

RENEWING WORSHIP

BY WARREN ANDERSON

THE POSITIVE PAYOFF OF MESSING WITH CONVENTION

Purists, prepare to harrumph. That long, low, guttural sound you hear emanating from the east is the mooing of the sacred cow of Taizé worship on its way to the slaughter.

For the uninitiated, Taizé worship grew out of the ecumenical community established in 1940 in Taizé, France, by Brother Roger. Though Taizé is often associated with Catholicism, Brother Roger was a Swiss Protestant by birth, and his mission initially was simply to aid refugees during World War II. (Consult the all-encompassing Taizé website for more of the history and current ministry of this fascinating community: taize.fr)

THE BEAUTY OF SUNG PRAYER

Eventually, the type of simple, acoustic corporate worship that evolved within the community began to attract pilgrims, and today thousands of (mostly young) adults converge upon the Taizé compound for week-long times of spiritual nourishment. The repetitive, chant-like melodies are beautiful, and friends of mine who have attended services there say the focus on worship as sung prayer combined with the aesthetics of candlelight and visual symbols of our faith, is overwhelming.

Although I've never been to Taizé, I regularly take students to an excellent Taizé prayer service in suburban Chicago, and over the years the responses of these young people—the vast majority of whom attend large evangelical churches seeking to be culturally relevant (which Taizé worship most definitely is not)—gives me the boldness to assert the following, which will be anathema to most Taizé aficionados: It's time to take Taizé worship out of the quiet, candle-lit cathedrals and into the media-frenzied converted warehouses where many of us worship these days. Why?

1. Taizé worship counteracts the self-focus about which many detractors of current worship practices groan. The extent to which self-references predominate in contemporary American worship is debatable (and I would argue things are getting better), but wherever congregations focus more on me than Thee, Taizé choruses, with their frequent emphasis on rejection of self and embrace of God, put things in proper perspective.

2. Taizé worship fosters communal worship. In this space last November, I argued that contemporary worship sometimes unwittingly “kills” worship, in the sense that the various displays of prowess on stage threaten to distract us from the purpose of corporate worship, the lifting up of all voices in praise. Taizé, with its simple and easily learned melodies, takes the emphasis off the presentation and puts it on the participation.

3. Taizé worship is a great way to involve musicians who normally don't get a chance to share their gifts in contemporary worship. Do you have a first-or-second-chair-in-the-high-school-orchestra violinist in your youth group? Any stay-at-home moms who used to play flute in the marching band back in the day? Excellent Taizé orchestrations for almost all of the songs are available through GIA Music (giamusic.com). Exploring some of the better Taizé choruses can help worship leaders expand their church's musical palette.

4. Taizé worship can translate into contemporary worship. It's a misconception that every Taizé tune is slow and sedate. In three separate worship ministry settings (two churches and one Christian college), I have seen more upbeat Taizé fare (and a few slower pieces) work with a typical praise-band lineup of electric instruments and drums. It takes a little bit of effort, but it can be done.

If you deem this a worthy venture, here are two hints for success:

■ Do the songs in English. Save singing them in the original languages for smaller, more intimate gatherings where there will likely be better buy-in for this kind of display of diversity.

■ Taizé often features individual descants sung over the top of the corporate ostinato. The effect is gorgeous in smaller groups but gets lost in large congregations. Turn the descants into verses (sung either individually or corporately) and let the choruses function as they would in a typical A-B format. *WA*

Warren Anderson teaches and serves as Dean of the Chapel at Judson University. He is also the Worship Pastor at the Elgin Evangelical Free Church, and serves on the editorial board of *Worship Leader* for which he writes a monthly column and special features.

Three upbeat Taizé tunes to try with your praise band:

1. “Laudate Dominum” (“Sing, Praise, and Bless the Lord”). A rollicking call to worship in A minor and $\frac{3}{4}$ time with verses from various psalms. Your rhythm section will love this tune for its deep groove.

2. “El Senyor” (“In the Lord”). A mid-tempo song of thanksgiving and comfort: “In the Lord I'll be ever thankful. . . . Look to God, do not be afraid.” I have used this tune in Thanksgiving Eve services with great success.

3. “Jubilate, Alleluia” (“Shout to God with Joy”). A universal hymn of praise with optional wonderful woodwind trio accompaniment. Verses from Psalm 66.