


Uttering the name of Jesus and the realisation of salvation: A study of confession of faith as a speech act

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This study applied the speech act theory to investigate the theological significance of the utterance of the name of Jesus, interpreting it as a performative act that generates the reality of faith and salvation. Rather than a mere verbal expression, the invocation of Jesus' name is analysed as a linguistic event that reconfigures the believer's identity and fosters practical faith. Through a systematic exploration of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions, the study elucidates how the utterance initiates a relational transformation and mediates salvific experience. The analysis demonstrates that confession of faith is not simply intellectual assent, but an embodied linguistic act that actively participates in the formation of spiritual life and practice.

Contribution: This article clarifies how the utterance of Jesus' name functions as a performative act that forms faith identity and mediates salvation. It offers a theological perspective that recognises confession not merely as symbolic language but as an active participation in salvific reality.

Keywords: Jesus' name; profession of faith; salvation; invocation event; speech act theory.

Introduction

The name of Jesus and the reality of salvation

In Christian theology, the name of Jesus has theological implications that go beyond mere designation. It comprehensively represents the person, identity, nature and saving work of Jesus, and becomes a core element of faith for Christians (Jones 2015:290–300). Ruck-Schröder (1999:211) argues that the name of Jesus is directly linked to God's revelatory work and has redemptive significance for believers. Specifically, the name of Jesus becomes revelation itself, a channel through which we can experience God and God's saving work (Miskotte 1976:38). The believer's act of believing and calling on the name of Jesus is an expression of faith, a source of salvation and life transformation. The profession of faith in the name of Jesus thus functions as a verbal act that establishes the reality of salvation.

Despite this theological importance, there remains a relative lack of systematic research on how the utterance of the name of Jesus specifically impacts the believer's life. While contemporary faith communities and theological discourse reaffirm the importance of the name of Jesus, little attention has been paid to its linguistic and performative function in realising salvation. The absence of such research neglects the meaning, intent and performative dimension of the name of Jesus, and hinders a deeper theological reflection on the actualisation of salvation through verbal confession. Consequently, theological statements concerning the transformative mystery and power of faith as a linguistic act remain underdeveloped. Furthermore, although the utterance of the name of Jesus serves as a declaration of salvation and a central element of confession, existing studies have often been limited to its doctrinal dimensions. To address this gap, it is necessary to examine the utterance event of the name of Jesus from a linguistic perspective, particularly through the lens of speech act theory. Accordingly, this study systematically analyses how the utterance of the name of Jesus operates as a transformative reality in the believer's life and clarifies the relationship between professions of faith and salvation.

This study was guided by the following research questions: (1) *What role does the utterance of the name of Jesus play in the realisation of religious salvation?* (2) *How can the theological performativity of the name of Jesus be explained from a linguistic perspective (speech act theory)?* (3) *Through what*

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mechanisms is the relationship between profession of faith and realisation of salvation formed?

To answer these questions, this article adopts the speech act theory as a methodological framework. Speech act theory explains that language possesses performative power to create and transform reality beyond simply conveying meaning (Austin 1975). As the utterance of the name of Jesus acts as a linguistic event that establishes the reality of salvation and transforms the believer's life, speech act theory provides an effective theoretical lens for analysis. It offers insights into understanding the saving work of Jesus, the power of language and the mystery of faith manifested when the name of Jesus is invoked. Through this perspective, new theological insights can emerge concerning the confession of faith and the practical dimensions of salvation.

Speech act theory underscores the performativity of language and shows that speaking itself produces tangible effects. Connecting this with the theological context, the utterance of the name of Jesus is more than a verbal profession; it realises salvation. As Bietenhard (1954a:271) asserts, invoking the name of Jesus reveals not only his meaning but also his being and nature. Furthermore, Link (1995:416–438) emphasises that the name of Jesus embodies theological performance, not merely linguistic expression. Extending this discussion, this article argues that the utterance of the name of Jesus is not simply a symbolic act, but a concrete mechanism for realising salvation through the embodiment of confession. In doing so, it demonstrates that the name of Jesus creates a transformative reality within the believer and integrates theological performance with practical faith. By systematically analysing the relationship between the utterance of the name of Jesus and the realisation of salvation within the framework of speech act theory, the study seeks to reconstruct the theological foundation of confession and clarify its practical effects.

