

A New Stone on an Ancient Foundation: Traditional Liturgical Aspects in Taizé Order of Prayer

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During the 20th Century, the Taizé Community created a unique liturgical tradition, combining Byzantine and Latin liturgical elements with Protestant background worship. The combination of these liturgical elements concurred with the rediscovery of the old Tradition of the Church and with the entrance of a considerable number of Catholic brothers into the Taizé community. The high point of this reconsidered Tradition is the introduction of the weekly Sunday Eucharist using the Taizé liturgical order. Nonetheless, the Community maintains a Eucharistic discipline and tries to avoid intercommunion. The combination of different traditional liturgical elements on a traditional Protestant base under the supervision of the community's founder, Br. Roger, aroused great interest among both theologians and simple believers during the time.

Keywords: *Taizé community, Taizé hymns, Byzantine liturgy, Latin liturgy, Reformed worship, Br. Roger, Br. Alois.*

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. (Jn. 20.1)

They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" But when they looked they could see that the stone – which was very big – had already been rolled back. (Mk. 16.3-4)

Preliminary remarks

Speaking about the ecumenical approach of Taizé, the French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément wrote that the Ecumenism practiced in Taizé is an ecumenism of *the essential*, born from the immense suffering of the Second WW.¹ To practice a balanced ecumenism means to search for the essential in faith, without forcing the time and other Christian brothers into dogmatic agreements. But, in the main time it means to have the courage to begin the path for Christian unity, as with regards to the women who went at the tomb of Jesus, when it *was very early* and *still dark*, so practically, when there is no visible hope for a soon to come unity in Christianity, too

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¹ Olivier Clément, *Taizé. A Meaning to Life*, Chicago, GIA Publications 1997, p. 11.

early from everyone's point of view. Br. Roger and his community did and do exactly this. They engaged and engage in living the unity of the Church, when it is *still dark*, when there is almost no reason to hope for Christian unity. Maybe Br. Roger and every brother that followed and follows him could have asked at some point like the women in the Resurrection Morning: "*Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?*" The historical, sociological, psychological and dogmatic differences are truly a huge stone, which can't be rolled away so simply when Christians from different confessional and cultural backgrounds want to live together in the unity of the Church. A Serbian Orthodox bishop observed that "the monastic community of Taizé, shaped by Protestantism, was founded in a region of Burgundy compatible with Roman Catholic spirituality and always open to the spirit of Orthodoxy".² Putting all these aspects together is not easy at all but maybe, once they started to live together, again like the women heading to the resurrection place, they saw "*that the stone – which was very big – had already been rolled back*".

In our study we will try to follow how essential elements of the liturgical tradition of the Catholic and Orthodox Church (*the stone already rolled back*) influenced the Taizé way of living until today such that we can speak about a *Taizé tradition*, perfect and compatible with the old Universal Church Tradition. In this way, *Taizé tradition* is to be called a new stone on an ancient foundation, and not at all a "mishmash of Pentecostalists".³ For this we will try to identify and analyse liturgical and spiritual elements from the Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic Traditions which influenced in major ways the Taizé order of prayer.

1. Brother Roger liturgical ecumenical background

Even if the Taizé prayer order seems to be very simple, it is not simple at all to analyse it because it contains many elements from different Christian traditions and it reflects through words, symbols or liturgical gestures aspects of both Eastern and Western Christian Spirituality. Maybe we should start our journey in discovering elements from different Christian traditions in the *Taizé Liturgy* from the very beginning, the cultural and spiritual background of Br. Roger. He came from a deeply religious Protestant family, being the ninth and youngest son of a Reformed Pastor from Bachs, in Switzerland.⁴

² Andrej Cilerdzic, "Orthodox Impressions of Brother Roger and His Life for Reconciliation", in: *Brother Roger's Contribution to Theological Thought. Acts of the international colloquium, Taizé, August 31 – September 5, 2015*, Taizé, Les Presses de Taizé 2016, p. 51-59, here p. 53.

³ A. Cilerdzic, "Orthodox Impressions", p. 56.

⁴ Br. Roger was born in Provence, where his father was a pastor.

