

PASSING on the Faith

A SPIRITUAL CROSSROADS OF EUROPE: THE TAIZÉ COMMUNITY'S ADVENTURE WITH THE YOUNG

Brother John of Taizé

I stand before you today with a mixture of gratitude and apprehension. Gratitude, because the organizers of this conference saw fit to include the Taizé Community in their program, ostensibly as a "model that retain[s] religious traditions in non-reductive ways while at the same time bridging in an open and dialogical way the ever-increasing religious pluralism of the contemporary world." It is quite something to be considered, even remotely, such a model. So on behalf of my community I thank the organizers for this show of confidence in the life we have been attempting to live for the past sixty-plus years.

At the same time I feel apprehension, because we are constantly aware of the huge gap between what happens around and through us and our own conscious efforts. I am reminded of Brother Roger's audience with Pope Paul VI in 1972. The pope very generously said to the founder of the Taizé Community, "If you have the key to understanding the young, please tell me." Brother Roger immediately replied that he would like to have that key but did not have it, and never would. In one way or another, including through this very conference in which we are now participating, the pope's question continues to be put to us. And Brother Roger's answer more than thirty years ago still expresses our spontaneous reaction today. I would be very happy to give you the key

to understanding the spiritual quest of young people at the beginning of this new millennium, but this is far beyond my powers. I will be glad, however, to reflect with you on our attempts to welcome young adults and to share our life with them, in the hope that this will confirm some of your own views and spark in some of you insights to put into practice in your own life and work with the younger generations.

BACKGROUND

Let me give some background to my reflections by briefly recounting something about Taizé. On this side of the Atlantic, many people consider Taizé a type of singing: short phrases, often in Latin, repeated over and over again. Others use the word "Taizé" to refer to a style of communal prayer using these chants, and Scripture readings, in an atmosphere of silence and peace. When these people say "I went to Taizé last night," they mean that they attended a service of this sort, not that they hopped on a plane and spent the previous evening in France.

In Europe, on the other hand, and increasingly now in the United States, Taizé is known as a place of pilgrimage primarily for young adults. Every week throughout most of the year, hundreds and often thousands of visitors—between two and five thousand in the summer months—generally between the ages of seventeen and thirty, visit a tiny village in Burgundy, France, named Taizé, for an experience of prayer and community life. They come from all over the world, spend a week together with many others, and then return to their own homes to continue their own Christian and spiritual journey, each in his or her own way.

While all this is part of the story, what is lacking is the center that unifies these diverse impressions. At the heart of life in the village of Taizé, and the source of the worship and music now known across the world, is a monastic community of just over one hundred brothers from many different countries and from different Christian traditions. In August 1940, with France cut in half by the Nazi invasion, a young man from Switzerland named Roger came to the village of Taizé, first of all to welcome refugees, particularly Jews, who were fleeing the invaders. With his sister, he spent two years together hiding refugees and helping them cross the border into neutral Switzerland. But Roger's reason for coming to Taizé went beyond the immediate political situation: he was motivated by the dream of a community that would be a sign of recon-

ciliation among divided Christians and, as a consequence, become a ferment of peace in a war-torn world.

After two years, Brother Roger was forced to leave Taizé and returned to Switzerland. There he met three other young men who shared his vision. As soon as it became possible, the four men returned to Taizé and began living a life inspired by the great monastic tradition of Western and Eastern Christianity: praying three times a day, working to support themselves, and offering hospitality. In the immediate postwar years, this meant taking in a group of orphaned boys (for whom Brother Roger's sister became the surrogate mother) and visiting a German prisoner-of-war camp located in the vicinity. In 1949, the first seven brothers committed themselves for life to celibacy, material and spiritual sharing, and making their decisions in common.

