and singing allow everyone to gather together, to greet each other whether they are similar or different, to become a single body without excluding anyone, to join in the act of thanksgiving of the "*ecclesia*" at prayer. In order to set free at a deep level the song both of everyone together and of each person individually, liturgical music must in an intimate way touch all those who take part, by tuning in to their life-rhythms. A body that is at ease leads to a heart that is at peace, the unity of a single being leads to a union of persons. In the same motion, by being in communion through listening and singing, the members of the assembly are called to leave themselves behind in order to move towards the others.
- 3.2 In the liturgical action, instrumental music and singing have a function that involves hospitality: to open people up to listening, to create a space of mystical identity where human

beings can share the things that are fundamental to them. Music and singing prompt the group and the individuals in it to form a single people. They allow each person to live in the house of the Lord and to join in the high praise which resounds therein.

- 3.3 In order that even the least may also find a place there, liturgical music must not be inaccessible. In order for each individual to be guided along a pathway towards freedom, liturgical music must not shut itself off in “common” places. Like travellers sojourning in a strange land, the faithful gathered together produce a new song which thus appears to be at the same time both well known and unheard of.
- 3.4 In humility of service, singing shows the ecclesial community that it has a prophetic role. Communal singing demonstrates to everyone that each person never ceases to receive from others and that each person also enriches others with his or her own gifts. Thus it reminds the community that it needs to strive against a refusal to share, strive for the forgetting of differences, and strive that those who are the least in the assembly may be truly served.
- 3.5 To make peace, to unite, to set free, to welcome and to convert: this is what celebrating with voices and instruments means. If singing in Christian liturgy is like this, then the ministry of music in the Church can be seen to be something formidable. Composers, cantors, animators, and instrumentalists can only devote themselves to the service of Christian liturgy by allowing the assembly to become the subject of the celebration by forming a single body, and by listening alongside them to the promptings of the Spirit.
- 3.6 In liturgy, the mission of instrumental music and singing is to aid, to accompany and to express the passage from death to life which is the fruit of all sacramental action. In a non-violent way, they tear the disciple away from a narcissistic contemplation of self and open the same disciple up to the broader horizons of the promise of the Gospel; and all of this with the proviso that at no time does anyone — whether officiant, cantor or any other minister — take control of that moment when within each member of the assembly there is accomplished the letting-go of self, let alone the paschal “*transitus*” or adoption as son or daughter.

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