Theological application of speech act theory: Methodology

Speech act theory argues that language is not just a means of conveying information or meaning; it performs certain actions. To say something is to do something (Searle 1969:16–17). Most of the language used in daily life consists of performative sentences that involve action. A performative sentence is a linguistic utterance that does more than convey sounds or information; it creates an action and establishes reality in itself (Austin 1975:98). For example, at a wedding, the statement 'I marry this person' not only provides information, but also establishes the legal and social relationship of marriage. Similarly, the phrase 'I promise' is not merely a statement, but the act of making a promise. In the same way, the statement 'I am a Christian' implies that a person lives and acts according to Christian faith. Thus, a profession of faith in Jesus is not merely an expression of belief but an act of living and practising faith.

In speech act theory, performativity is understood relationally (Searle 1969:16–18). The creation of linguistic reality involves mutual cooperation and responsibility between speaker and hearer. For an utterance to be effective, it must be spoken sincerely, intended for the hearer, and carried out with shared understanding and commitment (Searle 1969:65–71). Thus, speech act theory argues that language has the power to create new relationships and realities through the relational dynamic between speaker and hearer. This shows that calling on the name of Jesus establishes a relationship between Jesus and the believer, and brings about the reality of salvation. Speech act theory describes performative language in three dimensions: (1) locutionary act; (2) illocutionary act; and (3) perlocutionary act (Austin 1975:98–108). These components are essential for understanding the intent, performance and consequences of an utterance:

- The locutionary act concerns the propositional content and grammatical structure of an utterance, dealing with its surface meaning. For example, 'Jesus is the Saviour' expresses a theological proposition, reflecting the content of the utterance.
- The illocutionary act explains the performative intent and function of the utterance. When an utterance moves beyond conveying information, it enacts a specific intention, affecting reality. The statement 'Jesus is the Saviour' is not merely a declaration, but a performative act that actualises the reality of salvation through confession.
- The perlocutionary act addresses the effects of the utterance on the hearer. Uttering the name of Jesus produces consequences within the believer or the faith community, resulting in experiences of salvation and life transformation.

There is broad scholarly agreement that a profession of faith shapes the reality of salvation. Richard Bauckham (2008:180–185) states that salvation is a relational reality formed by the identity of God and the believer's profession of faith. He explains that salvation is practically experienced through calling on the name of Jesus. Tom Wright (2016:257–263) similarly argues that salvation is not a mere legal declaration but a historical and practical event that transforms life. He emphasises that salvation is realised through faith profession and the work of the Holy Spirit, viewing confession as life transformation rather than doctrinal assent. Craig Bartholomew (2017:192–197) also stresses that faith is a lived reality rather than a theoretical concept, asserting that confession affects all aspects of life. Calling on the name of Jesus begins the confession of faith and realises the saving reality in the lives of those who believe (Jn 17:3; Rm 8:16).

When explained through speech act theory, the utterance of the name of Jesus is understood as more than religious expression; it produces real change. 'For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved' (Rm 10:13) is not merely a doctrinal statement, but a linguistic event that actualises salvation through performative confession. This study employs speech act theory to analyse the relationship

between the utterance of the name of Jesus and the reality of salvation, identifying the theological and practical implications of confession for the believer's life. Through this approach, the theological performativity of the name of Jesus can be systematically explained, offering a concrete application of speech act theory's understanding of linguistic action.

The calling event and the believer's personal relationship with Jesus

A calling event is a language event that occurs when a name is called. A language event is when language acts as a performative act that creates or transforms reality beyond the mere transmission of meaning. It involves the use of language by a speaker with a specific intention, and the process by which the language produces a specific effect on the hearer or the environment (Austin 1975:12–15). A calling event is a linguistic phenomenon in which the act of invoking a name causes the object of the name to be symbolically or physically summoned and present in the conversation of the speaker and listener, even if the object of the name is physically absent. For example, when A and B invoke C's name in conversation, C becomes relationally present, influencing the conversation despite being physically absent. It is not merely the act of calling, but the relational and emotional effects triggered through the utterance that create new meaning and presence (Anna 2024:1–8). This occurs through performative language, where the name serves to create a relationship and to bring about change. In the Christian faith, calling on the name of Jesus can be understood as a calling event where Jesus is symbolically summoned, allowing believers to experience his presence and salvation. The act functions as a performative language that enables a religious experience concurrent with the utterance. Invocation events are faith experiences in which the believer encounters Jesus in daily life, where the utterance leads to the transformative reality of salvation (Ac 4:12; Mt 18:20).

