



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

**The call to be a unifying influence:
some synergies and suggestions**

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In recent days I have been drawn to pray that President Putin would have an encounter with the Risen Jesus, like what happened to Saul on the road to Damascus.

Reflecting on this, it seems congruent with the desperation felt by many of us as the invasion of Ukraine causes so much suffering and spreads such fear across the globe. Offering this prayer, I have also been drawn to reflect on God's action, times past, as regards the renewal of hope through peacemakers with a unifying intention.

Specifically, I have been reflecting on the synergies between our times and the post WW2 period in Europe when God inspired Chiara Lubich of the Focolare Movement and Brother Roger of Taize. God chose to incarnate, so vulnerably, through a young and faithful country couple from Nazareth, Mary and Joseph. "Jesus, God amongst us born of Mary". Likewise, God chose faithful Chiara and Roger to begin movements of renewal.

These movements began in their own Christian denomination but then spread to be ecumenical and interfaith expressions of our common humanity and our yearning to live with a more unifying consciousness. Neither Chiara nor Roger sought to be leaders of anything, let alone celebrity figures, when they began saying their prayers amidst the despair and destruction of, respectively, northern Italy and France after WW2. Their stories are illustrative of God's way and of God's choices, as celebrated by Mary in her song, the 'Magnificat'. [Luke 1:39-56].

<https://centrochiaralubich.org/en/biographic-information/>

<https://www.tcdsb.org/Board/NurturingOurCatholicCommunity/Documents/Chiara%20Lubich%20Biography.pdf>

https://www.taize.fr/en_rubrique917.html

<https://www.oikoumene.org/blog/remembering-the-remarkable-life-of-brother-roger-taize>

What Chiara and Roger offer in common is a simple spirituality based on loving Jesus and following his call to build unity, as a matter of love. Brother Roger reminds us that "the constant search for unity harmonises the human being: it provides thought with deeds and being with action." The need is obvious, in our current global context, for more people to have an intentional unifying, cooperative commitment, like in the sustained example of Chiara Lubich's Focolare Movement and in Brother Rogers' Taize Community.

As we give thanks for the continuing vitality and leadership of both the Focolare Movement and Taizé Community, we might also wonder now, from where the next movements of renewal will spring. Who is God choosing to lead them? Can we see already?

Keeping attentive to what the Holy Spirit may be prompting, there are some simple clear ways we can all help. Here are three learnings from our living traditions that seem relevant to current circumstances:

1. Keep reading the Gospels to better follow Jesus' way.
 - For example, we notice how Jesus challenges negative motives with positive substance; helping people out of corners; encouraging a change of heart [John 8: 1-11].
 - Again, we see Jesus' sustained focus on healing and helping, even amidst opposition [Mark 3: 1-6].
 - And profoundly, we see in the Gospels how Jesus gives and forgives, embodying his teaching, even on the Cross [Luke 23:34].
2. Meditate and pray so we stay closer to Jesus and are graced to make truer, more beautiful and kinder choices on what thoughts will shape our words and actions.
 - Relatedly, our World Community of Christian Meditation [which is another post WW2 movement of renewal with inspired and humbly loving leadership] recently had a beautiful presentation on teaching Meditation to Children to enhance our children's resilience, delight and enchantment in the gift of life.
 - The WCCM website has many wonderful resources, including the attached.
<https://wccm.org/outreach-areas/children-and-meditation/>
<https://wccm.org/outreach-areas/children-education/resources-for-children-pandemic/>
3. Keep practicing, in daily life, those basic learnings we have about what helps us to have more unifying, healthy relationships. For example:
 - Listen carefully to each other. Don't interrupt as interrupted conversations seldom end well. As the theologian Paul Tillich reminds us: "The first duty of love is to listen."

- Therefore, when in doubt about the other person's meaning in conversation, ask clarifying and open questions rather than closed questions. "Do you mean by this?...Are you saying?"
- Keep confidences that are entrusted to us.
- Where there has been conflict, rather than focus on each other's alleged mistakes, try to move the conversation to what may be possible to do together now that is lifegiving and respectful.
- Be attentive to our tone of voice. Our tone of voice is very powerful in terms of the atmosphere it creates. Attentiveness to our own tone of voice can be instructive as to our actual feelings. As I say to our grandchildren, try to make the sound of your voice to be like beautiful music!
- Try to let go of old resentments and wounds because of how they can otherwise, even inadvertently, reappear in our daily conversations. Remember Nelson Mandela's sober saying: "Hating someone is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.". Obviously, such a reflection as this brings us back to my unexpected but vivid prompting to pray that President Putin will have an encounter with the Risen Jesus, like happened to Paul on the road to Damascus.

https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20110125_1.htm

Meanwhile, as the above also seeks to convey somewhat succinctly, there are things we can do as we watch for how God will raise up new leaders and movements. Leaders, that is, like Chiara Lubich of Focolare and Br Roger of Taize who have a unifying consciousness and a love for all humankind.

May it be so, Amen and Amen!



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