

Letter from Taizé

The afternoon of the day he died, August 16th, Brother Roger called one of the brothers and said to him, “Note down these words carefully!” There was a long silence while he attempted to formulate his thinking. Then he began, “To the extent that our community creates possibilities in the human family to widen...” And he stopped there, too exhausted to finish his phrase.

These words reflect the passion that inspired him, even in his old age. What did he mean by “widen”? He probably wanted to say: do everything possible to make more perceptible for everyone the love God has for every human being without exception, and for all peoples. He wanted our little community to bring this mystery to light, through its life, in a humble commitment with others. So we brothers wish to take up this challenge, together with all those who are searching for peace across the earth.

In the weeks before his death, he had begun to reflect on the letter that would be made public during the Milan meeting. He had noted some themes and some texts of his that he wished to take up again and work on. We have taken them just as they were in order to compile this “Unfinished Letter”, translated into 57 languages. It is a kind of final message from Brother Roger, which will help us to go forward along the road on which God “widens our steps” (Psalm 18:36).

Reflecting on this unfinished letter in the meetings held in 2006 both in Taizé, week by week, and elsewhere on different continents, each person can try to find ways of completing it by the life he or she lives.

Brother Alois

For 2006

Unfinished Letter

“I leave you peace; I give you my peace.”¹ What is this peace that God gives?

It is first of all an inner peace, a peace of the heart. This peace enables us to look at the world with hope, even though it is often torn apart by violence and conflicts.

This peace from God also supports us so that we can contribute, quite humbly, to building peace in those places where it is jeopardized.

World peace is so urgent in order to alleviate suffering, and in particular so that the children of today and tomorrow do not live in distress and insecurity.

In his Gospel, in a dazzling intuition, Saint John expresses who God is in three words: “God is love.”² If we can grasp only those three words, we shall go far, very far.

What captivates us in those words? The fact that they transmit this luminous conviction: God did not send Christ to earth to condemn anyone, but for every human being to know that he or she is loved and to be able to find a road to communion with God.

But why are some people gripped by the wonder of a love and know that they are loved, or even cherished? Why do others have the impression that they are neglected?

If only everyone could realize that God remains alongside us even in the fathomless depths of our loneliness. God says to each person, “You are precious in my sight, I treasure you and I love you.”³ Yes, all God can do is give his love; that sums up the whole of the Gospel.

What God asks of us and offers us is simply to receive his infinite mercy.

That God loves us is a reality sometimes hard to comprehend. But when we discover that his love is forgiveness above all else, our hearts find peace and are even transformed.

And then, in God, we become able to forget what assails our hearts: this is a wellspring from which we can draw freshness and new vitality.

Are we sufficiently aware that God trusts us so much that he has a call for each one of us? What is that call? God invites us to love as he loves. And there is no deeper love than to go to the point of giving oneself, for God and for others.

Whoever lives a life rooted in God chooses to love. And a heart resolved to love can radiate goodness without limits.⁴

Life is filled with serene beauty for whoever strives to love with trust.

All who choose to love and to say it with their life are led to ask themselves one of the most compelling questions of all: how can we ease the pain and the torment of others, whether they are close at hand or far away?

But what does it mean to love? Could it be to share the suffering of the most ill-treated? Yes, that's it.

Could it mean having infinite kind-heartedness and forgetting oneself for others, selflessly? Yes, certainly.

And again: what does it mean to love? Loving means forgiving, living as people who are reconciled.⁵ And reconciliation always brings a springtime to the soul.

In the small mountain village where I was born, near our home, a large poverty-stricken family lived. The mother had died. One of the children, slightly younger than I, often came to see us. He loved my mother as if she were his own. One day, he learned that they were going to leave the village

and, for him, leaving was not easy at all. How can a child of five or six be consoled? It was as if he did not have the perspective needed in order to make sense of such a separation.

Shortly before his death, Christ assured his friends that they would receive a consolation: he would send them the Holy Spirit who would be a support and a comfort for them, and who would always remain with them.⁶

In the heart of each person, Christ still whispers today, “I will never leave you all alone; I will send you the Holy Spirit. Even if you are in the depths of despair, I remain alongside you.”

Welcoming the comfort that the Holy Spirit gives means seeking, in silence and peace, to surrender ourselves to him. Then, though at times dire events may occur, it becomes possible to go beyond them.

Are we so easily upset that we need to be comforted?

There are times when all of us are shaken by a personal trial or by the suffering of others. This can go so far as to undermine our faith and extinguish our hope. Rediscovering the trusting of faith and peace of heart sometimes involves being patient with ourselves.

One kind of suffering leaves a particularly deep impression: the death of someone we love, someone we may have needed in order to keep going forward here on earth. But such a trial can sometimes be transfigured, and then it opens us up to a communion.