From a very young age, his spiritual way was quite different from a normal pastor's son. Describing Br. Roger's confessional childhood background, the Irish Dominican Friar, Patrick Burke states:

From an early age Roger was very conscious of the divisions between Protestant and Catholic, but was encouraged by his parents to look beyond them. While attending secondary school in a nearby town his parents chose to lodge him with a Catholic rather than a Protestant family, because the Catholic family was in need of the income from the rent. Roger had very high regard for his maternal grandmother whom he remembers as having a powerful gift of welcome. Although she was also the wife of a Protestant pastor, she often attended Mass and even received Holy Communion.⁵

Actually, Br. Roger will also confess later that his father influenced him a lot because he was a mystic and he used to sometimes have an ecumenical approach, going to pray even in Catholic Churches.⁶

But, as Fr. Gianluca Blancini, an Italian theologian who wrote a PhD about the Taizé community, states that Br. Roger didn't grow up just with a consciousness of the Protestant-Catholic division, but he also came to know something about the Orthodox Church and Orthodox Spirituality, going sometimes to the Orthodox Russian Church liturgical services.⁷ Br. Roger admits that he sometimes frequented Orthodox liturgical services and that he came to love the Orthodox music:

For my part, this deep love for the Orthodox Church goes back to my childhood. During the First World War, Russians had to flee their land. They were Orthodox Christians. My mother received some of them in our home and I listened to their conversations; afterwards, she told me about the misfortunes they had undergone. When I was a bit older, we lived close to a Russian Orthodox Church. We went there to take part in the prayer, to listen to the beautiful chants, and I tried to see in the people's faces the suffering of those Christians who had come from Russia.⁸

In another place, Br. Roger makes an extraordinary description of the Orthodox liturgical life:

⁵ Patrick J. Burke, *The Spirituality of Taizé*, <http://opcentral.org/resources/2015/01/21/patrick-j-burke-the-spirituality-of-taize/>, viewed on January 13, 2019.

⁶ "I am sure that my father was a mystic at heart. Very early in the morning he would go to pray alone in the Church. Once when I was about twelve, I even saw him go into a Catholic Church to pray." See: P. J. Burke, *The Spirituality of Taizé*.

⁷ Gianluca Blancini, *Pellegrini in Oriente – la comunità di Taizé e il mondo ortodosso*, Arezzo, AGC Edizioni 2018, p. 77-78.

⁸ Br. Roger, *God Is Love Alone*, London, Continuum 2003, p. 62-63.

The Orthodox Church gives us a precious testimony. In its liturgy, it lives and causes its believers to live the joy of heaven on earth. Many storms have come upon this Church, but the prayer of God's people continues to remain alive in this Church, this prayer which has crossed the centuries does not involve just the intelligence but also integrates an ensemble of visible and sensible expressions.⁹

It is obvious that all these ecumenical aspects of Br. Roger's childhood helped him a lot later when he had to make decisions about a prayer order of an ecumenical community. All these aspects constituted key elements in building his *charisma*: "the openness, discretion, and freedom with which Roger grew up regarding the division of Christians in the years that followed developed into a prophetic quality that has been acknowledged the world over".¹⁰

2. The liturgical order of prayer in Taizé

In the Community Rule, written during the 1952-1953 winter, there is a description of the prayer life style, inspired, of course, from the monastic schedule of prayer, as we have mentioned earlier. Br. Roger recommended that the community pray three times during the day, being inspired in this sense, directly from the primary Christian Communities who were observing the Jewish Custom of Prayer.¹¹ In the *Rule*, the *Prayer* chapter, begins with a quotation from Luke¹² that refers to the Jewish Prayer from the Temple practised by the disciples together with the first converts. The structure of each of these three prayers¹³ "is similar to that of the *Divine Office* from the Catholic monastic tradition consisting of a hymn, psalms, scripture reading and intercessions".¹⁴

*Example of a Taizé service prayer:*¹⁵

Song
Psalm

⁹ See: Jean-Marie Paupert, *Taizé et l'Église de demain*, Paris, Fayard 1967, p. 166.

¹⁰ P.J. Burke, *The Spirituality of Taizé*.

¹¹ G. Blancini, *Pellegrini in Oriente*, p. 129. See also: Br. Roger, *L'idéal monacal jusqu'à saint Benoît*, Lausanne, Université de Lausanne 1943, p. 10.

