

# The Taizé Community: A Symposium at Sarum College

## Submitted Papers

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### **The Familiar Unfamiliar: A Study of Youth Worship and Transformative Learning (Steve Emery-Wright)**

The aim of this paper is to examine the findings of two qualitative research projects as they relate to transformative learning among teenagers through worship at Taizé. The first research project was conducted during a week at Taizé in April 2006. 24 interviews were conducted with 15–18 year olds at Taizé. This was part of an ongoing piece of research in how young people understand and express worship. The second research project was a case study conducted in 2013 involving eight participants between the ages of 18-23 who engaged in an eight day pilgrimage to Taize. The research question applied to the findings was, 'Can a spiritual pilgrimage to a location with a contrasting theological tradition and practice create a theological and experiential dissonance that results in transformative learning?'

The first research project discovered similarities (and some contrasts) to other worship events where young people described the worship as authentic. The premise behind the question was that young adults from an Evangelical/Pentecostal background in England are spiritually nurtured from a predominately neo-charismatic perspective. In other words the first research exposed how Taizé had the elements present that would make worship particularly meaningful for young people. The second research focused on the contrasts and how these created a learning, and possibly transforming, encounter. Turner's theory of liminality and Mizirow's theory of transformative learning suggest that experiences of dissonance within the context of pilgrimage may form fertile ground for change. Jack Mezirow and Victor and Edith Turner serve as key conversation partners in this research.

The findings indicated that all but one of the individuals experienced some degree of transformation in theology and/or practice. The findings also suggested that the event potentially initiated a process that required further action in order for a transformation to be fully realised.

### **Biography**

Steve Emery-Wright is a Methodist Minister who has pastored churches, worked with young people, and lectured in the USA, New Zealand, the UK, Singapore and Nigeria. He currently is the MA programme leader at Cliff College. He has published books and journal articles on young people's understanding and expressions of worship from the context of the UK as well as a global perspective. He has also published on faith formation and teenage sexuality. His current projects include the role of transformative learning and a book on the broad relational understanding of faith formation. BA from Olivet Nazarene University, MDiv from Asbury Theological Seminary, PhD Westminster Institute of Education, Oxford Brookes.

## **Social Justice and Taize Spirituality in Taiwan (Yin-An Chen)**

To practice Taize spirituality is not only to sing some Taize chants but also to participate in transformation of social justice. In 2012, Brother Alois proposed the letter from Taize, 'Toward a New Solidarity', to start a new project of pilgrim. In this letter, Brother Alois encouraged the youth to live with trust, which will initiate and be the foundation of solidarity, and then to go toward others to listen surrounded people. Also, Christians as salt of the earth need to live on trust and live with our inner struggles, and both will revitalise the message of love and peace. So, Brother Alois suggests the youth to response the voice of the world and answer the call of God's justice and peace.

In this context, when Sunflower Student Movement broke out and occupied the Parliament over a month in Taiwan in 2014, Christians joined the protest and held Taize prayer 'on the street' to support the demonstration. (And then, Taize prayer was also held in anti-nuclear protests.) Taize is not merely a Christian ecumenical movement but a spiritual movement of embodying Christian faith through its solidarity of social participation and of bringing God's peace to the world. In this light, Taize spirituality deeply connects with Christian participation in social justice.

The presentation/article will have two parts, combining theological interpretation and social observation. Firstly, I will briefly describe church's political attitude and the promotion of Taize in Taiwan. Secondly, I will discuss the relation between Taize spirituality and liberation theology, basing on resources from the project of 'Toward a New Solidarity'. It shows how Taize spirituality embodies that 'the kingdom of God is justice and peace' and Taize prayer in Taiwan is an example.

### **Biography**

Yin-An Chen is an Episcopalian and a PhD candidate in the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University. He was a permanent of Taize in 2013 summer and in 2015 during the celebration of 'Toward a New Solidarity'. Before coming to Durham, he joined social movement and coordinated a regular Taize prayer in Taipei. Now, he is a translator of 'I am the Beginning and the End', written by Br. John of Taize, and a volunteer to revise Taize letters in Chinese version.

## **Taizé and Christian witness in secularised society with special reference to Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Roger Newell)**

The paper explores certain themes of the Taizé community's presence in a secularized society with special reference to Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The point of the paper is not to show a causal connection but to consider certain themes shared by Taizé and Bonhoeffer that help describe a life of discipleship in the contemporary West. For example from the Taizé side, Brother Francois has posted an article on Bonhoeffer's relevance on the Taizé web site. Also, in recent years the community has regularly sung a song whose text is from one of Bonhoeffer's prison writings. Beyond these and other specifics, other themes worth noting include community formation centered in the Sermon on the Mount, and the close linking together of hospitality with the 'secret disciplines' of worship and liturgical prayer. Lastly I wish to consider how these themes may be of relevance for those of us who are part of local churches where such practises are either dormant or nonexistent.

### **Biography**

Roger Newell is Professor of Religious Studies at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. His doctoral studies were in Aberdeen, Scotland, where he examined the theological epistemology of C. S. Lewis and T. F. Torrance under the supervision of James Torrance. He served as pastor of Claypath United Reformed Church in Durham for eight years before moving back to the States. Since coming to George Fox, he has taken five Juniors Abroad trips to Europe to study key moments in church history, ancient and modern, beginning with St. Paul in Rome and ending with Bonhoeffer in Berlin. In part inspired by these visits to Europe, Roger is currently completing a book length study of Church and State relations in Germany from the rise of Hitler in 1933 to the non-violent revolution that came from the Church in 1989. His most recent book was a study of the hermeneutics of C. S. Lewis: *The Feeling Intellect: Reading the Bible with C. S. Lewis* (Wipf and Stock, 2010).