A Gospel joy can be restored to someone in extreme distress. God comes to shed light on the mystery of human suffering, going so far as to welcome us into an intimacy with himself.

And then we find ourselves on a path of hope. God does not leave us all alone. He enables us to advance towards a communion, that communion of love which is the Church, at one and the same time so mysterious and so indispensable ...

The Christ of communion⁷ offers us this enormous gift of consolation.

To the extent that the Church is able to bring healing to our hearts by communicating forgiveness and compassion, it makes a fullness of communion with Christ more accessible.

When the Church is intent on loving and understanding the mystery of every human being, when tirelessly it listens, comforts and heals, it becomes what it is at its most luminous: the crystal-clear reflection of a communion.

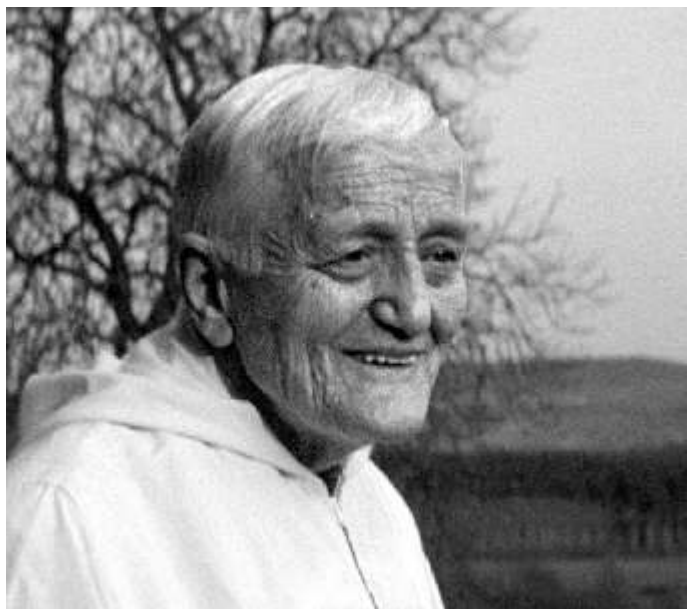
Seeking reconciliation and peace involves a struggle within oneself. It does not mean taking the line of least resistance. Nothing lasting is created when things are too easy. The spirit of communion is not gullible. It causes the heart to become more encompassing; it is profound kindness; it does not listen to suspicions.

To be bearers of communion, will each of us walk forward in our lives on the road of trust and of a constantly renewed kind-heartedness?

On this road there will be failures at times. Then we need to remember that the source of peace and communion is in God. Instead of becoming discouraged, we shall call down his Holy Spirit upon our weaknesses.

And, our whole life long, the Holy Spirit will enable us to set out again and again, going from one beginning to another towards a future of peace.⁸

To the extent that our community creates possibilities in the human family to widen...



1. John 14:27. 2. 1 John 4:8. 3. Isaiah 43:4

4. At the opening of the Council of Youth in 1974, Brother Roger said, "Without love, what is the good of living? Why live any longer? For what purpose? That is the meaning of our life: to be loved for ever, loved into eternity, so that in our turn we go to the point of dying for love. Yes, happy those who die for love." Dying for love meant for him loving to the very end.

5. "Living as people who are reconciled." In his book *A Prospect of Happiness?* which appeared two weeks before his death, Brother Roger explained once again what these words meant for him: "Can I recall here that my maternal grandmother discovered intuitively a sort of key to the ecumenical vocation, and that she opened for me a way which I then tried to put into practice? After the First World War, her deepest desire was that no one

should ever have to go through what she had gone through. Since Christians had been waging war against each other in Europe, she thought, let them at least be reconciled, in order to prevent another war. She came from an old Protestant family but, living out an inner reconciliation, she began to go to the Catholic church, without at the same time making any break with her own people. Impressed by the testimony of her life, when I was still very young I found my own Christian identity in her steps by reconciling within myself the faith of my origins with the mystery of the Catholic faith, without breaking fellowship with anyone."

6. John 14:18 and 16:7

7. The "Christ of communion." Brother Roger already used this expression when he welcomed Pope John Paul II to Taizé on October 5th, 1986: "The constant longing of my brothers

and myself is for every young person to discover Christ, not Christ taken in isolation but the 'Christ of communion' present in fullness in that mystery of communion which is his Body, the Church. There, many young people can find ways to commit their entire lives to the very end. There they have all they need to become creators of trust and reconciliation, not just among themselves but with all the generations, from the most elderly to little children. In our Taizé Community, following the 'Christ of communion' is like a fire that burns us. We would go to the ends of the earth to look for ways, to ask, to appeal, to beg if need be, but never from without, always while remaining within that unique communion which is the Church."

8. These last four paragraphs were spoken by Brother Roger in December 2004 at the end of the European meeting in Lisbon. They are the last words he said in public.