¹² Lk. 24.53: "Just as the disciples, full of joy, were continually in the temple praising you". See: Br. Roger, *La Règle de Taizé*, Taizé, Les Presses de Taizé 1956, and idem, *The Rule of Taizé, in French and English*, London, SPCK Publishing 2012, p. 15.

¹³ Morning, midday and evening.

¹⁴ P.J. Burke, *The Spirituality of Taizé*.

¹⁵ The Prayer example is taken from Taizé official website: http://www.taize.fr/en_article5806.html?id_document=5839, viewed on January 14, 2019.

Reading

Genesis 12.1-4

Matthew 5.1-12

Song

Silence

Intercessions

Our Father

Prayer

Example: Jesus our joy, you want us to have hearts that are simple, a kind of springtime of the heart. And then the complications of existence do not paralyze us so much. You tell us: don't worry; even if you have very little faith, I, Christ, am with you always.

or

Bless us, Christ Jesus; in you alone our hearts find rest and peace.

Songs

It should be mentioned that this service is also very alike to the order of a classical Protestant *Gottesdienst*.¹⁶ hymns, psalms, Old Testament Lecture, New Testament Lecture, Prayer of Intercessions, Our Father etc, still the Taizé liturgical order has some specific aspects that are to be analysed especially in light of the monastic Church Tradition influence. In the 1960's the presence of Franciscan Friars and Orthodox monks influenced the development of the liturgical service of the Taizé community.

The most well-known elements of the Taizé liturgical service are without any doubt the Taizé Songs.¹⁷ The Taizé songs are not usual Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox Church hymns but repetitive short phrases taken from the Bible, from the Fathers of the Church, from Liturgical Services (from all Christian Traditions) and even from recent theologians that were martyred.¹⁸ It was due to the increasing number of pilgrims from different countries in the '60s and '70s that caused the community to rethink the liturgical service of Taizé. The brothers had to design it in such a way that as many people as possible could actively participate to the common prayer. The importance given to the music and the desire that as many persons as

¹⁶ See for example: *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress Press 2006, p. 298-308 or p. 309-319.

¹⁷ Patrick Burke acknowledges that "for most of us, our first encounter with Taizé was through its music, an essential part of the worship there", see: P. J. Burke, *The Spirituality of Taizé*.

¹⁸ See the official Taizé Songs book that comprises the collection of the community hymns: *Die Gesänge aus Taizé*, Taizé, Ateliers et Presses de Taizé 2017.

possible participate by singing shows also the Reformed heritage, very present in the Taizé order of prayer. Patrick Burke manages to explain very well this aspect dictated by pastoral reasons:

French had been the only language of their worship up until then, and now many who came were not French-speaking and therefore felt alienated from the worship. With the help of the musician Jacques Berthier, friend of Taizé, different methods were tried out, and a solution was found in the use of repetitive structures, namely, short musical phrases with singable melodic units that could be readily memorized by everybody. The use of some very simple words in basic Latin (a language without allegiance to any particular culture or tradition), to support the music and the theme of prayer was also dictated by pastoral reasons.¹⁹

Even if the repetitive songs entered into the Taizé liturgical order by *pastoral need*, replacing the previous Lutheran hymns and Psalms,²⁰ they became the emblematic image for the Taizé liturgical identity. The presence of an Orthodox monastic small community in Taizé during 1963-1975 also contributed to the choice of repetitive songs, repetitiveness being a characteristic of Oriental spirituality.²¹ The practical solution found was not an innovation, but rather a rediscovery of a very old practice that allowed profound spiritual aspects to be reconsidered. Gianluca Blancini observes that repetitive hymns, even if not a specificity of the Western liturgy were actually used during the first millennium in the Monastery of Montserrat,²² putting Taizé repetitive hymns in a quite clear line of the Undivided Church Tradition continuity. Br. Roger himself links the *repetitiveness* of the Taizé songs to *the prayer of the heart* or to *Rosary* and through this to Palamite monastic Orthodox Spirituality or Marian Catholic Spirituality:

Such a prayer lies under the surface of gestures, of conversation, indeed of all life. This prayer, which originated in the East, became widespread among the Christians in the eastern part of Europe,

¹⁹ P.J. Burke, *The Spirituality of Taizé*. For more information about the contribution of the musician Jacques Berthier regarding the repetitive songs of Taizé see: Judith M. Kubicki, *Liturgical Music as Ritual Symbol. A Case Study of Jacques Berthier's Taizé Music*, Leuven, Peeters 1999, p. 93-127.

