



Hymn in Christian Worship

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Abstract:

This essay discussed three hymns. The first hymn was from the Classical or Middle Ages, the second was a modern hymn, and the last was an Indonesian Catholic hymn. The hymns were those of St. Francis of Assisi, a hymn from Taizé, and a hymn from Indonesia. This study employed a qualitative method. The essay also explored good typical hymns used in the Church, namely the hymns of St. Francis and those of Taizé, and compared them with a hymn from Indonesia. It also provided a few hymns as examples to help better understand the hymn of Taizé. The English translation of the Indonesian hymn might miss its emotion because Indonesian poetry has unique linguistic features. Based on the comparison of the three hymns, this study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of what constitutes a good hymn.

INTRODUCTION

Hymns have long been a cornerstone of Christian worship, serving as a powerful medium for expressing faith, devotion, and theological reflection (Halaweh, 2022). Throughout the history of the Church, hymns have evolved, reflecting the cultural, historical, and theological contexts of their times (Harvey, 2020). This essay embarks on an exploration of three distinct hymns, each representing a different era and cultural background. The selected hymns are the hymn of St. Francis of Assisi from the Middle Ages, a modern hymn from the Taizé community, and an Indonesian Catholic hymn. By examining these hymns, we aim to uncover the qualities that define a good hymn and how these qualities transcend cultural and temporal boundaries.

The hymn of St. Francis of Assisi, often referred to as the "Canticle of the Sun" or "Canticle of the Creatures," is a classic example from the Middle Ages. St. Francis, a revered figure in Christian history, composed this hymn in the 13th century (Wang, 2020). It stands out not only for its theological depth but also for its poetic beauty and profound connection to nature. The "Canticle of the Sun" is an ode to God's creation, celebrating the sun, moon, stars, and all elements of nature as reflections of the Creator's glory (Even-Ezra, 2023). This hymn encapsulates the medieval worldview, where nature was seen as an integral part of God's divine plan, and it reflects St. Francis's deep spirituality and reverence for all living things.

In contrast to the medieval hymn of St. Francis, we turn to a modern hymn from the Taizé community, an ecumenical monastic order founded in the mid-20th century in Taizé, France. Taizé hymns are characterized by their simplicity, repetitive structure, and meditative quality (Boyce-Tillman, 2021). They are designed to foster contemplative prayer and

communal worship, transcending linguistic and denominational barriers. The hymn from Taizé selected for this essay exemplifies these qualities, offering a stark contrast to the elaborate and theologically rich hymn of St. Francis. Taizé hymns often consist of short phrases sung repeatedly, creating an atmosphere of peace and introspection. This modern approach to hymnody reflects contemporary needs for unity, simplicity, and deep spiritual connection in a fast-paced world (Dingwell, 2022).

The third hymn in our study comes from Indonesia, a country with a rich tapestry of cultures and a growing Christian community. Indonesian Catholic hymns are unique in their incorporation of local musical traditions, languages, and cultural expressions. The selected hymn represents this vibrant intersection of faith and culture, offering insights into how Christianity adapts and flourishes in diverse cultural settings. Translating this hymn into English poses a significant challenge, as the emotional and linguistic nuances inherent in Indonesian poetry can be difficult to convey. This translation endeavor highlights the broader issue of translation in hymnody, where the essence of the original text may be altered or lost, affecting the hymn's emotional impact and theological message.

This essay aims to explore the attributes of good hymns used in the Church, using the hymns of St. Francis and those of Taizé as benchmarks. By comparing these hymns with the Indonesian hymn, we seek to understand the universal elements that make a hymn resonate deeply with worshippers, regardless of their cultural or temporal context. To facilitate this comparison, specific examples of hymns from St. Francis and Taizé will be provided, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of their styles and theological content.

Furthermore, this essay explores into the process of translating hymns from one language to another. The translation of the Indonesian hymn into English serves as a case study, illustrating the challenges and limitations that arise in this endeavor. Indonesian poetry, with its special features and emotional depth, often loses some of its impact when translated. This phenomenon is not unique to Indonesian but is a common issue in translating poetic and liturgical texts across different languages and cultures. Through this exploration, we hope to shed light on the delicate balance between preserving the original hymn's essence and making it accessible to a broader audience.

