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# Another tribute for TaizÈ from the Vatican

John L. Allen Jr. | Aug. 11, 2010 NCR Today

tOne of the more intriguing chapters in the history of ecumenical détente has long been the relationship between the Vatican and the Community of Taizé, a joint Protestant and Catholic monastic order in the Burgundy region of France.

Typically speaking, anything that smacks of syncretism is viewed in Rome as toxic, yet Taizé and its late founder, Brother Roger Schutz, who boldly blend Catholic and Protestant devotions and beliefs, have been wrapped in a warm loving embrace.

The latest proof comes just today, as *L?Osservatore Romano* splashed a tribute to Brother Roger across its front page from Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Secretary of State, on the fifth anniversary of Schutz?s death and the seventieth anniversary of the foundation of Taizé. The Vatican paper also devoted an entire page inside to tributes for Schutz and Taizé from a wide variety of Christian leaders, including the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

tSuch fuss amounts to a high-profile seal of approval, one that the Vatican is usually reluctant to bestow even upon exclusively Catholic movements or religious orders. It?s especially striking given the grumbling about Taizé that has long circulated in more traditionalist Catholic circles.

tThere was blowback in the blogosphere, for example, when then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger gave communion to Schutz during the funeral Mass of Pope John Paul II in April 2005. (Try a Google search on ?Ratzinger? and ?Brother Roger,? and you?ll see what I mean.) The problem was that Schutz insisted he had never ?converted? from his Reformed Protestant background, but rather ?integrated? Catholic beliefs into his faith without breaking fellowship with anyone. For strict constructionists on Catholic identity, that seemed like Schutz was trying to have his cake and eat it too.

tDespite the contretemps, Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, and his Vatican lieutenants apparently remain unabashed in their enthusiasm for Taizé.

tBrother Roger was ?a tireless witness to the gospel of peace and reconciliation? and a ?pioneer on the difficult journey towards unity among the disciples of Christ,? Bertone wrote in his message addressed to Brother Alois, Schutz?s successor at Taizé, published today at the top of page one in *L?Osservatore* along with a full-color photo of a smiling Brother Roger.

tPope Benedict wants to express his ?spiritual closeness? to Taizé, Bertone wrote, and his ?union in prayer.?

tIn some ways, Bertone referred to Schutz almost as a saint, writing that ?now that he has entered into eternal joy, he continues to speak to us.? Bertone also expressed the hope that the Community of Taizé ?will continue to live and to radiate its charism, in a special way among the young generations.?

tPart of the reason that Benedict and other senior Vatican officials are enamored with Taizé is its appeal to

young people, including young Europeans who otherwise seem thoroughly secular in both formation and worldview. *L?Osservatore Romano* today noted that Taizé annually attracts ?hundreds of thousands of people, above all the young, from every confession.?

tTwo years ago, Cardinal Walter Kasper, who recently stepped down as the Vatican?s top ecumenical official, spoke at length about Brother Roger and Taizé in an interview with *L?Osservatore* which offers some important context for today's tribute.

t?Few persons of our generation have incarnated with such transparency the gentle and humble face of Jesus Christ,? Kasper said then, referring to Schutz. ?As a theology professor and then as Bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, I always encouraged young people to stop in Taizé during the summer. I saw how much that time spent close to Brother Roger and the community helped them better to understand and to live the Word of God, in joy and simplicity.?

tKasper argued that Schutz?s expertise lay in ?spiritual ecumenism.?

?Rather than the speed of the development of the ecumenical movement, he was aiming at its depth,? Kasper said. ?He was convinced that only an ecumenism nourished by the Word of God and the celebration of the Eucharist, by prayer and contemplation, would be able to bring together Christians in the unity wished for by Jesus.?

Kasper strongly defended allowing Brother Roger to receive communion.

As the years passed, the faith of the prior of Taizé was progressively enriched by the patrimony of faith of the Catholic Church,? he said.

?In response, the Catholic Church accepted that he take communion at the Eucharist, as he did every morning in the large church at Taizé,? Kasper said. ?Brother Roger received communion several times from the hands of Pope John Paul II, who had become friends with him from the days of the Second Vatican Council, and who was well acquainted with his personal journey with respect to the Catholic Church. There was nothing secret or hidden in the attitude of the Catholic Church, neither at Taizé or in Rome. During the funeral of Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Ratzinger only repeated what had already been done before him in Saint Peter?s Basilica, at the time of the late pope. There was nothing new or premeditated in the Cardinal?s act.?

Kasper also stressed the strong rapport between Brother Roger and a series of Bishops of Rome, beginning with Pope John XXIII, who once referred to Taizé as ?a little springtime.?

?Acting in harmony with the thought of the Bishop of Rome was for [Brother Roger] a kind of compass,? Kasper said. ?He never would have undertaken an initiative that he knew was against the opinion or the will of the Bishop of Rome. A similar relationship of trust continues today with Pope Benedict XVI, who spoke very touching words when the founder of Taizé died, and who receives Brother Alois every year in a private audience.?

Overall, Kasper praised Taizé as a ?parable of community ? that helps to go beyond the rifts of the past and to look towards a future of communion and friendship.?

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