²⁰ G. Blancini, *Pellegrini in Oriente*, p. 134-135. Olivier Clément also underlines this pastoral aspect of *repetitive hymns* that manage to be accesible to young pilgrims especially; O. Clément, *Taizé. A Meaning to Life*, p. 52.

²¹ G. Blancini, *Pellegrini in Oriente*, p. 135. For more information about the Orthodox presence in Taizé see: Communauté de Taizé, "Centre patriarcal orthodoxe à Taizé", in: *Aujourd'hui* 2 (1963), p. 12; Communauté de Taizé, "Centre et chapelle orthodoxes", in: *Aujourd'hui* 11 (1965), p. 2.

²² G. Blancini, *Pellegrini in Oriente*, p. 135

giving rise for example to the “Jesus Prayer”. Elsewhere, there is the prayer which begins “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you”, or else simple chants which are sung over and over again.²³

Olivier Clément underlines an important theological aspect of the *repetitiveness*, that it opens the liturgical celebration to the aspect of eternity.²⁴ Regarding to Taizé repetitive hymns, Clément links it also to the old Church Tradition through the Orthodox *Jesus prayer* or through the Catholic *Rosary* but at the same time observes the main difference: at Taizé, the *repetitiveness* is assumed in a communal and liturgical way, not just for personal prayer.

Now, Christianity has a whole tradition of repetitions which can pacify us and which can, in a sense, empty the intellect of its agitation and allow it to be united to the “heart”. And this makes us ready for prayer. For example, in the Eastern Church there is what is known as the “Jesus prayer,” or in the Latin Church there is the “Rosary”. Something very interesting at Taizé is that this formula of calming repetition has been taken up in the liturgy; that is, it is not used only in a personal prayer, but also in prayer together or common prayer.²⁵

In a very similar way, cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi underlined during the last Spiritual Exercises²⁶ kept for Pope Benedict XVI spiritual and psychological aspects of *repetitiveness*. Ravasi states the repetitiveness is actually the typical language of the passion: persons in love enjoy repeating their loving words to one another, ill persons love to describe their suffering and, in the Old Testament, in key moments for the Jewish people, repetitive hymns and psalms were composed;²⁷ also, in the deep moments, Jesus spoke through *repetition*.²⁸ Using the repetition in the dialogue with God means, according to Ravasi, being involved in prayer not only intellectually through words but also sentimentally, through passion. This is a way, according to the same cardinal, the Rosary has had so much pastoral success during the story.²⁹

There is another liturgical element linked to the *repetitiveness* in the Taizé order of prayer: the silence. The *silence*, as the *repetitiveness*, is also men-

²³ Br. Roger, *Letter from Madras*, Taizé, Les Presses de Taizé 1987, p. 2. G. Blancini quote also other letters where Br. Roger links the repetitive hymns to the *Jesus Prayer*. See: G. Blancini, *Pellegrini in Oriente*, p. 136.

²⁴ See: Olivier Clément, *Anachroniques*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer 1990, p. 32.

²⁵ O. Clément, *Taizé. A Meaning to Life*, p. 51-52.

²⁶ Gianfranco Ravasi, *The Encounter. Discovering God through prayer*, Charlotte N.C., Saint Benedict Press 2014, p. 11 and the following.

²⁷ For example Ps. 118/119, see: *Ibidem*, p. 10.

