

## The Path Before Us

BROTHER RICHARD OF TAIZÉ

We come to the end of our week of reflection on monastic and religious life. I will not draw any conclusions. It is not a matter of concluding but rather of opening ourselves to the path before us.

Several times during this week, titles of Brother Roger's book were mentioned, e. g. *Living Today for God* and *The Dynamic of the Provisional*. I would also like to express with the title of another book what we have experienced together these days: *A Life We Never Dared Hope For*.

We hoped that this week would be a nice moment of meeting and sharing. But it seems to me that we have also experienced something beyond all our hopes. We have heard unexpected things. We met people that we did not think we would meet, got to know sisters and brothers who surprised us because we did not even know they existed.

Our diversities are great, sometimes amazing. Monastic and religious life has taken extremely varied forms in history and throughout the earth, and this in different Church contexts.

The experience of this week brings to mind the image of the polyhedron dear to Pope Francis. He said more than once that he preferred the polyhedron to the sphere. And he explained why. The polyhedron is a body with many faces. It is not smooth, it has corners and edges, it may be irregular. It changes appearance depending on the perspective of the beholder, think of a beautiful crystal. Beautiful gemstones are not spheres but polyhedra.

A sphere is quite regular, whichever side you look at it from, it is always the same. All points of its surface are equidistant from the center. The different faces of a polyhedron, however, may be more or less removed from the center and from each other. So do not worry too much about where we are exactly. It is wherever we are, with whatever we are, that we are part of the same living reality.

Brother Roger compared monastic and religious life over the centuries to a large tree. He said, "Taizé is a simple bud grafted onto a large tree, without which it cannot live." This large tree lives from the same sap. But it has many branches, leaves, flowers, fruits and buds. In 1965, when Brother Roger wrote these words, he considered Taizé as a mere bud.

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I tried to prepare myself for this morning. But listening to the speeches this week, one richer than the other, I had more and more the desire to keep quiet.

And yet, because I really love Brother Roger and I owe him so much, and Brother Alois asked me, I want to return to the intuition of Brother Roger concerning three aspects of monastic and religious vocation: lifelong commitment, common life and the dynamic of the provisional.

### ***1. Lifelong commitment***

On the occasion of a symposium on the monastic life, which took place in Paris last weekend, a French sociologist, Danièle Hervieu-Léger, said: "What poses a problem ... is the requirement of a lifetime commitment."

A lifelong commitment is not in tune with the times. But are not the beginnings of Taizé a confirmation of the always new relevance of the monastic and religious vocation? There were not a lot of reasons why, 75 years ago, young Protestant men should have adopted the monastic life. The fact that they did it anyway, despite the opposition they encountered around them and despite the questions and doubts they may have had themselves, this simple fact confirmed that the monastic life was not merely a venerable tradition. At every age, it is a present-day response to a call of the Gospel.

Brother Roger pointed out several times that he did not want to restore the monastic life, to copy nothing. He wanted to respond to Christ's call.

At Taizé, in the beginning, there were no vows, no rule, not even a specific plan for community life. But there was the desire and the choice to belong to Christ for good.

Along the way, the brothers realized that this yes to Christ without reserve needed to be given concrete shape. And it was the tradition of monastic life that provided a form and stability to their spontaneous impulse in the footsteps of Christ. This surge of love, the desire to give oneself without return, is the reason for the lifetime commitment.

### ***2. Common life***

About the common life, I would like to recall that for Brother Roger the search for community life was primary. It was, as he wrote in 1941, to "break with a too-individualistic tradition."

This is why he preferred the word "cenobitic" to that of "monastic". "Cenobitic" or "cenobitism" means "common life." Brother Roger said "common life" when others say "consecrated life". In the text which he speaks of the great tree where Taizé is a simple bud grafted, he speaks of "those who have preceded us in the common life." "To live the common life" was his way of naming in a single expression monks and nuns, male and female religious. Until today, "common life" is the word we like to use in Taizé to say what we are.

The Acts of the Apostles say of the first Christians that they had one heart and one mind, and that everything was held in common. Brother Roger was convinced that in a Church faithful to the New Testament, there must be room for such a common life. He was not an idealist, and he

saw that all could not live in the same radical way. So he wanted the community of brothers as a sign of brotherly love in the Church, as a parable of communion.

It is in this perspective that Brother Roger spoke of holiness. He did not see it so much as a personal achievement as a common vocation, the vocation of a community.

### ***3. The dynamic of the provisional***

As I said, Brother Roger did not go to Taizé with a pre-established project. And once there, he wanted to continue living in a dynamic of the provisional. Is not that what characterizes all foundations? Have not all founders started with not knowing where God would lead them?

For a long time, Brother Roger said, "Have we really begun?" I'm of the generation of brothers who still heard him speak in that way. Then he began to say, "Yes, we have begun." But he wanted, as St. Gregory of Nyssa says, "to go from beginning to beginning by beginnings without end."

Our Rule of Taizé says, "Never stand still." This is a call to each brother, but also to the community. We live between what was given to us and what we will still be given. This requires openness to the Holy Spirit and flexibility; we have heard that several times during this week.

Brother Roger often said that we live as if suspended on the grace of God. We must and can go forward constantly because God's gift and call are without repentance, as St. Paul writes in the letter to the Romans.

It is by placing greater emphasis on the gospel of grace in its simplicity and freshness that we can move forward with a light step, as witnesses of a joy of the Gospel.