

BROTHER OLIVIER QUENARDEL, ABBOT OF CITEAUX

The Eternal Youth of Love

It seems very fortunate to me that the big anniversaries of Taizé in 2015 coincide with the Year of Consecrated Life and with the last year of the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. Brother Roger was 45 years old when John XXIII announced the meeting of a council. This news was like a bombshell.... Taizé was then twenty or so years old. This coinciding of anniversaries leads me to say that there was, at that moment, a providential meeting between our old Church, marked by the wrinkles of a long history, and the young community of Taizé, whose first buds were beginning to flower. To put it another way, it seems to me that there is, in the meeting of these two great figures: good Pope John and Roger Schutz, a historical event of the same kind as the joyful mystery of the Visitation. The fruit ripening in the womb of the Taizé Community made the child that its elderly cousin had the happiness of bearing tremble with joy, and vice versa. The two met each other in the great breeze of the Spirit. They recognised each other in the eternal youth of love and, together, they let their joy overflow.

THE FRESHNESS OF THE GOSPEL

The time had come for the People of the baptised to become aware that their progress towards the Kingdom would gain from being less encumbered. There was a need to rediscover the lightness of the gospel. John XXIII and Brother Roger bring us back to the land of the sources, to the time of betrothal, to the springtime of the Church where the dove can once again make its voice heard. From there comes this freshness, so characteristic of the Gospel, that we find both in the great texts of the Council and in the writings of the founder of Taizé. They invite us to go to Galilee, to the “peripheries” that Pope Francis speaks of, to the place where the Risen Jesus arranges to meet his apostles. It is there that all begins over and over again. There, that is to say in the land of first love and of love built for ever. There, in the intimate Galilee of the heart of the Church, all Christian and religious vocations are truly born for a festival without end.

No doubt you know this saying which is passed from generation to generation in monastic circles: “Today, I begin”. With the Risen Jesus, today, everything begins, and we go from one beginning to another, through beginnings that are always new. It is impossible to settle down, even when one has made a vow of “stability”, that’s to say of fidelity to others in order to make possible the vow of permanent conversion! If our religious institutions cannot make room for this grace of beginnings, we must take a close look at them again, as we risk, under the pretext of faithfulness, closing ourselves up in fossilised practices that once were legitimate but that, today, harm charity.

From our personal and community conversion is born the conversion of our Church; from the conversion of our Church is born the conversion of the one and only Church; from the conversion of the one and only Church, which is the Body of the Risen Christ, is born the Kingdom of God very close to us. Do you not see it?

THE SACRAMENT OF FRATERNAL LOVE

One cannot be mistaken in saying that the grace of beginnings passes through love of the common life. "Yes, how good, how pleasant it is for brothers to live together and to be united!" (Psalm 133(132):1). Jesus made this the most meaningful sign of the new world into which we enter through baptism. "I give you a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you. By this sign people will recognise that you are my disciples: by the love that you have for each other" (John 13:34-35). We Christians, lay and religious, will never cease being confronted by these words that lie at the heart of the New Testament, and of which a concrete example is given to us by the first Christian community: "The multitude of those who had become believers had only one heart and one soul, and no-one considered the goods of others as their own property; on the contrary, they held all things in common" (Acts 4:32).

The most convincing sign that we are disciples of the Lord, and therefore the sign that attracts people most strongly to become his disciples, we can call the sacrament of fraternal love. When it is achieved, then a community becomes a wonderful parable of the gospel. "See how they love one another!" On the contrary, when it is not achieved, even if I celebrate the Eucharist every day, if I do not love my brother or sister, it is pointless! In this respect, one can ask if our institutes, our congregations, our orders, and finally the whole Church... make enough room for the washing of feet to which Jesus attaches the new commandment that he commanded us to "do," just like the Eucharist itself? At the time of St Bernard, this action was considered as a sacrament! Is it enough to revive the washing of feet once a year, on Holy Thursday, to be faithful to the memory of Jesus? Don't you think that if the Church, during its long history, had been more faithful to this action of the Lord that can be called the "act of salvation from below", to differentiate it from the Eucharist which is thus seen as the "act of salvation from above", then the Church would have suffered less from the ruptures we have inflicted on it in the course of centuries?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor and martyr in the face of the Nazi regime, when speaking of the witness of community, saw it as a kind of living call to go forward as Church: "God wanted us to be required to seek and to find his living Word in the witness of a brother, in a human mouth..."