Ultimately, by comparing and contrasting these hymns, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of what constitutes a good hymn. Good hymns are more than just musical compositions; they are vessels of theological truth, vehicles of emotional expression, and instruments of communal worship. They have the power to unite diverse congregations, evoke profound spiritual experiences, and connect believers across time and space. Through the lens of these three hymns, this essay seeks to illuminate the timeless and transcendent qualities of hymnody that continue to inspire and uplift the faithful in their worship and devotion.

METHOD

This essay embarks on a journey through the rich and diverse landscape of Christian hymnody, examining three hymns from different eras and cultures. By exploring the hymns of St. Francis of Assisi, the modern Taizé community, and Indonesian Catholic tradition, we aim

to uncover the essential qualities that make a hymn resonate deeply with worshippers. The process of translating the Indonesian hymn into English further enriches our understanding of the challenges and nuances involved in preserving the emotional and theological integrity of hymns across languages. Through this comparative analysis, we hope to offer insights into the meaning and significance of good hymns in the life of the Church, affirming their enduring role in fostering faith, unity, and spiritual growth.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Church in the Middle Ages and the hymn of St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226)

The life of Church was central the monastic vocation during the classic period of monasticism from the 4th to the 7th centuries. After the 7th century monasteries influenced the Church strongly, particularly in liturgy, but monastic life was also becoming more complex. Monastic life seemed a strange life, separated from the world, remote and exclusive and there were also scandals involving corruption, wealth and extensive possessions (Smet, 1975:1). A lot of abbeys experimented with different forms of liturgical life. This unhealthy situation stimulated a renewal. During the Middle Ages, the establishment of new forms of religious life was partly a criticism of the changes in the Christian way of life, particularly monastic life, that had taken place. For example, the renewals of the monasteries associated with the Abbey of Cluny, brought a new liturgical tradition to their communities. The varieties of liturgical rites in the Church, including in the monasteries, were standardised by Charlemagne.

The 11th and 12th centuries were marked by two significant movements: the “renaissance” of the eremitical life and the pilgrimages to the Holy Land known as the Crusades. Besides the eremitical life and the pilgrimages of the Crusaders, the spirit of renewal of religious life (monastic life) led to improvements. This phenomenon began with the reform of Cluny. The mendicant way of life had a very strong influence during the Middle Ages, for it answered the scandals involving corruption, wealth and extensive possessions which were disturbing the church generally and religious in particular. Mendicant and eremitical life in the Middle Ages had been largely practiced in connection with the monasteries. This way of life was seen as a rebirth and partly as a reaction to the decline of monasticism. There was also a new desire to follow Christ more closely, in a literal and physical sense. It was very common for a religious to follow Christ into the desert. At every stage, the religious made their pilgrimages, especially to such favorite places as Compostella, Rome and the Holy Land (Smet, 1975:2), or to other lonely places, which support a life of silence and an ascetical way of life.

Francis came from a rich family. His Father, Peter Bernadone, was a merchant and his mother was called Pica. Much of Peter’s trade was with France, and his son having been born while he was absent in that country, was called *Francesco*, the “Frenchman”. When he was about twenty, he began converting from his old way of life to the new way of life, which was a simpler and poorer lifestyle. Increasingly, a number of people came to him and became his followers, and lived a life which was closer to the Gospel even in a physical sense, wearing a very simple habit like the hermits usually used in the wilderness (Walsh, 1991:314-320). Its

magnificence was a strange comment on Francis's life and work. Yet it was also a testimony to the impact of a man whom many saw as an *alter Christus*, a second Christ bearing the same *stigmata*, his preaching to the birds a sign that a human being could speak once more with the beasts of the wild, as Adam and Eve had done before their fall into sin in the Garden of Eden. Francis had created the Franciscan Order despite himself. Francis and his followers survived because they won the sympathy of one of the most statesmanlike of the medieval popes: Innocent III (1198-1216). In so many ways, Innocent represents the culmination of the age of reform which we have seen begin in Cluny.