²⁸ Last supper, Jn. 13, see: *Ibidem*, p. 12.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

tioned in the prayer sheet-paper, so it is not an act ordered instinctively by the main celebrant,³⁰ being assumed by entire community and pre-scribed. The silence opens the spirituality to the sense of the *apophatic knowledge of God*,³¹ specifically to Palamite monastic tradition. The silence also introduces the question of *listening* to the Word of God and to the others in a very personal way, aspect important for the Reformed background of Taizé worshipping.³² Analysing the *repetitiveness* and *silence* as theological values inspired by the Palamite monastic spirituality, one cannot avoid observing a very visible sign of the *hesychast* tradition: the small chair and prayer position of the body. The need of a certain body-position during the repetitive or silenced prayer reveals the involvement of both body and soul or heart and intellect in the dialogue with God. In this way the Taizé spirituality managed to recuperate certain aspects of the prayer that were set aside in some Western Reformed Churches where the prayer tended to be too *intellectual*.³³

Another element of a classical Taizé prayer is the Intercession prayer, actually a combination of the *Prayers of the Faithful* in western rites and the *ektenies* or *Litanies* from the Byzantine rite. Even the answers to this *Litanies* can be *Kyrie eleison* or *Gospodi pomilui*. The classical Songs book of Taizé counts no less than 21 versions of *Kyrie eleison*³⁴ and 3 versions of *Gospodi pomilui*³⁵ for answering the Intercessions prayers. Also, some of those prayers end exactly like the Byzantine Litanies: “let us pray to the Lord!”. Here is one example of Taizé Intercessions prayer, taken from the community official website:

For all those who faithfully announce your Word, *Lord, we pray.*

For prisoners and those forgotten by society, keep us in solidarity with their suffering, O Source of comfort, *we pray.*

For abandoned children, that they may find peace with those who welcome them, *Lord, we pray.*

For scholars and researchers, that their work may benefit all humanity, *Lord, we pray.*

For those who have responsibilities in public life, that they may act with integrity and for the good of all, *Lord, we pray.*³⁶

³⁰ Actually, there is no main celebrant in Taizé prayers except for the Eucharist.

³¹ G. Blancini, *Pellegrini in Oriente*, p. 142.

³² Blancini underlines the spiritual potential of the value of silence in an era when we use to speak to much. *Ibidem*, p. 144.

³³ Aspect observed also by G. Blancini. See: *Ibidem*, 92.

³⁴ See songs 79-90 in: *Die Gesänge aus Taizé*.

³⁵ See songs 103-105 in: *Die Gesänge aus Taizé*.

³⁶ See: http://www.taize.fr/en_article5806.html?id_document=5839, viewed on January 14, 2019.

3. Weekly Paschal celebrations

Thanks to some liturgical elements, Taizé celebrates some parts of Easter every week of the entire year³⁷ in a much obvious way than in the traditional Churches themselves. Those liturgical elements are: the adoration of the Cross Friday evening, the service of the Light Saturday evening and the Eucharist Sunday morning.

The adoration of the Cross, called in Taizé *the prayer around the cross* takes place at the end of the Friday evening prayer when the Cross is put on the floor and everyone comes to touch the icon of the Cross with their forehead, beginning with the brothers and followed by everyone in the Church. This practice was inspired to Br. Roger by the Russian custom of touching the icons with the forehead. Br. Roger saw this gesture during a meeting of prayer with young Russians in the late '70. After visiting Moscow in 1978, Br. Roger described the gesture and gave the interpretation himself: entrusting to God his and others' difficult preoccupations and concerns.³⁸ It was generalized soon after for the Friday evening prayer in Taizé. Gianluca Blancini underlines that this practice of adoring the Cross every Friday evening is an amazing synthesis between the Western devotion to the Cross and the iconic spirit of the Orient.³⁹ The Taizé icon of the Cross is painted in a mostly Oriental style⁴⁰ by Fr. Eric de Saussure⁴¹ and it is very alike to the Assisi Cross (San Damiano), which is also from a Syrian Oriental provenience.⁴² This resemblance could also be an extraordinary symbol for the spiritual ecumenical project of Taizé. In front of *San Damiano* Cross, Saint Francis heard the calling of God: *Go and repair my House!* This is a relevant symbol for the ecumenical mission of Taizé: the mission of repairing and healing. Pope Paul VI was emphasizing that the ecumenical monastic experience of Fr. Roger and his community is like the project of Saint Francis of Assisi.⁴³ The fact that for this adoration gesture one must not necessarily kiss the Cross but just touch the front made it available also to Protestants for whom the icons-veneration is not characteristic or could be even problematic. Without

³⁷ The Sunday understood as weekly Easter.

³⁸ Br. Roger, *And Your Deserts Shall Flower. Journal 1977-1979*, Oxford, A. R. Mowbray & Co Ltd, p. 74.