How, then, does a calling event make salvation real in the believer's daily life? For the invocation of the name of Jesus to create saving reality through performative language, it must involve a personal relationship between Jesus and the believer. The utterance becomes effective when it is rooted in faith, recognising Jesus as Lord, Saviour and Christ. Names reveal the identity of an object, and calling a name initiates a relationship. Yet for that relationship to become existentially meaningful and transformative, performativity must occur. Just as a flower becomes personally significant when we call it by name, the object becomes a relational reality through naming (Heidegger 1971:98). Depending on the depth of the relationship, the calling event creates new realities and brings about transformation. For example, when a daughter falls and hurts her knee, she cries out, 'Mom!' The daughter's calling is not simply a request but an expression of profound trust and relationship. The mother responds not out of obligation but from the relational bond, providing comfort, stability and aid. In this calling event, the utterance of 'Mom' activates

the personal relationship, summoning the mother's presence and care. Through the utterance, the daughter experiences emotional relief and tangible change in her reality. In the same way, when a believer calls on the name of Jesus, a personal relationship is activated. The presence and salvation of Jesus are experienced as real and transformative through the believer's utterance. The daughter's cry for her mother symbolically represents the believer's experience of salvation and transformation through calling on the name of Jesus.

In theological context, the calling event is interpreted as creating a real, personal communion between the speaker (believer) and Jesus. Hans Bietenhard (1954b:270–271) argues that God's name reveals his nature and that invoking the name leads to experiencing God's presence. Oscar Grether (1934) similarly claims that names carry essence and function as channels of theological experience. Thus, a calling event goes beyond linguistic description to establish a substantial relationship between the believer and Jesus. Invoking the name of Jesus is not simply recalling or referencing him, but an act that activates a living relationship. The utterance of Jesus' name is a key agent in establishing this personal relationship. It does not merely represent the relationship symbolically, but transforms it into an actual relational experience. This means that the utterance interacts with the believer's inner faith and Jesus' redemptive work, creating tangible faith reality. Through the utterance, the believer experiences salvation and the living presence of Jesus, completed as a relational act. The relational nature of the name is emphasised in Scripture. Matthew 18:20, 'For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them', highlights that the name of Jesus is not merely a title but relational language that guarantees his presence. The calling event creates a real, personal relationship between the believer and Jesus, functioning as a theological device that actualises faith reality. Names reveal presence and essence; invoking them provides believers with a tangible experience of Jesus' saving presence.

Calling events: Profession of faith and practice of faith

A calling event is a language event in which invoking a particular name does more than offer a linguistic expression; it creates a relationship between speaker and object and actualises reality. A calling event becomes effective through performative language, where the name uttered surpasses mere sound to produce tangible actions and results. When the name of Jesus is uttered, it generates the reality of salvation as a profession of faith and initiates a process that leads to faith practice. In the Christian faith, the act of calling on the name of Jesus is not merely a religious tradition, but a performative act that constitutes the believer's relationship with Jesus and actualises the reality of faith. Thus, when a believer calls on the name of Jesus, it is not simply an intellectual assent or symbolic gesture, but a linguistic act that mediates the presence and salvation of Jesus. According to speech act theory, language operates

beyond conveying meaning to create reality (Austin 1975:98). The act of calling on the name of Jesus is not a mere utterance, but an illocutionary act that forms the reality of faith. For example, when a believer calls 'Jesus, save me', it is not simply a plea but a confession of faith, entrusting oneself to Jesus' redemptive work and establishing a transformative relationship with him.

The confession of faith is central to Christian identity, and the declaration 'Jesus is Lord' (1 Cor 12:3) is recognised as the beginning of salvation. In Romans 10:13, Paul declares, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved', highlighting that calling on the name of Jesus is essential to salvation. This reflects the theological premise that invoking the name of Jesus not only expresses faith, but brings the reality of salvation into existence. Bauckham (2008:180–185) notes that, in the early Christian community, calling on Jesus' name was not simply an expression of belief, but a real practice of experiencing divine authority and salvation. Thus, calling on Jesus' name is a performative language that embodies his presence and redemptive work, enabling faith to be realised.

