

Translated into 57 different languages (including 24 from Asia), this letter, written by Brother Roger of Taizé, was made public during the young adult European meeting in Hamburg. It will be a starting-point for reflection throughout the year 2004 during the weekly meetings in Taizé as well as those held in other parts of the world.

Letter from Taizé

To the Wellsprings of Joy

Letter 2004

1 A deepening of the inner life, far from leading us to shut our eyes to the situation of present-day societies, is a call to become better informed. Are we aware, for example, that 54 countries in the world are poorer today than they were in 1990? Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, wrote to us last year on the occasion of the European meeting in Paris, "There are so many young people in the world who are deprived of prospects for the future. For them, each day is a bitter struggle against starvation, illness and misery. In addition, many live in regions which are prey to armed conflicts. We have to do everything we can to give them hope."

2 The beloved Pope John XXIII wrote in 1963, "Every believer must be a spark of light, a center of love, a vivifying leaven amidst his fellow human beings: and he will be this all the more perfectly the more closely he lives in communion with God. In fact, there can be no peace between humans unless there is peace within each one of them." (*Pacem in terris*, 164-165)

3 The apostle Paul encouraged believers to be "points of light," shining like stars in the world (see Philippians 2:15-16).

4 "When the Lord comes the lowly shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the neediest people shall exult" (Isaiah 29:18-19). "Console your heart, chase sorrow far away; for sorrow is of no use to anybody" (Sirach 30:21-25).

So many young people all across the earth carry within them a yearning for peace, for communion and for joy.

They are also mindful of the untold suffering of the innocent. They know all too well that poverty in the world is on the rise.¹

It is not only the leaders of nations who build the world of tomorrow. The most obscure and humble people can play a part in bringing about a future of peace and trust.

However powerless we may seem to be, God enables us to bring reconciliation where there are oppositions and hope where there is anxiety. God calls us to make his compassion for human beings accessible by the way we live.²

If young people live lives focused on peace, a light will shine wherever they may be.³

I asked a young man one day what he felt was most essential to keep him going in life. His reply was: "Joy and kind-heartedness."

Worry and the fear of suffering can take away our joy.

When a joy drawn from the Gospel wells up in us, it brings with it a breath of new life.

We are not the ones who create this joy; it is a gift from God. It is constantly renewed by the look of trust with which God regards our life.⁴

Kind-heartedness is not gullible; it requires us to be vigilant. It can lead us to take risks. It leaves no room for looking down on others.⁵

It makes us attentive to the very poorest, to those in distress, to the suffering of children. It lets us show, by the look on our face or by the tone of our voice, that every human being needs to be loved.⁶

Yes, God enables us to make our way forward with a spark of goodness in the depths of our soul, a spark which asks only to burst into flame.⁷

But how can we go to the wellsprings of kindness, of joy, and also to the wellsprings of trust?

We find the way by surrendering ourselves to God.

As far back as we look in history, multitudes of believers have known that, through prayer, God brings a light, a life within.

Even before Christ, a believer prayed, "My soul longs for you in the night, Lord; my spirit within me is seeking you."⁸

The desire for communion with God has been set within the human heart since the dawn of time. The mystery of that communion touches what is most intimate in us, reaching down to the very depths of our being.

And so we can say to Christ, "To whom would we go but to you? You have the words that bring our soul back to life."⁹

Remaining before God in contemplative waiting is not something beyond our grasp.

As we pray in this way, a veil covering the inexpressible realities of faith is lifted. And what lies beyond words leads to adoration.

God is also present when fervor fades and when all perceptible resonance vanishes. We are never deprived of his compassion. It is not that God remains distant from us; we are the ones who at times are absent.

⁵ Kind-heartedness is invaluable in community life. It may be one of the clearest reflections of the beauty of a communion.

⁶ When they are still quite young, children can grasp what it means to have a mother or father, a sister or brother who is kind-hearted. That is a clear reality of the Gospel. It is so important for children to know that they are loved; it makes them able to keep going far their whole life long, and to understand that God calls us to love in our turn.

⁷ During a visit to Taizé, the philosopher Paul Ricoeur said, "Goodness is deeper than the deepest evil. However radical evil may be, it is not as deep as goodness."

⁸ Isaiah 26:9.

⁹ When some people began to leave Christ, he asked his disciples, "Do you want to leave too?" Peter replied, "To whom else would we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:67-68)

10 Living in communion with God leads us to live in communion with others. The closer we come to the Gospel, the closer we come to one another. The Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément wrote, “The more someone becomes a person of prayer the more they become a person who is responsible. Prayer does not set us free from the tasks of this world: it makes us even more responsible. In fact, nothing shows more responsibility than to pray. This can take the concrete form of being present with those who are suffering from being abandoned by others, or from poverty—as is the case, for example, with the brothers of Taizé who live in deprived areas in other continents—, but it calls us as well to be inventive, to be creators in every sphere, including that of economics, that of a global civilization, of culture....” (*Taizé, A Meaning to Life*, Chicago: GIA Publications, 1997.)