In the 1950s, Taizé was a place of prayer, work, and hospitality that welcomed clergy and laity concerned about the ecumenical vocation, the search for visible unity among the divided followers of Christ. At the same time, brothers went out to live in small groups in areas of poverty and social division. At that time, the community was already made up of brothers from different Protestant backgrounds. Following the Second Vatican Council, it became possible for Roman Catholics to join the community as well. Today the hundred or so brothers come from some twenty-five different countries; most of them live in Taizé, though there are also small groups located in Brazil, Senegal, South Korea, and Bangladesh.

TAIZÉ AND THE YOUNG

One thing should already be clear from this brief historical overview: Taizé did not begin as a place of meeting for the young; the brothers have never had any formal training in youth ministry. By the late 1950s, some work camps and other gatherings were occasionally organized for young Christians, but it was really the sociocultural changes we associate with the 1960s that gave the impetus to Taizé's adventure with young adults. In the course of the late sixties and early seventies, the numbers of these young adults who visited the hill of Taizé mushroomed. Their motives were incredibly diverse, but they were all searching: searching for a better world, for peace and justice, for a deeper and more relevant faith. They were trying to find their place in society, looking for others with a common vision, perhaps desiring

above all to be listened to and to be taken seriously. They came to Taizé as they came to many places, perhaps attracted more specifically by the countercultural ethos of monasticism. They came, went away again, told their friends, and came back in larger numbers. By the early 1970s, during the Easter vacations there were already thousands of young people arriving in this out-of-the-way village in the middle of Burgundy, far from cities and the amenities of modern life.

This sudden influx of the young to a monastic community in rural France, however intriguing in itself, is not to my mind what is most interesting and significant concerning the question that interests us here. Such a phenomenon is not unknown, and in general it disappears as quickly as it arises. The fascinating thing about Taizé is that today, over thirty years later, the coming and going of young visitors shows little or no signs of abating. Those who would explain it by simple sociological factors, by a kind of fortuitous match between the tastes of the young and the characteristics of a particular place, will have to refine their arguments to take into account the changes over time. The youth of 2004 are not those of 1970, nor indeed those of 1985. If I may hazard a generalization, particularly perilous in this domain, today's young people seem to be less ideological than their predecessors, more fragile, harder to grasp or to subsume under overarching categories; they are less a mass of dough and more a heap of sand. And yet, whether dough or sand, they keep coming to Taizé.

An equally interesting and significant element, not unconnected to the one just mentioned, is the response of the community of brothers to the influx of the young. As already stated, they had no particular training or preparation for youth ministry. In some ways, they were as surprised as anyone at the growing number of visitors. And yet they felt it was necessary to respond, to do all that was necessary to offer hospitality to those who came knocking at their door. This sometimes required significant and demanding changes in their life. An event that took place at Easter 1971 is often mentioned in this respect. In 1962, a new, larger church had been built for community worship, since the twelfth-century Romanesque church in the village was sometimes filled to overflowing. Less than ten years later, with three thousand young people expected for Easter, the new church had become too small in its turn. So the brothers knocked down the back wall of their new church and attached a circus tent so that all the worshippers could fit inside. This step was an eloquent sign of Taizé's readiness to place the welcome of

the youth over material considerations, a sign that clearly had a great impact on those who came.

Why did the community make welcoming the young such a priority? First and foremost, hospitality is an important human, Christian, and monastic value. In the stranger, Christ himself is welcomed. Second, beginning in the 1960s, the gap between generations was widening as never before. Parents and children found, sometimes with surprise, that they were speaking entirely different languages. In the older generations, fear of the young was often palpable. A conference like this one would have been unthinkable back then. In such a climate, it seemed all the more essential to listen to the younger generations, to allow them to realize that they had a place in society and in the Church. And finally, Brother Roger saw the search of the young, and even their protests, as a "sign of the times" that should be listened to. At a time when the ecumenical movement, after its first flowering, was running the risk of settling down into mere peaceful coexistence, he felt that by listening to the intuitions of the young the entire Church could be helped to find a way forward toward greater authenticity.