These calling events fundamentally reshape the believer's existence and identity. Evans (1963:157–158) observes that religious language significantly alters a believer's self-perception and forms their relationship with Jesus. The confession of faith in Jesus' name is not an external utterance but an act that transforms internal identity and spiritual life. By calling on Jesus' name, the believer recognises themselves as united with Christ and embarks on a new life direction. For example, imagine a young man who, after years of wandering and anxiety, calls upon the name of Jesus during a worship service. His heartfelt cry, 'Jesus, please lead me', is not a mere mention of the name, but a profound confession of faith that initiates life transformation. Through this act, he experiences a reorientation of his existence, finding meaning and purpose through the relationship with Jesus. The performative language of invocation extends beyond profession to practice. Uttering the name of Jesus calls the believer towards a changed life, encouraging concrete acts of faith. For example, the exhortation in 1 John 2:1–15, 'Love one another', implies that profession must lead to practical acts of love. It is not enough to intellectually assent to faith; believers must embody faith through action. The invocation of Jesus' name functions as a performative language that calls believers to love, serve and live out their faith actively. As Hays (1996:189–195) emphasises, the calling on Jesus' name must be manifested in life, not merely declared in words. Bartholomew (2015:102–110) similarly stresses that calling the name of Jesus involves living according to his teachings. Heitmüller (1903:154–155) further explains that the name of Jesus possesses performative power to transform a believer's behaviour and life. In this way, calling on the name of Jesus is not simply an utterance but a profound act of faith commitment. When a believer prays, 'Jesus, use me', it is not a passive wish but a religious commitment to action. The believer becomes inwardly motivated and accountable to

embody their prayer through tangible transformation. This demonstrates how performative language leads to real change in the believer's life. Ultimately, the confession of faith in the name of Jesus is a powerful performative event that renews the believer's being and reorients their life. It expresses the recognition of Jesus as Saviour and becomes the practical act of entering a new life shaped by that relationship. Calling on the name of Jesus thus constitutes an event of faith, a transformative encounter in which the believer experiences inner renewal and the salvific work of Christ.

Consequences of the perlocutionary act: The perlocutionary act and the realisation of salvation

The act of calling on the name of Jesus is not a simple religious utterance but an essential process that forms a confession of faith, brings about the reality of salvation and leads to the practice of faith. From the perspective of speech act theory, this is an illocutionary act where a declaration of faith is made, and a perlocutionary act that produces inner change and transformation in the believer's life. Calling on the name of Jesus thus not only forms a confession of faith but also transforms the believer's identity and life through its performative power. Donald Evans (1963:157–158), who employed speech act theory to study biblical language, explains that religious language shapes believers' identity and alters their behaviour, emphasising that confession of faith is an event that accompanies existential change. Michael Horton (2018:312–317) similarly points out that confession of faith is not merely personal belief, but an essential means of experiencing the reality of salvation within a covenant relationship with God. From a systematic theological perspective, this can be understood as a theological event that concretises the process and reality of salvation, as salvation is not only an objective event achieved by God but also an ongoing application realised in believers' lives through the Holy Spirit (Murray 1955:79). Thus, calling on the name of Jesus initiates a confession of faith, leads to an experience of salvation, and extends into the practice of faith, illustrating that salvation is a dynamic, progressive reality rather than a static declaration (Ladd 1974: 202–204).

The perlocutionary act refers to the specific effect that an utterance has on the hearer. Uttering the name of Jesus constitutes a perlocutionary act that allows the believer to experience salvation and undergo spiritual transformation. Stated differently, it is a performative confession of faith that changes the believer's existence and identity. Louis Berkhof (1938:452–453) notes that 'confession of faith is not a mere intellectual agreement but a theological reality that reshapes the believer's life and identity'. For example, when someone cries out, 'Jesus, save me', it is not a mere utterance but a profound declaration of faith that fosters a relationship with Jesus. Although Jesus, as Saviour and Christ, desires

the salvation of all, salvation is realised particularly for those who call on his name with faith. The act of calling itself performs the name 'Saviour', demonstrating that Jesus' name has inherent performative power. When believers utter his name, it is not merely symbolic, but enacts the promise embedded in the relationship between Jesus and the believer, fulfilling his saving work (Evans 1963:158).

