

Dear friends,

I am writing this to reach out to all fellow spiritual travelers in the wake of the tragic death of Brother Roger Schutz, the founder and prior of the Taizé community in France . As most of you know, this saintly ninety-year-old, whose entire life had been lived in the mission fields of reconciliation, was slain at knifepoint during Vespers by a disturbed woman who evidently felt slighted that he was no longer granting private audiences. I can only imagine the anguish of the Communauté and its young pilgrims during this time of horror and confusion; please keep them particularly in your prayers.

As most of you know, Brother Roger was one of my own beloved mentors on the path. It was thanks to him that I became a Christian in the first place. More than thirty years ago, I was so moved by a talk he gave at Riverside Church in New York City that I joined the throng of people pressing around him to thank him and stand in his presence for about thirty seconds. That thirty seconds changed my life. For the timeless duration of that brief encounter, he was unconditionally present to me, his eyes glowing with pure light-filled love. My life shifted on its foundations; within a year I had been baptized and was attending seminary.

I had the rare privilege of renewing that friendship five years ago. On a pilgrimage to Taizé in 2000, I left him a postcard thanking him for that encounter that had set the course of my life. He immediately sent a brother to fetch me, and we talked in his apartment for about half an hour. Even at that point, he was clearly moving easily between the worlds, filled with the gentleness and joy of the communion of saints, "The light within him had ripened to love," to use that wonderful phrase from Bruno Barnhart. My sense from that unexpected and magical encounter was that he was living out his last years on the planet as a Christian bodhisattva, fully attained in his own life's pilgrimage, but staying around as an act of conscious love, to hold the door open for others.

That impression helps somewhat to ease the pain of an otherwise senseless and brutal end to a life of pure gentleness. During a vigil of prayer last night, the overwhelming reassurance came to that Roger is at peace—more than at peace, in bliss—and that his death is deeply eucharistic; in other words, the fullness of his love has been willingly poured out for the life of the world. Again, some of Bruno's words are so helpful as he talks in *SECOND SIMPLICITY* about our journey from white to red, from dawn to dusk, from baptism to Eucharist, from light to fullness of love. That was Roger's life in quintessential expression, and his final gift to his community and to the world. I am sure that as he looked into the eyes of his assassin during the final moments of his life, he was to her, as he was to me, unconditionally present, breathing out his love and forgiveness. The Paschal Mystery is again made present in its fullness as innocent blood, freely offered in love, takes upon itself the sin of the world. If by this final gift of himself he could enter even more deeply into the darkness and anguish of the human condition, bringing it into the light of Christ, I am sure he did so willingly. In the "bridal mysticism" of the Church, this would be his nuptial feast, the consummation of his full union with Jesus, made perfect in complete self-giving.

For those of us now moved to make some appropriate gesture of gratitude with our own lives, might I suggest both an inner task and an outer task? It goes without saying that we are required to "stay the course" of reconciliation and hope. The only unpardonable tragedy would be to give way to despair. We will most honor Roger and the legacy of Taizé by our continued efforts to live our lives as beautiful Christians, grounded unshakably in faith, hope, and love.

For the inner task, I ask us all to look unflinchingly at our own sense of entitlement, the shadow side of every spiritual journey. I do not presume to know the motivations of the woman who became the instrument of Brother Roger's martyrdom, but I do know from hard-earned personal experience that a preoccupation with one's own life story--one's needs, dramas, victimhood, and pain—can hold the world hostage and fatally skew the mirror of perception. Let us take upon ourselves a renewed personal commitment to cleansing the lens! There is a murderer in each one of us, who, while hopefully never reaching that point of no return, acts out in all sorts of lesser trappings on the lives of others. I acknowledge this murderer in my own shadow side and ask us to hold each other accountable.

For the outer task, I believe that there could be no greater memorial to Brother Roger than to live out the vision he gave his life to and for: of full reconciliation and intercommunion between all Christians.

I am thus addressing this concluding paragraph particularly to Pope Benedict and other worldwide Christian leaders: as the deepest living tribute to Roger, might it not be possible simply to declare EUCHARISTIC AMNESTY, making the shared communion table the foundation for our journey into full ecumenical reconciliation rather than its endpoint? In and of itself, that would be a "little miracle" worthy of the stature and compassionate depth of Roger's life.

"What you dare not hope for; that is what He gives you," Brother Roger was fond of saying. I will adopt that phrase as my mantra of gratitude and renewed commitment as I seek to bring to fullness in my own life the enormous gifts of compassion and inclusiveness which are Roger's legacy to this world. Farewell, dear friend; "I am sure you shall see the goodness of the Lord in the Land of the living."

In peace,

Cynthia Bourgeault