

Translated into 58 different languages (including 23 from Asia and 7 from Africa), this letter, written by Brother Roger of Taizé, will be a starting-point for reflection throughout the year 2002 during the weekly meetings in Taizé as well as those held in other parts of the world.

Letter from Taizé

LOVE AND SAY IT WITH YOUR LIFE

Letter 2002

1 “Love and say it with your life”: these words were written three centuries after Christ by a Christian from North Africa, Saint Augustine.

2 “All God can do is give his love.” These words come from a Christian thinker of the seventh century named Isaac of Nineveh. He reached this conclusion after having studied Saint John’s Gospel for a long time and meditated on the words “God is love” (1 John 4:8,16).

3 God loves every human being on earth, but he does not impose himself and does not force anybody to love him.

Today more than ever before, a call is arising to open paths of trust even in humanity’s darkest hours. Can we hear that call?

There are people who, by giving themselves, attest that human beings are not doomed to hopelessness. Are we among them?¹

More and more people throughout the world are becoming aware of how urgent it is to come to the aid of the victims of poverty, a poverty that is constantly on the rise. This is a basic necessity to make peace on earth possible.

The disparity between the accumulation of wealth by some and the poverty of countless others is one of the most serious questions of our time. Will we do all in our power for the world economy to provide solutions?

Neither misfortunes nor the injustice of poverty come from God; all God can do is give his love.²

And so we are filled with astonishment when we discover that God looks at every human being with infinite tenderness and deep compassion.³

When we realize that God loves us, that God loves even the most forsaken human being, then our hearts open to others. We are made more aware of the dignity of the human person and we ask ourselves: how can we prepare ways of trust on earth?⁴

However powerless we may be, are we not called to communicate a mystery of hope to those around us by the lives we live?⁵

Others can recognize our trust in God when we express it by the simple giving of our own lives. Faith becomes credible and is passed on above all when it is lived out.⁶

God's presence is a breath that fills the entire universe; it is an inrush of love, light and peace on earth.

Borne forward by this breath of life, we are drawn to live in communion with others⁷ and we are led to make the hope of peace a reality in the human family. May this communion and this hope shine out all around us!⁸

By his Holy Spirit, God penetrates the depths of our being; he knows how we are longing to respond to the call of his love. And so we can ask him, "How can I discover what you want of me? My heart is troubled: how can I perceive your call?"

And in inner silence this answer can well up: "Dare to give your life for others; there you will find meaning for your existence."

One day we may find ourselves saying to God:

"The days passed and I did not respond to your call. I went so far as to ask myself: do I really need God? Hesitations and doubts made me drift away from you.

"But even when I remained far from you, you were waiting for me. I thought I had been abandoned, and you were alongside me.

"Day by day, you renew within me the spontaneity which allows me to hold true in a 'yes' to Christ. You look at me with such understanding that my 'yes' will be able to carry me onward until my last breath." > 3

4 The love of God placed in each one of us is a precious treasure. From this treasure, a force of compassion lasting a whole lifetime can spring up.

5 For many years now, we have realized how necessary it is that some brothers of our community share the life of the very poor in the Southern continents. For example, a few brothers have been living in Bangladesh for the last twenty-seven years. They look after the ill and the handicapped. They invite the destitute to share meals with them. They support small schools for children from poor families. From the outset they established a trusting relationship with Muslim believers.

6 We can give our own life to the point of forgetting ourselves for others. In Taizé, sisters have been helping with the welcome for over forty years. They are concerned to understand the young women and to listen to them. The welcome they offer can be so authentic that we say to ourselves: these women are a Gospel treasure.

7 Christ did not come to earth to start a new religion but to offer every human being a communion in God. In God's heart, that communion which is the Church cannot be divided. And so it is essential for the undivided Church, still hidden but a reality in God, to be made manifest.

8 Peace on earth begins within us. As early as the fourth century Saint Ambrose of Milan said, "Begin the work of peace within yourself so that, once you are at peace yourself, you can bring peace to others."

9 In the early years of our community life, we were aware of the doubts that could arise in us as we tried to respond day after day to Christ's call and we asked ourselves: how are we going to persevere? Gradually we realized that the power of the Holy Spirit was enough to sustain a vocation for an entire lifetime. And it became clear that we could not remain faithful to our vocation without making a life-commitment.

10 The Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément wrote these words which have been a real support for us, "One of the key words at Taizé is 'trust.' The meetings organized by the community in Europe and on the other continents make up part of what is called a 'pilgrimage of trust on earth.' The word 'trust' is perhaps one of the humblest of words, one of the most everyday and simplest words there are, but nevertheless it is one of the most essential. In trust there is the mystery of love, the mystery of communion, and finally there is the mystery of God." (From the book *Taizé, A Meaning to Life*, p. 69.)