Here, we are at the heart of the Christian revolution. This is where the Spirit of the Lord placed Brother Roger and his community. The humble hill of Taizé has become for us all, and especially for the young, a sign of new times, a powerful symbol of unity and reconciliation. To be credible today, amidst the abundance of proposals produced at all levels by globalisation, what we have to say first and foremost is that we are all brothers and sisters. The rest follows from that and is important only as a function of the universal brother/sisterhood established by Jesus, Christ and Lord. If a Christian monastery, a religious community are not at the heart of this fraternal revolution, what use are they? And

beyond religious life, if we shut ourselves up in the differences, although legitimate, between clergy and laity, between regular and secular life, between the universal Church and individual Churches, do we not risk making them into obstacles, whereas baptism has gathered us first of all as brothers and sisters at the heart of the House of God? As on the first day the Gospel was proclaimed, for us it is a question of showing to the eyes of the world that we are sons and daughters of the light, that the Holy Spirit is given to us to teach us to walk in communion with each other. May Brother Alois allow me to use again here the invitation he extended to the young people gathered at Prague on January 1st, 2015: “Let us dare to come under one roof”, then together, happy in our diversity, let us take the paths of trust and solidarity!

THE SPIRIT OF POVERTY

In 1965—just fifty years ago—the Presses de Taizé published a book containing some of Brother Roger’s greatest intuitions. The book’s title is revealing: *The Dynamic of the Provisional*. At the centre of the book can be found a chapter which would surely not displease Pope Francis. It entreats us to “meet up with the world of the poor”. In this book Brother Roger condemns “the puritanical attitude that consists in acting poor, in other words looking drab, when wealth is hiding behind the faded exterior”. For us who make vows of poverty or of *conversio morum* (radical change of lifestyle), it is good to let ourselves be shaken up by this prophetic voice which refocuses our good intentions:

If the spirit of poverty became synonymous with gloom and austerity, how would it correspond to the first Beatitude? The spirit of poverty is found in the joy of a man who trusts in God... [It] embraces the whole of our being. External signs of poverty are not enough. They do not prevent us from still cherishing a human ambition, a need for power or a desire to dominate sometimes belied by outward appearances.

Further on, Brother Roger’s voice becomes that of wisdom that cries out:

The spirit of poverty must not become harsh and judgemental. One Beatitude cannot be exaggerated at the expense of the others. The poor are the gentle; they remain God’s poor, dependent upon him alone day after day.

In these areas, it is indispensable to keep things in a great equilibrium. Without charity poverty is nothing – shadow without light.

Like a true prophet, Brother Roger is not content to raise his voice. He is the first to put into practice the message that it is his mission to deliver. At the risk of upsetting the humility of the Taizé brothers, I would like to say how touched I am each time I come here—and this grace has been given to me twice a year for several years—by the perfume of evangelical poverty which permeates the life of the community. Nothing ostentatious, nothing superfluous, but everywhere the simplicity of the gospel, which is Brother Roger’s characteristic style:

Accepting with simplicity that which is given today, without giving in to the temptation of accumulating reserves.... He is there, the One who fills us. Multiplying securities of all kinds

gives the lie to our trust in God. Abandoning them means seeking God and finding unshakeable security in him alone.

To realise the first Beatitude, Brother Roger goes further than rejecting deceptive securities and choosing a voluntarily simple life style; he wants us to share his conviction that:

...the existence of the world of the poor in the Southern hemisphere could become, for the Christians of the West, an event of God that would help them not to shut themselves away in their societies of abundance, but to tear themselves loose from the process of withdrawal into oneself that characterises all the old societies.... Christ's poor are coming to encounter us. Their existence invites us to transform our ways of thinking. Contact with them allows us to gain perspective on ourselves. It is with them that our reconversion will take place, otherwise we risk promoting in the West a Christian family which is hyperactive and closed up in a vicious circle of human efficiency.

This message is astounding. Brother Roger assures us that we are no longer the ones who are to carry the gospel to the poor and to the peripheries; it is they who will come towards us so as to evangelise us, and it is with them that we shall be converted.

THE RAINBOW OF THE BEATITUDES

If there is a first Beatitude, it is to lead us to the others whilst respecting the order in which they come: poverty, gentleness, compassion, justice, mercy, purity, and finally peace, which comes in seventh place. Thus one can better understand that gospel peace, this peace that is so dear to people of good will, reveals its full depth only if the pilgrim of the Beatitudes has passed through the first six stages. This is not because it is absent from the first stage, but it is revealed there only in the colour of poverty. It grows when poverty is coloured by gentleness. It grows even more when poverty and gentleness shine through tears, and so on.

Yes, truly, Jesus does not give peace as the world does (John 14:27). Brother Roger helps us to understand this well when he speaks of the "violence of peacemakers." I like to think that the thousands of young people who come to Taizé each year do not leave without having glimpsed the rainbow of the Beatitudes which has risen each day over the hill of Taizé for 75 years, and without having sensed that it is the same rainbow that tries to rise in the depths of their heart, so often wounded or in darkness in the search for consolation and light. The rainbow of the Risen Jesus. In these days of grace, it is given to us, too. And thus we are sent by the Gardener of the New Earth, with all these young people and with all of the Church, to rake the world in the direction of love, to build there the garden of the Beatitudes that the Lord entrusted to men from the time of his Creation, so that they could cultivate it—the paradise of the Man-God, where all living beings sing "Praise the Lord! Alleluia!"