³⁹ G. Blancini, *Pellegrini in Oriente*, p. 132.

⁴⁰ Olivier Clément, *L'autre soleil. Autobiographie spirituelle*, Paris, Stock 1975, p. 34.

⁴¹ Br. Eric de Saussure (1925-2007) Taizé frère, internationally wellknown for his artistic work, see: G. Blancini, *Pellegrini in Oriente*, p. 131.

⁴² For more information about *San Damiano* Cross see: Sergiusz Baldyga, *The San Damiano Cross*, Assisi, Proziuncola 2006.

⁴³ See: Kathryn Spink, *Frère Roger, fondateur di Taizé*, Bologna, EDB 1987, p. 63: "a post-confessional monachism".

being necessary involved in the liturgical order there are in Taizé also other icons that fill the liturgical space of the Reconciliation Church. We can mention here the Virgin Mary's icon painted also by Br. Eric,⁴⁴ very alike to the Vladimir Orthodox icon of the Theotokos. Another Taizé symbolic icon to mention would be the so-called icon of the friendship, a Coptic Orthodox icon from the 7th century representing Jesus keeping his arm in friendship gesture on Saint Menas, an Egyptian Saint but whom actually can represent anyone of us⁴⁵.

During the Saturday evening prayer another rite takes place, full of theological symbolism, of Orthodox provenience: the lighting of the candles. This is how the Dominican Friar Patrick Burke describes this rite:

The climax of the liturgical week is undoubtedly the Service of Light which takes place on Saturday nights. This is not unlike our own liturgy for Holy Saturday night. All present are given candles as a symbol of the presence of the risen Lord. As the *Christus Resurrexit* is being sung, the church is filled with a great sense of joy and hope. The risen Lord Jesus has conquered darkness and sin; he has broken the powers of oppression and misery, and he offers new life to all humankind. There is hope for humankind; there exists the real possibility for change, and there is, in the words of Brother Roger, a life we never dared hope for.⁴⁶

In an interview that Gianluca Blancini has personally taken from Fr. Thomas of Taizé, the last one mentions that Br. Roger was very touched by the liturgical celebration he saw in Russia that included also a Vigil prayer with the gesture of lighting candles by all the believers present at the celebration.⁴⁷ Fr. Roger imported this gesture and included it in the Saturday evening Vigil prayer as a symbol of the Resurrection.

But the very core of every weekly liturgical order is the Eucharist Sunday celebration. There is no other more obvious liturgical sign that the Taizé spirituality managed to rediscover and to recuperate the Old Tradition of the Church than the weekly Eucharist celebration. The Eucharist is always presided over by the priests of the Catholic Church but it also maintains much of

⁴⁴ The Italian theologian Gianluca Blancini considers that the presence of the Holy Virgin's icon means also a reconsideration of the *Theotokos* figure and role in the Taizé spirituality. G. Blancini, *Pelegrini in Oriente*, p. 131. In the Taizé Songs book there are two versions of the Slavic *Hail Mary* hymn (*Bogoroditse Dievo*). See: *Die Gesänge aus Taizé*, hymns nr. 99 and 110. For more information about the evolution of the presence of the *Theotokos* in the Taizé spirituality and liturgical space see: Br. Max Thurian, *Marie, mère du Seigneur: figure de l'Église*, Taizé, Les Presses de Taizé 1962.

⁴⁵ See: Br. Jean-Marc, *Icons*, Taizé, Les Presses de Taizé 2011, p. 17-18.

⁴⁶ P. J. Burke, *The Spirituality of Taizé*.

⁴⁷ See: G. Blancini, *Pelegrini in Oriente*, p. 99.

a Reformed style; the role of the main celebrant is re-interpreted and limited just to the necessary liturgical words and acts. There is not always a homily, but the Prior meditates the Gospel in form of a short prayer translated in several languages. If there is a homily, it can be made by somebody not necessarily Catholic. Also, all the Church is involved through singing and communal silence. Participating at the Taizé Sunday Eucharist, one can feel how the Eucharist is a gift for everyone, including the main celebrant or the preacher, and they are just guests of the Eucharist, not masters of it. This aspect is definitively a liturgical approach inspired by the Reformed background.