Speech act theory teaches that performative language unites the locutionary and illocutionary acts as a concrete reality (Searle 1968:148). This means that the propositional content (*p*) and the performative force (*F*) occur simultaneously. In Romans 10:13, 'For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved', we can distinguish between the propositional content ('Jesus is the Saviour, the Christ') and the illocutionary force (the assurance of salvation). Representing this as *F(p)*, the calling event simultaneously reveals the identity of Jesus and the believer. It forms a relationship of voluntary responsibility and mutual accountability between the believer and Jesus, serving as a medium through which salvation is realised.

The calling event unfolds as follows:

- **Uttering the name of Jesus (the calling event):** A declaration of faith and self-entrustment to Jesus. Through calling the name of Jesus, the believer acknowledges sin and weakness, and decides to accept Jesus' redemption ('Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' Rm 10:13). Some examples include; 'Jesus, save me', 'I pray in the name of Jesus', and 'I believe in the Lord'.
- **Performativity of confession of faith (linguistic act):** Formation of relationship and transformation of identity. By calling on the name of Jesus, the believer forms a relationship with him and is transformed into a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- **Realisation of salvation:** Experiencing the presence of Jesus and spiritual transformation. This act becomes an encounter with the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, resulting in religious assurance and peace (Revelation 3:20). Furthermore, the calling on Jesus' name fosters communal solidarity in the faith community, as Acts 2:42–47 describes.
- **Creation of the reality of salvation:** Expansion into the practice of faith. Confession of faith through the calling event leads not only to personal spiritual experience but also to practical acts of faith (Murray 1955:120). The forms of faith practice include: (1) the practice of love and service when believers live out love and service as emphasised in 1 John 2:1–5; (2) ethical life transformation when believers practise honesty, forgiveness and patience (Mt 5:13–16); and (3) evangelisation and discipleship namely making disciples which is the ultimate practice of faith (Mt 28:19–20).

Thus, the calling event actualises the confession of faith and expands the experience of salvation into practical living.

In summary:

- Uttering the name of Jesus (the calling event) is a performative confession of faith, not a mere verbal expression.
- The performativity of confession creates the reality of salvation, fostering a transformative relationship with Jesus.
- This transformative experience propels believers into concrete religious practice.
- Calling on the name of Jesus changes the believer's life, advancing the process of salvation towards practical realisation.

Therefore, the calling event is a performative act that both expresses and realises the reality of salvation. When a believer calls on the name of Jesus, it forms a confession of faith and transforms the believer's identity and existence, while Jesus, in response, fulfils salvation in the believer's life through his name. This process encompasses confession, transformation and practice, integrating faith and life through the performative power of Jesus' name.

Conclusion

This study has examined the theological significance of uttering the name of Jesus by applying the framework of speech act theory. It has been proposed that this act transcends mere linguistic expression and operates as a transformative event within the life of the believer. The utterance functions not as a static declaration but as an active engagement that embodies and enacts the reality of salvation. Through the analysis, it has become clear that the utterance of Jesus' name functions at more than a verbal level. It initiates a relational and performative process in which the believer is drawn into a dynamic transformation. This process unfolds through language itself, which serves as the medium through which theological realities are not only communicated but realised. In the act of calling upon Jesus, the believer enters a theological relationship in which identity is reshaped and the foundation for ethical and spiritual life is established.

The utterance of Jesus' name must therefore be understood as a vital moment within the lived expression of faith. It is not a passive recital or a mere symbol, but a meaningful act that sustains the believer's participation in the reality of salvation. In this light, the name of Jesus becomes more than a doctrinal reference. It operates as a channel through which divine presence is encountered, experienced and embodied. These findings open the way for further theological reflection on the formative power of language in Christian life. Spoken expressions such as confession, prayer and proclamation should be recognised not as supplementary acts but as essential practices through which faith takes shape and becomes active in both personal and communal dimensions. Ultimately, the utterance of the name of Jesus, when offered in faith, is a theologically charged event. It mediates the presence of Christ, affirms

the believer's relationship with him, and directs the believer towards a life transformed by that relationship. In this understanding, faith is not only believed internally but is also expressed outwardly through speech that reveals and enacts the reality to which it testifies. In doing so, this study offers a meaningful contribution to the ongoing discourse on language, faith and transformation.

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