## **A Road Well Travelled: Personal Reflections on Taizé (Diane Coleman)**

When I first walked into the Church of Reconciliation I felt as if I had come home. Since that first visit some 25 years ago I have kept my notebooks, photographs and journals from all 16 visits. In them questions began surfacing about how the place 'works' for the thousands of young people, as well as those of more mature years, who spend a week there.

In particular I wondered how the distinctive style of music enabled experiential learning in an atmosphere of worship and living in community, and at the same time how the worship and work of the community expresses its theology, inclusivity and reconciliation.

This paper will draw on my records of visits, articles published by the community and others as well as other anecdotal material, beginning to draw out from them questions themes and ideas which may be useful for our own churches.

### **Biography**

Diane Coleman is a Methodist Local Preacher who first visited Taizé during their 50th celebrations in 1990 and has returned regularly since. Firmly committed to ecumenism and equality, Diane believes in world peace, reconciliation and mutual respect. After a successful career in IT, towards the end of her working life she gained two degrees (Theology and Music). She worked for the church from graduation until her retirement and now lives, knits and gardens on the coast of County Durham.

## **The power of vulnerability: Taizé and its attraction to young people (Daniel Smith)**

This paper will explore what it is about Taizé that is attractive to young people. Although numerous arguments for this could be made, I will focus upon a single claim, the significance of which rests upon its ability to be transferred beyond the Taizé community. Taizé, I will argue, is a space where it is safe to be vulnerable. I will consider how the community, in the spirit of Brother Roger's own life and vision, intentionally provides this space of safety and acceptance through the manner in which it conducts its own community life and prayer. This gives authenticity to the invitation it extends to visitors to come into that space, an authenticity of profound significance in an age where the young are increasingly disillusioned with church authority. By walking alongside the materially and spiritually vulnerable, sharing their struggles and listening to their questions, the community maintains in itself an openness which it offers to its visitors. This does not lead us to a theology of Taizé for, I shall suggest, the community embodies a spirit of renewal and receptivity to God which can be found in the Gospel and in the lives and works of many Christians. It does however help to draw out some important principles embodied in the community and its worship which can be taken home from Taize, principles which help create that space which seems to be so powerful for the young.

### **Biography**

Daniel Smith completed his undergraduate and masters degrees in theology at the University of Durham, focusing especially upon Meister Eckhart's theology. He is currently beginning his second year of a PhD at Cambridge. His research draws upon Eckhart's works, using his teaching to develop disability theology by exploring how the practical exclusion of people with intellectual disabilities from church and theology overlaps with a similar exclusion of God from individual's lives and communities and considering how we might respond to this problem today. Daniel has visited Taizé on numerous occasions and has been involved in organising Taizé worship for several years.

## Taizé and Receptive Ecumenism (David Tatem)

Receptive Ecumenism is rapidly becoming one of the buzz phrases of the ecumenical scene. The underlying principle is simplicity itself, the idea that other Christians and other traditions may have gifts which I or my tradition would benefit from receiving.

For some this is almost second nature whilst for others it is a challenge, needing stereotypes and misconceptions to be challenged.

A purely intellectual exercise in discussion across the boundaries of traditions may go some way in persuading people of the virtues of Receptive Ecumenism and to engage in it but it is essentially a spiritual discipline and is best entered into and experienced in the context of spiritually engaged community.

Without ever having used the term, the concept of Receptive Ecumenism lays at the heart of Taizé and the vision of Brother Roger. Implicit in the pattern of life and spirituality of Taizé is the giving and receiving of the gifts of different Christian traditions. It is one of its defining features and without even necessarily being aware those who spend time there are exposed to it and easily become 'infected'.

The challenge of processing the experience and being able to embrace change is facilitated both by the environment of the community itself and the expression of its spirituality but also by the experience, over a week and for some young people even longer, of being engaged in groups where relationships are formed and the sharing of experiences and reflection can be deep.

### Biography

Since 2009 David Tatem has been the Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations for the United Reformed Church. He trained in the Cambridge Federation and holds an MA in Pastoral Theology. Since 1979 he has served in various roles including as ecumenical chaplain to a Polytechnic; an area Secretary for a Mission agency; a Church Development facilitator and the Free Church minister in the Church of Christ the Cornerstone in Milton Keynes. He first visited Taizé in 1973 and many times since, sometimes taking groups. His current areas of interest are *Bibliodrama*, Receptive Ecumenism and the relationship between spirituality and superstition.

## **A Case Study: Reconciliation through Shared Learning (Keith Thomasson)**

Reconciliation is central to the work of Taizé. To a degree, this reconciliation comes through learning together. For, learning together is one aspect of the Taizé experience that deepens one's understanding of another person.

I shall explore a case study where inverse learning led to reconciliation across generational boundaries. The context was that of an afternoon workshop preparing for Taizé-style worship in Bristol.

I shall make reference to leadership studies (e.g. Grint) and writings that have come from the Taizé context.

### **Biography**

Keith has undergraduate degrees in music and in theology, and is a recent graduate of Sarum College's MA in Christian Approaches to Leadership (validated by the University of Winchester). Keith has taught music in secondary schools and then served as an Anglican priest in parish ministry and school chaplaincy. He is currently Senior Chaplain to Alabaré Christian Care and Support based in Salisbury.