Perhaps we can already draw a provisional conclusion from what we have seen so far. Taizé's "success" in attracting young people was not the result of an explicit plan of action, an agenda set out in advance; it was rather a response to their arrival and their aspirations in a way consonant with the life and faith of the community. It was precisely because the adventure with the young was and is seen as meaningful by the brothers in terms of their own understanding of their vocation, that it could also be meaningful to the young visitors. These visitors did not have the impression that they were the "targets" of a conscious and intentional strategy. Instead, they were asked to take part in a joint undertaking that had meaning first of all for the brothers themselves.

PRAYER AND COMMUNITY

Let us now look at some of the aspects of the welcome of the young in Taizé, which may afford further insight into the way the next generation views its religious identity. The experience offered to the young visitors (and the not-so-young: it should be mentioned that although 85 percent are between fifteen and thirty years old, there are also adults and families with children) in Taizé is essentially the core of the brothers' own life—prayer and community.

First of all, prayer. Three times each day the bells start ringing and everything stops. Everybody—permanent residents and visitors—heads for the Church of Reconciliation for a time of common prayer lasting about forty-five minutes. In the evening, the worship is prolonged by meditative singing which can last, for those who wish, until the early hours of the morning. Worship in Taizé is based on the age-old monastic tradition. The services are classical in form, made up of psalms, Scripture readings, intercessions, and, at the center, a long period of silence. When the numbers of visitors began to increase, the community reflected seriously on how to make the prayer more accessible to them, while maintaining the sung, biblical, and meditative quality that has always characterized it. One solution we came up with was the short refrains sung over and over again, first in Latin and then gradually in other languages as well, now associated throughout the world with the name of Taizé. More accessible and shorter scripture readings were chosen, and read in different languages. Instead of entire psalms sung in French, verses are sung in different languages by soloists to which everyone responds with a simple antiphon such as "Alleluia."

If the worship was intentionally and willingly made more accessible to the young, it nonetheless remains the prayer of a monastic community. The young visitors know that it is not a prayer crafted especially for them but that, whether they are present or not, day in day out, the brothers will be in the church praying. To their minds, this gives it a certain authenticity. At the same time, we have discovered that there is often a tendency to underestimate the ability of the younger generation to enter into a form of prayer that may be quite demanding. For example, at the heart of every service in Taizé there are eight or more minutes of total silence—a time to rest in God, to let the words listened to and sung penetrate one's being, a way of keeping worship from becoming routine. In the summer months, when five thousand visitors, mostly young, are in the church, you can still hear a pin drop during this period of silence. The experience never fails to affect people deeply, and it alone should keep us from selling the young short. When they grasp the significance of a spiritual practice, we have found that they are ready and willing to take part.

One misgiving sometimes expressed by those who hear about the prayer style of Taizé is the concern that it plays on the emotions and offers a superficial "high" rather than a deep encounter with the divine. It is true that in Taizé, we have always believed that worship is not just

a cerebral process but involves the whole being. As during most of the Christian centuries, and still today in the Eastern Church, liturgy attempts to involve the whole being in a relationship with the Source of all life. In our community, using very simple means (candles, icons, soft lighting, some bricks and some cloth), we attempt to create a space that facilitates attentiveness and inner silence. The prayer is sung and, as in many religious traditions, the repetition of the words sung helps one to go beyond superficial rationality and come closer to the core of being.

On the other hand, prayer in Taizé makes no attempt to appeal specifically to the emotions. It is, in fact, rather low-key. Its quiet, meditative atmosphere has little in common with many prayer styles that are consciously employed to try and attract the young. In fact, many of the participants need a day or two to enter fully the rhythm of the prayer. They are not used to sitting in silence for almost ten minutes, to repeating words in different languages. While there may be an immediate fascination with the style of worship, it usually takes a little time for them to feel fully at home there. Is this not because a meditative prayer calls out to a deeper level of their being where they are not accustomed to dwelling? They are challenged to discover a part of themselves often covered over by the busyness of contemporary society. They are forced to work a little bit to get to a place where they discover that they are more fully themselves, but not to expend so much effort that they become discouraged and abandon the search. Whether conscious or not, behind the prayer of Taizé there is thus a pedagogical intention in the deepest meaning of that term. A good teacher always starts where the pupils are at, using what is accessible to them to lead them beyond their prior unreflective understanding of life.

