

Introduction

For many people in the English-speaking world, the name “Taizé” evokes a kind of short repetitive chant used in the context of a meditative worship service, or perhaps even more the style of prayer in which such chants are employed. Others know Taizé as a place in rural France where tens of thousands of young Christians flock each year to spend a week of prayer and reflection in the context of a community life.

What is not always understood, however, is the underlying reality that makes possible both the worship and the gatherings of young people. A tiny village in eastern France, since 1940 Taizé has been the site of an ecumenical community of brothers rooted in the monastic tradition. Today it is made up of around a hundred brothers, from over 25 different countries and from different Christian traditions, Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican, and Catholic, who commit themselves for life to an existence made up of common prayer, work to earn their living, and hospitality. They strive to live as a “parable of community,” a sign of unity in the midst of divided Christians.

The Taizé Community began thanks to one man, known as Brother Roger, born on May 12, 1915 in French-speaking Switzerland. His father, Charles Schutz, was a pastor in the Swiss Reformed Church, and his mother, Amélie Marsauche, came from a family whose roots were in France. The youngest of nine children, seven girls and two boys, Roger felt called to be a writer from an early age. Following his return to the faith after an adolescent

religious crisis and a long bout with tuberculosis that brought him close to death, he decided to study theology, more in accordance with his father's wishes than out of a desire to become the pastor of a congregation.

As a young man, Roger was deeply concerned about the growing individualism in society that was leaving its mark on the church as well. In addition, he was convinced that transmitting the message of Jesus Christ by words alone was not enough. Although in Europe everyone by now was familiar with the figure of Jesus and his teaching, this knowledge seemingly no longer had the power to move mountains. What was needed, according to Roger, were concrete signs that would manifest the truth and beauty of the gospel. This led him to examine the age-old tradition of intentional community life in the Christian church and its possible relevance for our time.

When the Second World War broke out and the north of France was occupied by the Nazi armies, Roger felt called to leave neutral Switzerland and settle in France. He wanted to be close to the victims of the war, as well as continuing to reflect on the creation of a community. In August 1940 he found an abandoned house for sale in the small, isolated hamlet of Taizé, in Burgundy, and purchased it. After the war, Taizé became the home of the community which Brother Roger founded and of which he served as prior until his tragic death on August 16, 2005 at the hand of a demented person, during evening prayer in the church.

Throughout his life, the founder of Taizé was in the habit of jotting down thoughts and reflecting on daily events in notebooks used for that purpose or, especially in his later years, on small bits of paper. These writings helped him to reflect on essential aspects of his existence; they were part of an attempt to forge what he called "the unity of the personality." This unity, however, was never just an individualistic endeavor for him. As a Christian, Brother Roger felt it was essential to discover the salient traits of the age in which he lived, in order to discover how to be present in the contemporary world as a follower of Christ. Moreover, it was often

through personal encounters that he was able better to understand his own identity and the society around him.

This book contains the journals of Brother Roger. In some cases they are fragmentary in nature, often because the originals were lost or destroyed. Beginning in 1972, however, Brother Roger began publishing his diaries, interspersed with short meditations. Six volumes saw the light of day, covering the years from 1969 to 1981. These collected insights, reflections and accounts of personal encounters and current events offer what is perhaps the best portrait of the founder of Taizé. Moreover, they bring to light key aspects of the community that continues to attempt to put into practice the vision that inspired him.

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