

On the eve of the European young adult meeting in Poznan, Poland (December 2009), and the Asian young adult meeting in Manila, Philippines (February 2010), we are grateful for having been invited by Christians of China. A few of us brothers spent three weeks in their midst and were deeply moved by so many signs of hospitality. After the very different meetings that we had, it seems even more necessary to understand from within the situation of their Church and their great country, where 56 ethnic groups live.

At the entrance to the Catholic cathedral in Beijing, Christians take turns throughout the day welcoming those who arrive. An elderly woman told us, "After so many years when no expression of faith was possible, we saw church doors open in the late 1970s. Today more and more non-Christians come to see us. We are unable to welcome them all as well as we would like to."

A young man explained, "The Chinese soul has always believed in heaven, in a beyond. The past decades have not wiped out precious traditional values, in particular the search for harmony and respect for elders. In recent years material life has fortunately improved, but at the same time many feel a spiritual void and are looking for meaning in life. More and more young people are turning to religion, especially in the large cities."

The Church in China is still small and often lives with poor resources. And yet what dynamic faith there is among Christians! We admire their perseverance and their faithfulness. It is clear to us that God is at work. We met believers who, in their humble situation, play an active role in building the future of their country. In Sichuan province, for example, after the great earthquake of 2008, some went to help offer aid to the victims; they are still there and are deeply appreciated by the population.

Several people told us about the suffering that their parents or grandparents endured for the faith. Everyone we met was grateful to know that believers in other places feel close to them. In a large Protestant church, when we said that at Taizé young people from all continents pray every Friday for the Christians of China, everyone applauded spontaneously.

The wounds of the divisions within the churches left by recent history is very painful. Convinced that the time has come to move beyond them, there are Christians who at present are seeking reconciliation. It is important for this to begin in the hearts of believers. Turning to God together in common prayer could be a way to show that unity is possible.

In China more and more Christians are becoming sensitive to points of convergence between the Gospel and the legacy of ancient wisdom. All across Asia, there are those who seek to live the Gospel in dialogue with cultures and different religions, and by paying particular attention to the poor. Could Christians on other continents let themselves be inspired to a greater extent by this approach?

As a sign of friendship and gratitude to the Christians of China, in 2009 our Taizé Community had a million Bibles printed through Operation Hope and circulated them in all parts of the country.

Letter from Taizé

LETTER 2010

Letter from China

IN EVERY HUMAN BEING, A LONGING

Beyond the broad cultural differences that can create barriers between the continents, all human beings form one family¹: our visit to China has strengthened this conviction in us.

Whatever our culture, our age or our history, we share a longing, a thirst for life in fullness.

The Bible often returns to that thirst. It sees it as a mark engraved by God in us to draw us towards him.² Will we allow that thirst to hollow us out, without wanting to satisfy it too quickly?³ It can become a love burning within us for the One who is always beyond what we can grasp of Him.⁴

The more we seek God, the more we can make this astonishing discovery: God is the one who seeks us first. In the book of the prophet Hosea, God speaks to his people as a man to the woman he loves: "I am going to seduce her; I will lead her out into the wilderness and speak to

- ¹ We are one human family inhabiting the same planet; that is why it is urgent to take responsibility all together for creation and the environment.
- ² "God, my God, I seek you at dawn; my soul is thirsting for you. My flesh yearns for you, like a dry and parched land without water" (Psalm 63:1). "My soul longs for you in the night; in the depths of my being my spirit seeks you" (Isaiah 26:9).
- ³ We may be tempted to satisfy our desires in a superficial manner. Is not overconsumption, in particular, a way of not dealing with some questions that we are afraid to think through to the end?
- ⁴ In the fourth century, St. Gregory Nazianzen sang of the mystery of God: "You are the One beyond all; how can we call you by another name? What hymn can we sing to you? No words are able to express you.... A universal longing, the groaning of all, aspires to you." And at the same time Saint Augustine wrote: "Through our longing, God increases desire. By this desire, he hollows out the soul. By hollowing it out, he enables it to desire."

her heart.” Then he adds: “I will make you my wife forever... in tenderness and mercy.”⁵

In Jesus, this desire of God for human beings becomes a flesh-and-blood reality.⁶ Christ wanted to stay close to us forever and he paid the price for this: by his death on a cross, he went down to the lowest place, to the point of becoming the innocent one persecuted for no reason. Now, risen from the dead, he communicates the Holy Spirit to us, an invisible presence that draws us towards the fullness of God.