This type of worship is often described by saying that it implicitly communicates a sense of mystery. Our modern or postmodern consumer and technological society, for all it has achieved in the mastery of the universe, has often led to an appalling superficiality, to a reduction of life to what can be measured, bought, and sold. Entire dimensions of existence once familiar to our ancestors have become buried in the rubble of our toys, the products acquired today and broken tomorrow as we move on to other equally desultory activities. Is there any wonder that people are hungering, most often largely unconsciously, for a rediscovery of the depths of life? Is not an important role of our churches and religious institutions to help people rediscover these

depths in a way made authentic by millennia of experience, so that they are not enticed by modern counterfeit encounters with the sacred? Perhaps what some people consider "emotional" is simply anything that does not correspond to a detached and superficial rationality, and it is our notion of the intellect that needs in fact to be reframed.

A word often used by the young themselves to characterize the prayer of Taizé is freedom. "The prayer here is so free," they not infrequently say. At first, these comments left me perplexed. Our prayer is at the opposite extreme from what is usually called "free prayer." Each service is crafted in advance; the order of worship does not change and there is little improvisation. Upon reflection, I came to realize that what they mean by "free" is the creation of a space which leaves room for body and soul to breathe. First of all the body: there are no pews in Taizé; most of the participants sit on the floor in a variety of postures. After the service properly speaking, especially in the evening, the singing goes on and one can come and go as one wishes. One can sing or simply listen to the others chanting, in an atmosphere particularly conducive to inner discovery. The time of silence offers a more explicit space of freedom which one can fill as one chooses, provided of course that one does not disturb others. Paradoxically, perhaps, the set organization of the prayer favors the creation of an open space where body, mind, and heart are liberated; we discover that structure and freedom need not be mutually opposed, but that, correctly understood, the former can make the latter possible. This, I might point out, is another truth kept alive by the monastic tradition.

It is often assumed that contemporary Westerners, particularly the young, are impervious to liturgical symbolism. In our day the vestments, signs, postures, and gestures used in the public prayer of the historical churches often seem to many a closed book. Our experience in Taizé is rather that such forms of symbolic expression still speak to people, provided they are kept simple and when necessary explained (though outside of the service itself). For example, for years we have celebrated a "weekly Easter" during our Friday evening and Saturday evening services. On Friday evening, a large icon of the cross is brought to the middle of the church and laid on some bricks. All are invited to come up to the cross if they wish for a moment of silent prayer while the meditative singing continues, perhaps placing their forehead on the wood of the cross. It is explained earlier that this can be a way of entrusting their lives to Christ on his pilgrimage through death to life, as

well as committing to him all those near and far who are undergoing difficulties in their own lives. We have found that this prayer is very meaningful to all kinds of people, both those with an explicit liturgical background and those for whom such forms of expression are new. Similarly, on Saturday evening everyone is given a taper, a symbol of the light of the risen Christ. These candles are lit by the children present in the prayer at the end of the service, and then everyone passes the flame to his or her neighbors. Such simple but basic symbols seem to give people access to a dimension that remains alive within them, even when it has been almost smothered by a culture that privileges other forms of communication.