Early stories in the *Lives* give an authentic basis for the modern image which has made Francis the patron saint of all creatures. He stands in a long tradition of saints, from the Desert Fathers to the Celtic saints of the West, who found a special affinity with creatures of all kinds. Yet in affirming the goodness of God's creation, many of them, including Francis, practised a personal asceticism which belied any complacency about the powers of evil.

Table 1. The Hymn of St. Francis

All creatures of our God and King
Lift up your voice and with us sing
Alleluya, alleluya!
Thou burning sun with golden beam
Thou silver moon with softer gleam;
O praise him, O praise him, Alleluya, Alleluya, Alleluya!

Thou rushing wind that art so strong,
Ye clouds that sail in heaven along,
O praise him, Alleluya!
Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice,
Ye lights of evening, find a voice:

Thou flowing water, pure and clear,
Make music for thy Lord to hear,
Alleluya, Alleluya!
Thou fire so masterful and bright,
That gives man both warmth and light:

Dear mother earth, who day by day
Unfoldest blessings on our way,
O praise him, Alleluya!
The flowers and fruit that in thee grow,
Let them his glory also show:

And all ye men of tender heart,
Forgiving others, take your part,
O sing ye, Alleluya!
Ye who long pain and sorrow bear,
Praise God and on him cast your care:

And thou, most kind and gentle death,
Waiting to hush our latest breath,
O praise him, Alleluya!
Thou leadest home the child of God,

And Christ our Lord the way hath trod:

Let all things their Creator bless,
 And Worship him in humbleness,
 O praise him, Alleluya!
 Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
 And praise the Spirit, three in One.

The evidence that St. Francis himself actually wrote this famous and much-loved canticle comes from the first life of the saint by his disciple Thomas of Celano, dated no later than 1228 and perhaps as early as 1220. Thomas connects Francis's inspiration directly with the song of praise supposedly sung by the three young men cast into the burning fiery furnace by Nebuchadnezzar. This was inserted in the book of Daniel after chapter 2:23, but in the RV it appears in the Apocrypha as the "Song of the Three Children". It was widely used in the church from early times and, of course, enters the Book of *Common Prayer* as the *Benedict*.

Science had a very special place during the Middle Ages since interest in examining nature in all its aspects was growing. Most scientists admired and searched the reality of nature. St. Francis really admired nature, which led him to praise the Creator of all the reality of nature. The hymn of St. Francis is very *Theocentric* which starts from an admiration and respect for the reality of nature in all its aspects. The reality of nature, according to St. Francis in his hymn, is a sign of the greatness of God, the Creator of all. Nature calls St. Francis and all people to worship God and praise Him. The hymn of St. Francis is very good because it is very biblical and is centered on God, on the Trinity.

2. The Hymn of Taizé and the community of Taizé

The community of Taizé is always associated to Roger Louis Schutz Marsauche, or commonly called Brother Roger, the founder of the community. He was born in Provence-Switzerland on the 12th of May, 1915. His spiritual life was nurtured in the Lutheran tradition since he was a young man, particularly because his father was a Protestant priest of the Lutheran tradition. Brother Roger, when he was twenty years old, studied theology in Lausanne University, where he was a leader in the Swiss Student Christian Movement, a part of an organization of the World Student Christian Federation. He found, during his involvement in the organization, the importance of ecumenism and reconciliation that was based on prayer for all Christians, since he saw there was a lot of conflict and fragmentation between the Christian Churches. His desire for an ideal community of Christ's disciples increased during his time as a student. His theology thesis had the title: *The Ideal of Monastic Life before St. Benedict and its Conformity with the Gospel*. He was interested in monastic life, which expresses the peace, which is based on the Word of God.

Brother Roger went to Taizé near Cluny and started realizing his dream in 1940. Taizé was in unoccupied France, just beyond the line of demarcation to the zone occupied by German troops. Brother Roger hid Jewish refugees for two years and because of this he was forced to leave Taizé by the Nazis. In 1944, he returned to Taizé to establish the Community, which initially was a small quasi-monastic community of men living together in poverty and
 Manik (2024)/ Hymn in worship.

obedience. Since the late 1950s, many thousands of young adults from many countries have found their way to Taizé to take part in weekly meetings of prayer and reflection.