SORTING OUT OUR DESIRES

The human heart overflows with an abundance of desires and aspirations: we want so many different things, sometimes even contradictory ones. But we also know that we cannot do or have everything. Far from leading to sad resignation, this awareness can liberate us and help us live in a more unimpeded way.⁷

Yes, it is important to sort out our desires. Not all are bad, and not all are good either. We must patiently learn which to give precedence to and which to set aside.

Deciding which aspirations come first, paying attention to what is found in our depths, is already a way of listening to God. God also speaks to us through our desires. It is up to us to discern his voice in the midst of so many inner voices.⁸

AWAKENING IN OURSELVES THE DESIRE FOR GOD

And we must let the deepest of all longings awaken in us: the desire for God!

It is true that it is not easy to keep alive the spirit of wonder and adoration, since our societies set such a high value on efficiency and doing things as quickly as possible. Yet during long silences where nothing seems to happen the Holy Spirit is at work within us, without our knowing how.

Knowing how to wait... Being present, simply, with no ulterior motive. Kneeling down, recognizing that God is present. Opening our hands in a gesture of welcome.

⁵ Hosea 2:16,21.

⁶ One day, Jesus asked a woman beside a well: “Give me a drink” (John 4:7). The rest of the story shows that, in fact, he was thirsting to communicate the gift of God. On the cross he would say again, “I am thirsty” (John 19:28). According to the context, is this thirst not the ultimate expression of Jesus’ desire to give life and in this way to communicate the gift of God?

⁷ Is it not essential to learn to cope with the incomplete and unpredictable character of our lives? The most affluent societies often seek to hide this reality. The main concern then becomes to hide one’s vulnerability, forgetting that inner flaws, suffering and death are also part of life.

⁸ “I bless the Lord who has counseled me, and even by night my heart instructs me” (Psalm 16:7).

Quieting down is already an expression of openness to God.

Gestures of worship and meditation have been part of Asian cultures for centuries. Could Christians affected by secularization find an encouragement to renew their prayer there? In liturgies and gatherings, inwardness can be combined with a communal and festive dimension.

SHARING WHAT WE HAVE

Letting ourselves be penetrated by the thirst for God does not detach us from the concerns of the world around us. On the contrary, this thirst leads us to do all we can so that others may enjoy the benefits of creation and find joy in living.⁹

Sorting out our desires, accepting not to have everything, leads us not to monopolize wealth for ourselves.¹⁰ Already in the fourth century St. Ambrose said, “It is not your property that you distribute to the poor; you are simply giving back to them what is theirs.”

Learning not to have everything preserves us from isolation. Material affluence is often accompanied by a turning inwards, with a loss of real communication. It would not take much for things to be different.¹¹

Many initiatives of sharing are within our grasp: developing support networks, fostering an economy of solidarity, welcoming immigrants, travelling in order to understand other cultures and other human situations from within, promoting twinning between towns, villages or parishes, to help those who are in need, making good use of new technologies to create links of mutual assistance....

We must be careful not to let ourselves be overwhelmed by a pessimistic vision of the future by focusing

⁹ Faith is not just concerned with a religious domain. Nothing that affects the quality of life can leave us indifferent. Scientific research, artistic expression, political, trade-union or social commitments can be a way of serving God. To study or teach, manage a business with humanity, devote ourselves to our family, expand our friendships, all this can prepare the coming of the Kingdom of God.

¹⁰ A reworking of the global economic and financial system cannot come about without a change in the human heart: how can the foundations of a fairer system be laid as long as some continue to want to accumulate wealth at the expense of others?