11 When he was very young, at age 21, the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer coined the expression “Christ existing as the Church.” He wrote that “in Christ humankind is really drawn into communion with God” (*Sanctorum communio*, Berlin 1930).

A contemplative gaze perceives signs of the Gospel in the simplest events.

It discerns Christ’s presence even in the most abandoned individual.¹⁰

It discovers in the universe the radiant beauties of creation.

Many people ask themselves, “What does God want of me?” When we read the Gospel, we understand. God asks us to be a reflection of his presence in every situation. God invites us to make life beautiful for those he entrusts to us.

Those who attempt to respond to a call from God for their entire lifetime can say this prayer:

Holy Spirit, though it may well be that no one is built to live out a yes for ever, you come to kindle in me a source of light. At those times when the yes and the no clash, you shed light on my hesitations and doubts.

Holy Spirit, you give me the strength to consent to my own limits. If there is an element of frailty within me, may your presence come to transfigure it.

And then we are led to dare to say yes, a yes that will carry us a long way.

A yes that is transparent trust.

A yes that is the love in all our loving.

Christ is communion. He did not come to earth to start one more religion, but to offer to all a communion in him.¹¹ His disciples are called to be a humble leaven of trust and peace within humanity.

In that unique communion which is the Church, God offers us all we need in order to go to the wellsprings: the Gospel, the Eucharist, the peace of forgiveness... And Christ’s holiness is no longer something unattainable; it is there, close at hand.

Four centuries after Christ, an African Christian named Augustine wrote, “Love, and say it with your life.”

When communion among Christians is a life and not a

theory, it radiates hope. Still more, it can help sustain the indispensable search for world peace.

How, then, could Christians still remain divided?

Over the years, the ecumenical vocation has fostered an invaluable exchange of views. This dialogue is the first-fruits of a living communion among Christians.¹²

Communion is the touchstone. It comes to birth first of all in the heart of hearts of every Christian, in silence and in love.¹³

In the long history of Christians, at one point multitudes found that they were divided, sometimes without even knowing why. Today it is essential to do everything in our power so that as many Christians as possible—who are often innocent of the divisions—may discover that they are in communion.¹⁴

Vast numbers of people have a desire for reconciliation that touches the very depths of their soul. They aspire to this inexhaustible joy: one love, one heart, one and the same communion.¹⁵

Holy Spirit, come and place in our hearts the desire to move forward towards a communion; you are the one who leads us to it.

On Easter evening, Jesus went with two of his disciples as they walked to the village of Emmaus. They did not realize at the time that he was walking alongside them.¹⁶

We too experience times when we are unable to realize that, by the Holy Spirit, Christ remains at our side.

Tirelessly he walks beside us. He illuminates our souls with unexpected light. And we discover that, even though some darkness may remain in us, in each person there is above all the mystery of his presence.

Let us try to keep in mind one thing we can rely on. What is that? Christ says to each person, “I love you with everlasting love. I will never leave you. By the Holy Spirit, I will be with you always.”¹⁷

¹² Reflecting on the ecumenical vocation, the Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatius IV, wrote recently from Damascus, “We have an urgent need for prophetic initiatives in order to bring ecumenism out of the twists and turns in which I fear it is getting stuck. We have an urgent need for prophets and saints to help our Churches to be converted by mutual forgiveness.” The patriarch called for “emphasizing the language of communion rather than that of jurisdiction.” Last year, while receiving in Rome leaders of the Orthodox Church of Greece, Pope John Paul II said, “With the saints, we contemplate the ecumenism of holiness which will lead us finally towards full communion, which is neither absorption nor fusion, but an encounter in truth and in love.”

¹³ Reconciliation begins in the present moment, within each person. Lived in the heart of a believer, reconciliation gains credibility and can lead to a spirit of reconciliation in that communion of love which is the Church. This road presupposes that there be no humiliation for anyone.

¹⁴ Could the Church give signs of great openness, so wide as to let it become clear that those who used to be divided in the past are no longer separated, but are already living in communion? A significant step towards reconciliation will have been accomplished to the extent that a life of communion, already a reality in certain places throughout the world, is taken explicitly into account. It will take courage to recognize this and draw the necessary conclusions. Written documents will come later. Does not putting the emphasis on written documents in the end cause us to lose sight of the Gospel’s call to be reconciled without delay?

¹⁵ See Philippians 2:2.

¹⁶ See Luke 24:13-35.

¹⁷ See Jeremiah 31:3 and John 14:16-18.

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71250 Taizé-Communauté, France
www.taize.fr