At this point it is necessary to present the Eucharistic approach of Br. Roger and of the Taizé community. Br. Roger believed in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, sharing so the Catholic and Orthodox faith.⁴⁸ This vision opens the perspective of an ecclesiology or anthropology of mystical communion very characteristic of the Orthodox theology.⁴⁹ The Taizé community does not encourage the intercommunion and does not want to hurry up dogmatic agreements, nor does it wish to perform *prophetic* Eucharistic liturgical gestures that could affect the ecumenical relations between the Churches or could scandalise the faith of some believers for whom a strict Eucharistic discipline is an essential part of the faith. This fact is reflected in the Eucharistic approach that can be seen during the Sunday morning celebration.⁵⁰

First of all, regarding the Eucharistic approach and discipline it is required that the pilgrims, who wish to receive the Eucharist in Taizé, believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist substances. The Sunday Eucharist in the main church of the community is always presided over by priests of the Catholic Church. Secondly, for Protestants who do not share the belief in the real presence, for non-baptised persons, persons belonging to other religions, or for Orthodox who, even if they believe in the real presence in the Eucharist but cannot receive the Eucharist in other Churches, there is blessed bread sharing. This bread is actually a symbol taken from the Byzantine rite, the so called *antidoron*, a blessed bread distributed especially

⁴⁸ Br. Roger, *And Your Deserts Shall Flower*, p. 59.

⁴⁹ See for example: John Zizioulas or Pavel Evdochimov.

⁵⁰ One of the best consequences of this Eucharistical discipline is the fact the Taizé community not only was not condemned by any Orthodox authority but actually praised by Orthodox theologians or even Spiritual Fathers which is actually, a fact rare for the Orthodox traditional approach to an ecumenical community. For example, in the Romanian version of the book of Olivier Clément about Taizé, the late wellknown spiritual father Constantin Galeriu quotes and agrees with the words of Clément: "Guardians of Orthodoxy, do not worry! Taizé is not trying to capture anyone. It does not claim to be a Church. It wants only to be a sign of the Church and a way into it, in the perspective of reconciliation". See: the Romanian translation: O. Clément, *Un sens al vieții*, trad. Nicolae Bordașiu, București, Anastasia 2008, p. 7.

to those who for different reasons couldn't take the holy communion. Also, we have to mention that almost every week there is an Orthodox Eucharistic celebration in the Roman Church⁵¹ in the nearby town where Orthodox can receive the Eucharist. This Church is also used by some Protestant or Anglican communities for Eucharistic celebrations.

The fact that all the brothers now receive the Catholic Eucharist goes back to the 70's when Brother Roger received for the first time a new Catholic member into his community. With the passing of the years the Catholic presence in the Taizé community increased regarding both the brothers and pilgrims and Br. Roger considered as being inconceivable that he and his community and the pilgrims could not also share the same Eucharistic table.⁵²

But Br. Roger was a theologian, he knew that receiving the Eucharist implied also sharing the faith of the Church that consecrates the Eucharist and of course a certain approach to the role and place of the episcopate. Actually, even if he never has formally converted, Br. Roger was sharing at least two of the very basic dogmas of the Catholic Church: the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the Petrine Ministry. This thing is openly admitted also by his successor as Prior of the community:

For him, entering progressively into a full communion with the Catholic Church was given concrete expression in two points he never kept secret: receiving the Eucharist and recognizing the necessity of a ministry of unity exercised by the Bishop of Rome.⁵³

Weekly Eucharist⁵⁴ as receiving Communion⁵⁵ from the part of the Catholic Church was the most important step for the adherence of Taizé

⁵¹ Actually the old church of the village.

⁵² See this information in an interview with Br. Alois published as an answer to another article where Br. Roger was accused of converting to Catholicism, article published by Yves Chiron in *Le Monde* in September 6, 2006. See: Br. Alois, *Something that was without precedent*, https://www.taize.fr/en_article6739.html, viewed on January 15, 2019. In this interview, Br. Alois is pointing and describing the moment when Br. Roger had for the first time received the Sacraments during a Catholic Mass. Still, we have to mention that, nor Br. Roger neither Br. Alois have had the impression that this fact brought conversion in a confessional meaning, but it is given the impression that it happened the most natural and normal thing being given all the spiritual path followed by Br. Roger until that moment: "In 1972, the then Bishop of Autun, Mgr Armand Le Bourgeois, simply gave him communion for the first time, without requiring any other profession of faith from him besides the Creed recited during the Eucharist, and which is held in common by all Christians. Several witnesses were present, three of my brothers, a couple who are friends of ours; they can attest to this." See: Br. Alois, *Something that was*.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ It is well known that in most of the Protestant Churches there is no weekly Eucharist.