¹¹ When our community prepares young adult meetings in major cities on different continents, as stages of the “pilgrimage of trust on earth”, we invite thousands of families to welcome into their homes one or more young people they do not know and whose language they may not even speak. And we see that it takes little to reveal the goodness present in the human heart.

on bad news. War is not inevitable.¹² Respect for others is a priceless blessing to prepare peace. The borders of the richest countries must become more open. Greater justice on earth is possible.¹³

Analyses and calls for promoting justice and peace abound. What is lacking is the motivation necessary to persevere beyond good intentions.

The Gospel calls us to simplicity. Choosing simplicity opens our heart to sharing and to the joy that comes from God.

DEEPENING TRUST IN GOD

While faith seems to be vanishing in many societies, a spiritual longing is being reborn. We need to discover the right words, simple ones, to make accessible to others the faith that gives us life.

Many people cannot believe that God loves them personally. For some, too many trials make it impossible to trust in God.¹⁴ How then can we express more clearly that God takes seriously doubt and revolt against what is absurd?¹⁵ Jesus himself shared the pain of those who suffer,

¹² Despite doubts and even failures, the early twenty-first century has been marked by a growing affirmation of international awareness and the search for a more intense organization of relations between peoples: mobilization of public opinion, attempts to respond jointly to current challenges (climate, environment, health, economy).... Increased interdependence between nations can raise fears, awakening defensive reactions to shore up one's identity. But might it not also become a guarantee of peace?

¹³ There are still nine million children under the age of five who die each year, and 29% of the children who survive in underdeveloped countries are victims of malnutrition. This is totally unacceptable. At the same time, it should be emphasized that, thanks to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, approved unanimously by the Assembly General of the United Nations in 1989, the way children are treated has been transformed: by a concerted international effort; mortality and malnutrition have decreased almost 30% in the last twenty years.

¹⁴ This is not the case for all those who are undergoing great trials. I think of a young man I sometimes meet in Taizé. He has an incurable illness that is getting worse. He suffers terribly. Already many opportunities for a fulfilling life are disappearing. And yet the look in his eyes and his whole attitude remain surprisingly open. One day he said to me, "Now I know what it means to trust. Previously I did not need to, but now I do." And he added in a letter he wrote to me, "I must not let my illness occupy my whole attention." Then I told myself: if this young man could know how much his words keep me going and how he helps so many others by his attitude. There is in him a kind of reflection, very humble but real, of the mystery of the Resurrection.

¹⁵ Among the books that make up the Bible and even among the sacred texts of other religions, there may be none that express the revolt of a suffering innocent man as vehemently as the Book of Job. Job denounces the absurdity of a life of suffering, and he complains about a world where it would have been better not to have been born. But even in the violence of his revolt, he speaks to God. He does not get all his questions answered, but he finds peace in an encounter with God.

MY SOUL IS THIRSTING FOR GOD (PSALM 63)

crying out on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"¹⁶

Many children grow up without anyone ever telling them that God loves them. What young people will walk alongside one or more of them on the path of faith?

Upon entering adulthood, there are those who lose their association with the Christian community. Often it is not a conscious decision, but a chain of circumstances which relegates faith to the bottom of the ladder of priorities. How can friends help each other to renew a relationship with the local community of believers?

Sometimes a gap widens between knowledge in the domain of faith and that acquired in other areas. A faith that remains on the level of phrases learned during childhood will find it hard to face the questions of adulthood. We can find happiness in deepening our understanding of the mystery of faith at every stage of our lives.¹⁷

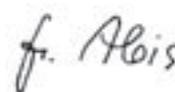
RENEWING OUR COURAGE

God calls us to transform the world, with great ambition but also deep humility.

Older people can encourage the young. The younger generations are no less capable than their predecessors.

This transformation has to begin with ourselves: we must allow the risen Christ to change our hearts, and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us out into deep waters so we can head courageously into the future.

Let us rejoice in the thirst God has placed in us! It gives renewed vitality to our whole lives. "Let whoever is thirsty come; let whoever desires it receive the water of life, free of charge."¹⁸



¹⁶ Mark 15:34.

¹⁷ Ways exist: Bible groups, short Bible readings for each day, a time of silent retreat, training in parishes, studies organized in collaboration with theological faculties or other Church institutions, courses on the internet...

¹⁸ Revelation 22:17.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH YOUR FREEDOM?