11 In our community life, we know that simplicity and kind-heartedness are indispensable values. They may be two of the most radiant facets of the beauty of a communion.

12 1 Peter 2:21-25.

13 We can be liberated from what weighs upon us by speaking with someone who has a gift, drawn from faith, for discerning what lies deep in others' hearts, and who can listen to us with kindness. Through such conversations, the certainty of forgiveness becomes accessible.

14 John 15:11 and Luke 10:21.

To remain faithful our whole life long requires unflagging attentiveness.

In the course of our lifetime the Holy Spirit comes to visit our inner nights, and gradually our whole being is transfigured.⁹

In a world where new technologies are making possible advances never before imagined, it is important not to neglect fundamental values of the inner life—compassion, simplicity of heart and simplicity of life, humble trust in God, serene joy...¹⁰

The Gospel awakens us to compassion and to a kind-heartedness without bounds. There is nothing naive about this; it can require vigilance. And these values lead to a discovery: seeking to make others happy liberates us from ourselves.

Looking at others with love allows the beauty of the human soul to reveal itself to us.

Simplicity of heart and life keeps us away from twisting paths where we risk going astray.¹¹

The most striking thing about the Gospel is forgiveness—the forgiveness that God gives us, and the forgiveness God asks us to give one another. Even when he was abused and mistreated, Jesus the Christ did not threaten anyone; he forgave.¹² Alive in God, he continues to offer the freedom of forgiveness.

There is no will to punish in God.

By forgiving us, God removes what has wounded our hearts, in some cases since childhood or adolescence.

Entrust everything to God, even our worries... And then we realize that we are loved, comforted, healed.¹³

In the Gospel, Christ never calls us to sadness or gloom. On the contrary, he places peaceful joy within our reach, and even jubilation in the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

A young African who recently spent a year in Taizé explained how he gradually came to discover joy in the

wake of great misfortune. When he was seven years old, his father was killed. And his mother had to flee far away. He said:

“I wanted to find again my parents’ love, the love I had not had since childhood. So I sought an inner joy, hoping it would give me strength in the midst of suffering. It enabled me to leave behind the loneliness of my childhood. I realized how important joy is in order to change everyday relationships and to find inner peace.”¹⁵

God has breathed a soul into every human being.¹⁶ That soul is invisible, just as God is invisible. It is there that our desire for a communion with God is born.¹⁷

And how can we make this communion a reality? It is possible to encounter God truly in prayer, whether it is expressed with words or in silence.¹⁸

Nothing brings us as close to God as prayer with others, when it is supported by the beauty of song.¹⁹

Realizing that even death does not put an end to a communion with God brings peace to our hearts. Instead of leading to nothingness, it opens the way to a life of eternity when God welcomes our soul for ever.

Even when there are doubts in us, the presence of the Holy Spirit remains, in days of peace as well as in times of dryness.

Are we not the poor of the Gospel? Our humble faith is enough to welcome God’s presence.²⁰ And the mere desire for it brings our soul back to life, on earth as in eternity.

15 “God’s joy is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

16 Genesis 2:7.

17 In the Bible, the same word can mean both “soul” and “desire.” The human soul bears the desire for God: “My soul is thirsting for God” (Psalm 42:2). “My soul yearns for you in the night” (Isaiah 26:9). God satisfies the longing of human beings: “Those who are thirsty may approach; those who desire may receive the water of life at no cost” (Revelation 22:17).

18 To have the simple desire for communion with God is already prayer. Saint Augustine wrote these words: “A desire that calls out to God is already a prayer. If you want to pray ceaselessly, then never stop desiring... Praying with many words does not mean praying for a long time, as some people think... So let us not use a great many words when we pray, but let us spend time praying in silence of heart.” He also wrote, “If you desire to know God, you already have faith.”

19 For some people the beauty of music, whether listened to in a church or in their own room, keeps alive a contemplative waiting.

20 During our last meeting with John XXIII, three of us were present; my brothers Max and Alain were with me. It was in 1963, shortly before he died. At one point during the conversation, the pope explained to us how he sometimes made decisions while praying. “I speak with God,” he said, and then added, “Oh, very humbly! Oh, very simply!” It was around this time that brothers of our community began to go to Eastern European countries to visit Christians there. We went to listen, to be with those who were undergoing trials, to understand the Orthodox faith better. And now we are thankful that we can offer a welcome to so many young Orthodox Christians. We are happy to have discovered that one of the secrets of the Orthodox soul lies in a prayer open to contemplation.