From a Protestant background, Brother Roger undertook a step that was without precedent since the Reformation, and then entered progressively into a full communion with the faith of the Catholic Church without a “conversion” that would imply a break with his origins. In 1980, during a European Meeting in Rome, he said in Saint Peter’s Basilica in the presence of Pope John Paul II: “I have found my own identity as a Christian by reconciling within myself the faith of my origins with the mystery of the Catholic faith, without breaking fellowship with anyone.” He took the Catholic sacrament of the Eucharist every morning at the Catholic Mass in Taizé, and he received the sacrament from both the current and former Pope, seemingly in contravention of canonical prohibitions on administering the sacrament to those, not in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. According to Cardinal Walter Kasper this was accomplished as though there was a tacit understanding between Brother Roger and the Catholic Church “crossing certain confessional” and canonical barriers through what Brother Roger called a gradual enrichment of his faith with the foundations of the Catholic Church including “the ministry of unity exercised by the bishop of Rome.”

Brother Roger promoted the sincere ecumenism of all Christians because all Christians, as disciples of Christ are called to ecumenism. Ecumenism should be built not in a complicated but in a simple way, and it is not in theological discussions but in more spiritual events, particularly by prayer. The community of Taizé uses a simple style for praying which usually consists of two basic elements: music and community. Music is a universal meeting point for all kind of Churches, and then, the tone with the words of the poem becomes a song of the universal “language” in praising the Lord. It means that Taizé is not only a place, but it has become a “spiritual movement” and a special way of praying.

The prayers of Taizé become a special feature of this community because they are simple, short songs, easy to remember and to sing, even for simple people. The prayers of Taizé are meditative songs which are repeated several times in a quiet atmosphere. The aspect of the participant’s affective life is touched more than in the prayers of the official liturgy. The prayers of Taizé are translated easily into a number of languages since their style is simple, and it means the prayers of Taizé talk to all peoples in their own languages.

The songs of Taizé are very biblical without any theological formula or agenda of a particular Church. Even a few of them are taken word by word from the Scripture (Gospel), for example: *Jesus, remember me, when you come into Your kingdom.* (Lk 23:42). The participants are touched directly by the Scripture as a source of faith and brought to the presence of Christ. Scripture is the power of the community of Taizé especially in the area of ecumenism. Almost all the Churches welcome this “spiritual movement” of Taizé because it is based on Scripture, without giving rise to conflict about differences of a theological nature among the Churches.

Table 2. The Hymns of Taizé

Hymn 1:	Bless the Lord, my soul, and bless God's holy name. Bless the Lord, my soul, who leads me into life.
Hymn 2:	Ubi caritas et amor,
Hymn 3:	Jesus remember me, when you come into Your kingdom.
Hymn 4:	Laudate omnes gentes, laudate Dominum.

Brother Roger adds the principle of love, as it is emphasized by Scripture, in the efforts of dialogue through true ecumenism. *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*. Brother Roger understands that all Christians actually are One because Christ gives the same duty: “to preach the Good News, that the Kingdom of God is coming”. The ecumenical movement without praying, according to Brother Roger, is in vain, because prayer supports the growth of love. Prayer brings a consciousness that the Church is in a sacred union, not merely a sociological or political thing. The hymns of Taizé are the Church’s prayer. The Scripture as their source is always present and calls believers to unity and it calls all believers to come into their inner heart and meet with God. Taizé is for all believers. It does not call people for a discussion but for prayer. It does not call people to think about differences but walk together to God. As hymns, the songs of Taizé are very good and profound since they come from Scripture (biblical aspect). They are prayers of the Church which are centred on God (spiritual and ecclesiological aspect), and because the songs of Taizé are simple, all believers from all countries can use them easily.