In Europe, but also in other regions of the world, this question is being put more and more forcefully.

Twenty years ago, just before the great changes in Europe, we were able to leap over many obstacles and prepare two young adult meetings in Central Europe:

– an East-West meeting in Pécs, Hungary. While the young people were gathering, the «Iron Curtain» across Europe was opened between Hungary and Austria.

– a European meeting in Wrocław, Poland. During the preparation for this meeting the Berlin Wall fell, which allowed 50,000 young people from the entire continent to meet together freely for the first time.

In Wrocław, Brother Roger told the participants, “During this year several peoples have seen iron curtains fall and, at the same time, walls of fear and humiliation have broken down. So in recent weeks, many have been praying day and night for the freedom of peoples.”

Twenty years later, in 2009, three meetings brought together young people: in May in Vilnius (Lithuania) in October at Pécs (Hungary), and late December in Poznan (Poland) for the European meeting.

On this occasion, we would like to ask ourselves: today, in Europe as well as across all the continents, are we reflecting enough on the meaning of freedom? Every young person could ask themselves: What are you doing with your freedom?

LET YOURSELF BE NOURISHED BY THE WORD OF GOD AND BY PRAYING TOGETHER

In China, we met groups of Christians very aware of that treasure which is the Bible.¹ Some would like to read it more, but this is not always easy. With them we called to mind these two pathways:

– At the heart of the Bible is God’s love. Between God and humanity, everything begins with the freshness of a first love; then come the obstacles, and even infidelity. But God does not tire of loving; he always keeps searching for his people. The Bible is the story of God’s faithfulness.

– God gives himself to us through Christ: he is the Word of God. When we read the Bible we meet him, Christ; we hear his voice; we enter into a personal relationship with him.²

In reading, we may retain just one word. The important thing is to put it into practice. In that way we come to understand it better and better.

In China, we also prayed with Christians used to singing the songs of Taizé in their language. Some asked us how best to organize a prayer with others. We shared some practical details with them, inspired by the long experience of our community. They must, of course, be in harmony with the particularities of each local Church:

- Make the place of prayer welcoming using simple means, so that it is conducive to worship.

- Make sure that the prayer flows smoothly: songs, psalm, reading, song, silence (8 to 10 minutes), intercessions, Our Father, final prayer, songs.

- During the prayer, read a short Bible text that is easy to understand, keeping more difficult texts for an explanation outside of common prayer.

- Sing one sentence from Scripture or tradition over and over again, in order to let it take root within us. A sung phrase is easily learned by heart and can accompany us by day and sometimes at night.

- Make use of simple symbols: Friday evening, for example, place an icon of the cross on the ground. All can go up and lay their foreheads on the cross, expressing by this action that they entrust to Christ their own burdens and the sufferings of the world. On Saturday evening, read the Gospel of the Resurrection while children light a small candle that everyone has been given, transmitting to all the light of Easter.

¹ Across the world, there are many examples which show how the Bible has been loved, how it penetrated the depths of the human being and how far this love could lead. In Latvia, in 1940, a priest named Victor was arrested one day because he had a Bible. The regime’s agents threw the Bible on the ground and ordered the priest to trample on it. He knelt and kissed the book. He was then sentenced to ten years’ hard labor in Siberia.

² Speaking of the Scriptures, a bishop of the Philippines said: “God speaks, but God also listens, especially to widows, orphans, the persecuted, to the poor who have no voice. So to understand the Word of God, we must learn to listen the way God does.”

Some steps in 2010 of the pilgrimage of trust on earth

Brother Alois will go, with other brothers...
... to Portugal:
meeting in Porto, February 13-16
... to Bosnia-Herzegovina:
Sarajevo, September 3-5
... to Norway:
Oslo and Trondheim, September 17-19

International young adult meetings

The fifth Asian Meeting will be held in the Philippines, in Manila, February 3-7, 2010

The second international Meeting in Latin America will be held in Santiago, Chile, December 8-12, 2010

The 33rd European Meeting will be held in Rotterdam, Netherlands, December 28, 2010 – January 1, 2011

Messages received for the meeting in Poznan: see <http://www.taize.fr>