

Founder of Taizé is murdered: Brother Roger "one of the best-loved Christian leaders of our time"

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The death of the 90-year-old founder of the Taizé Community in France at the hands of a woman wielding a knife shocked world Christian leaders.

Roger Schutz was killed August 16 as he prayed during a gathering of 2,500 young pilgrims at the community's center in Burgundy. Police arrested a 36-year-old Romanian woman thought to be mentally ill.

Schutz, a Swiss Protestant, founded the Taizé Community in 1940 as an ecumenical monastic community which advanced contemplative life among Protestants and spanned denominational and generational boundaries.

Beginning in the 1960s, thousands of young people, coming initially from Europe, then from the whole world, attended Taizé regularly. The community has more than 100 Protestant and Catholic brothers from more than 25 nations.

"Brother Roger died as he lived, praying at the center of his community," said Geneviève Jacques, a spokesperson for the World Council of Churches. "His ceaseless search for an authentic ecumenical dialogue between believers went far beyond any institutional barriers, and he achieved a particular resonance with young people."

Pope Benedict XVI said from his summer residence at Castel Gandolfo: "This most sad news strikes me even more because just yesterday I received a letter from him." It was "a very moving and loving letter" to say he supported the pontiff and those who would be with him in Cologne, Germany, for the August 16-21 World Youth Days.

Jean-Arnold de Clermont, president of the Conference of European Churches and of the French Protestant Federation, spoke with consternation: "We would have wished

a peaceful death for Brother Roger.” De Clermont praised his community’s influential work on liturgy. “The Taizé hymns are, indeed, known and sung throughout the world.”

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams called Brother Roger “one of the best-loved Christian leaders of our time,” and Ishmael Noko, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, cited the slaying as a metaphor for broader violence. “Forces of violence are moving among us and within us, from which we must pray fervently to be delivered,” Noko said. “Taizé is, and remains, an embodiment of this prayer.”

In his old age, the Taizé founder became frail and used a wheelchair, but in April he attended the funeral of John Paul II, where he received communion from the hands of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who would become Pope Benedict XVI.

Eight years ago, Brother Roger designated his successor, Brother Alois, a German Catholic who was in Cologne when he heard the news of Brother Roger’s death. – *Ecumenical News International, Religion News Service*