3. The Indonesian Hymn *Dayung di Arus* and its Background

The Catholic Church in Indonesia is a very young Church if we compare it to the Church in European countries. Indonesia was a colony of the Dutch for about 480 years, and the Catholic Church came to Indonesia only for the Dutch people. Although some of the local people became members of the Catholic Church, they never took an active part in the Church and many things about the Church’s activity were still strange for the local people. This situation meant that the Indonesian people who were baptized still kept their traditional religion while practicing the Church’s worship. The Church through all her activities could not always answer their spiritual needs and spiritual problems. People did not understand the Latin and Dutch languages. The Catholic Church began to focus on serving the Indonesian people since the early 20th century. Up to the 1960s, priests and religious were still mainly Dutch missionaries, while some Indonesians were becoming priests and religious.

In practice, the “Indonesian” Catholic Church began with the Second Vatican Council. Until the 1960s, the Catholic Church in Indonesia still copied everything from the Dutch (European) Church in all her activities, including liturgy without inculturation. The Second Vatican Council was fresh air for this young Church. Appreciation of the local traditions and customs in liturgy developed the faith very strongly. Using the local language and emphasizing the active participation in liturgy made it more splendid.

The Second Vatican Council brought a good liturgical renewal to the church in Indonesia in general. But on the other hand, there are still problems with it. The misunderstanding about the active participation in the liturgy, the traditional mindset of the people, and the Church in Indonesia being young, led to some mistakes being made in liturgical practices. It happened because of the misunderstanding about active participation and the dialogue mass.

Paul Widyawan (together with Karl Edmund Prier SJ.) is the founder of *Pusat Musik Liturgi (PML)*, the Centre for Music of the Liturgy, for the Catholic Church in Indonesia on 11th July 1971. This Centre focused on searching for and on improving liturgical music, which has its origins in typical Indonesian ethnic groups. Paul Widyawan, since 1971, has created and composed a lot of liturgical music – songs in various typical ethnic dialects because Indonesia consists of a lot of ethnic groups.

In the early 1980s, PML published *Madah Bakti*, a hymnbook for liturgy, mostly composed by Widyawan and Prier. This book is very familiar to and much welcomed by the Church in Indonesia because it uses the rhythm of Indonesian ethnic groups, short songs, easy to sing and usually the hymn follows typical Indonesian poetry. Poetry in Indonesia is very sacred and used only on special occasions. Paul Widyawan and Prier really understand Indonesian ethnic music, poetry, culture and spirituality, although both of them are not Indonesian originally. Paul Widyawan strictly rejects the western musical approach when composing hymns in an ethnic dialect. A hymn in the liturgy of the Church in Indonesia, according to Paul Widyawan, has to “speak” in an Indonesian way and “speak” for the Indonesian Church.

Table 3. Indonesian Hymn

<i>Tenang-tenang mendayung, di dalam ombak selepas pantai.</i>	Padling calmly In the wave which is far from the shore
<i>Tenang-tenang merenung, di tengah taufan hidup yang ramai, di tengah taufan hidup yang ramai.</i>	Padling while reflecting In the middle of the typhoon of life In the middle of the typhoon of life
<i>Bila terbawa arus di dalam doa laut terenang. Sabda penguat doa resapkanlah di dasar hatimu sedalam laut medan hidupmu.</i>	If you are dragged by the wave in the prayer “you can swim to overcome” the sea God’s word, the supporter of prayer Kept strongly in the base of your heart As deep as the sea of your life

This hymn is a poem and speaks about the importance of the Word for believers. If we look at its content, this poem actually is a little bit weak theologically. It is more a moral message for the faithful so that they keep the Word as they pray it in their life. It does not contain any biblical references and is not centred on God. Although it is a message for the faithful to keep the Word as they pray in their life, but this hymn is not seen as a prayer and it lacks a biblical message. It is just a message to the faithful and not a prayer to God.