⁵⁵ For more information about the Eucharistic approach of Taizé, especially the ecumenical relevance of this approach see: Marco Guido, *L'eucaristia di Taizé, tappa concreta nel dialogo ecumenico*, Bari, Ecumenica Editrice 1974.

Spirituality and Liturgy to the Church Tradition. Br. Alois states that “the way that he (Br. Roger) followed led him more and more to discover and bring to light the fullness of the tradition of the Church”.⁵⁶ In the great care for the communion and inter-communion we can see that Taizé image of the Church unity corresponds to the Tradition of the Church.

Conclusions

After enunciating all these liturgical and spiritual aspects, we can state that the Taizé community now has its own monastic, liturgical, and spiritual tradition born from “the enriching of the symbolic and sacramental dimension of the Taizé liturgy through integrating in the reformed spirituality elements derived from the Catholic Culture and extending it to the Oriental Christian patrimony”.⁵⁷ All these elements together are harmonized by the Eucharistic discipline⁵⁸ mentioned above and the existence of the ministry of the Prior.

Br. Alois considers that, besides a role of rediscovering the Old Tradition of the Church in a Protestant background community, mixing liturgical elements from different liturgical traditions has also had a very practical role: to facilitate the co-existence in the same community of brothers who come from so many different confessional and cultural backgrounds.⁵⁹

Rediscovering the Church Tradition through Liturgy, the Taizé community has followed the most profound and sure ecumenical path, without forcing dogmatic agreements or inter-communion, still venturing itself toward Christian unity in a period when “it was still dark” (Jn 20,1). It remains very interesting how the Catholic theologians’ interpretation changed during the years after Taizé opened itself to Tradition. In the ‘60s a French Dominican Friar was writing that the Taizé community, not being based on a clear (monastic) tradition will probably not last very long, the brothers being just some *enthusiasts*.⁶⁰ Half a century later, another Dominican Friar asks whether the original ecumenical character of Taizé is not put into danger by the all pervading Catholic character of the Eucharistic approach⁶¹

⁵⁶ Br. Alois, *Something that was*.

⁵⁷ G. Blancini, *Pellegrini in Oriente*, p. 131.

⁵⁸ Certain requirements before receiving the Eucharist as we have already mentioned.

⁵⁹ Br. Alois, “What is Distinctive about Taizé?”, in: *The Relevance of a Monastic or Religious Vocation. Acts of the international colloquium; Taizé, 5-12 July 2015*, Taizé, Les Presses de Taizé 2016, p. 13-19, here p. 16.

⁶⁰ François Biot OP, “La renaissance de communautés *coenobitic* dans le monde protestant”, in: *Istina* 1 (1956), nr. 3, p. 287-304, here p. 304.

⁶¹ P. J. Burke, *The Spirituality of Taizé*: “The Roman Catholic Mass is celebrated each Sunday as an integral part of the week’s liturgy for the community. Marian feasts are celebrated with great solemnity, and the Blessed Sacrament is preserved in the main chapel in the

Nonetheless, the former Archbishop of Canterbury's description of the Taizé identity can still be the best conclusion of every article about this community "meant to be a kind of protest against an ecumenism without hope".⁶²

Church of Reconciliation. Further more, some of the community have become Roman Catholics and of those, some have been ordained to the Roman Catholic priesthood. Will this tendency continue and if it does what effect will it have on the future of the community? It is difficult to speculate, but one hopes that the original ecumenical inspiration of the community will not be put in danger".

⁶² Rowan Williams, "Brother Roger's Theological Legacy: Solidarity, Poverty and Freedom", in: *Brother Roger's Contribution to Theological Thought, Acts of the international colloquium, Taizé, August 31 – September 5, 2015*, p. 43-49, here p. 48.