This hymn for a long time used to be sung after the first reading before the Gospel in a mass as a “substitute” for the Responsorial Psalm. It happened because of a misunderstanding

about active participation in the document ‘*Sacrosanctum Concilium*’. On the other hand, most of the faithful love this hymn because of its poetic form. It is a simple short song and its rhythm is completely Indonesian (*Minang*) with its meditative style of song. It speaks also in terms of the real Indonesian nature which familiar with sea. This song is easy to sing and the rhythm is very familiar to Indonesians, and then its poetic form really touches the sense of the spiritual in the Indonesian faithful.

There is a “conflict” between the traditional spiritual sense of the faithful, which still exists on the one hand and the true theological sense of the hymn as understood by the Church. There are two reasons why this hymn is controversial. The first is because it lacks theological content as we saw before, and the second is because of its place in the Mass. After the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church in Indonesia stop using Latin in Church worship and began using Indonesian or other ethnic languages in their liturgical worship. We, however, did not use the responsorial psalm before the Gospel as we do now, but we used special songs that were not connected to the reading or psalm. And the hymn *Dayung di Arus* is one of the songs sung before the Gospel. The Responsorial Psalm came into use in the Mass in Indonesia in the early 1990s, when many hymns which Widyawan and Prier composed, were very familiar to people throughout Indonesia. Every renewal brings difficulties and it always needs time to reach a stable situation. This hymn reminds us that the young Church in Indonesia is still looking for her identity without losing its spiritual traditions on the one hand and without leaving the true liturgical tradition of the Church on the other hand (Yuliano, 2022; Andrianto, 2023; Kurniawan, 2022).

Joseph Connelly (1954: ix) writes that “a good hymn is like a person which clothes with beautiful language our thoughts about the Blessed Trinity and our heavenly Father’s love for us.” From Connelly’s explanation, we can infer that the hymns of St. Francis of Assisi and Taizé are exemplary hymns. By comparing these hymns with the Indonesian hymn "Dayung di Arus," we can draw conclusions about what constitutes a good hymn.

A good hymn consists of both theological and social aspects. Theologically, a hymn is good if it centers on God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), contains an ecclesiastical aspect, and serves as a prayer. Sociologically, a hymn is good if it is accessible for all people to sing, helps the faithful express themselves in the liturgy, is expressed in beautiful language or poetry, has a beautiful rhythm, and reflects the culture of the faithful. The contribution of art and aesthetics is also significant from a sociological perspective.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we have explored the rich tapestry of Christian hymnody through the examination of three distinct hymns: the medieval hymn of St. Francis of Assisi, a modern hymn from the Taizé community, and an Indonesian Catholic hymn. By employing a qualitative method, we delved into the historical, cultural, and theological contexts of each hymn, offering a comprehensive analysis that highlights their unique characteristics and shared qualities.

The hymn of St. Francis of Assisi, with its profound connection to nature and poetic beauty, reflects the medieval worldview and the deep spirituality of its author. The modern Taizé hymn, characterized by its simplicity and meditative repetition, addresses contemporary needs for unity and contemplation in worship. The Indonesian Catholic hymn, rich in local musical traditions and cultural expressions, illustrates the dynamic interaction between global Christianity and local cultures.

Our comparative analysis reveals that despite their diverse origins and styles, all three hymns embody essential qualities that define a good hymn. These include theological depth, emotional resonance, and the ability to foster communal worship. The hymns of St. Francis and Taizé serve as benchmarks for these qualities, providing a framework for evaluating the Indonesian hymn.

The translation of the Indonesian hymn into English posed significant challenges, underscoring the difficulty of capturing the emotional and linguistic nuances of the original text. This highlights a broader issue in hymnody translation, where preserving the essence and impact of a hymn across languages is a complex endeavor.

Through this study, we have gained a deeper understanding of what constitutes a good hymn. Good hymns transcend their cultural and temporal contexts, offering believers a means to connect with the divine, express their faith, and unite in worship. They are vessels of theological truth, emotional expression, and communal identity. The exploration of these three hymns has illuminated the timeless and transcendent qualities of hymnody. By examining their unique attributes and commonalities, we have affirmed the enduring role of good hymns in fostering faith, unity, and spiritual growth within the Church. This study underscores the importance of preserving and understanding the rich diversity of hymns, as they continue to inspire and uplift the faithful across generations and cultures.

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