A UNIVERSAL COMMUNITY

In addition to offering an experience of prayer that is both meditative and accessible, the other important aspect of life in Taizé always mentioned by its young visitors is that of participating in a kind of universal community in microcosm. In the summer months, there can be young people from up to eighty countries present, from all the major Christian traditions and even beyond (there are always some Muslim students from Africa, and a few Jews, who make their way to Taizé). It is not rare for a young North American to be in a discussion group with Romanians, Swedes, Russians, perhaps a young man from Chile and a young woman from the Philippines. Fortunately, now most European students speak at least a bit of English and are often fluent in more than one language, which generally makes Americans feel a bit ashamed of their limited linguistic skills. Every day, these groups meet to discuss questions that follow from the Bible introduction given by one of the brothers. Sharing important questions with people from a great diversity of backgrounds and experiences, discovering that beyond the differences there is often a common aspiration, is an experience that has a deep impact on people. It gives concrete and specific content to expressions like "the planetary village" or "one human family." Born in a society where worldwide communication is taken for granted, young people today have an innate sense of the universal. Through discussing, working and praying together with people their own age from across the world, this universalism no longer remains abstract but takes on specific names and faces.

One of the aspects of the meetings in Taizé often emphasized by the young is the *trust* they sense is placed in them. Simply on a practical level, it would be impossible to welcome so many visitors if the brothers, along with the communities of sisters who work with us, had to do everything. So everyone is given as much responsibility for the ongoing life in Taizé as they can handle. When people arrive, they are welcomed and given an orientation not by the brothers but by other young people like themselves. The small-group discussions are likewise led by facilitators chosen from among those who arrive for the week. If this lack of trained staff means that the sharing is sometimes less smooth and more open-ended, the young people are appreciative of the fact that they are given the opportunity to express what is in them freely. They don't feel constrained to give the "right answers." The practical work too is organized by and with the young people. At any given time, there are about fifty young men and women who remain for a longer time in Taizé as volunteers. They take on a lot of the responsibility for organizing life on the hill.

This responsibility extends beyond Taizé itself. At the end of each year, the community organizes a five-day-long "European meeting" in a large city. Approximately sixty thousand young adults come to take part from throughout Europe and beyond. Participants are offered hospitality by parishes and congregations in the area. Such a meeting obviously requires a great deal of local preparation, many visits and explanations. Supported by a team of brothers and sisters, the young volunteers undertake most of this preparation. Without perhaps realizing it, they are receiving priceless training in pastoral ministry. I remember that after the meeting we held in Paris some years ago, I accompanied to a follow-up meeting at the Sorbonne the young German woman who had been given responsibility for churches and communities in that part of the center of Paris, a very significant area that included some of the most prestigious churches on the Left Bank. I was impressed by how well this young woman was able to facilitate contacts and get people to work together. Not only was she of Protestant background with very little or no previous experience in doing such work, but her French was rudimentary to the point of being almost nonexistent! Her sense of responsibility, practical intelligence, and good will nonetheless accomplished miracles, and perhaps her lack of expertise even helped ensure her a warm welcome.

So, our discovery about the young is that when given responsibility, they very often rise to it. They do not simply want to be the passive recipients of programs tailored to them; they appreciate being invited to take part in an ongoing search to which they have something vital to contribute.

SIMPLICITY

When you ask young people what strikes them about the experience of Taizé, the word "simplicity" often comes to their lips. Life in Taizé is simple first of all because that is the only way that we can welcome so many people. With no sources of funding beyond the contributions of the participants and the work of the brothers, the material side of life must be kept basic. The young sleep in cabins with bunk-beds or in tents; the food is wholesome without being fancy. There are few distractions outside of the worship and the group meetings. And yet this simplicity of life seems to offer a refreshing change to young people who come from societies that are drowning in excess, where nothing ever stops, where there is no time to just *be*, and be together. They discover that it is possible to be happy without an overabundance of consumer goods; they have a good time together without being burdened by expectations to meet or schedules to follow. Although a lot happens during the day in Taizé, there is no sense of rushing from one thing to the next, no deadlines to meet. The Italians have a good word to express this simplicity; they call it *essenzialità*, which can be loosely translated as "focusing on what really matters."

Perhaps in part because there is time to breathe, young visitors to Taizé are also struck by the atmosphere of acceptance and friendliness. Coming from cities characterized by anonymity and the fear of strangers, many are astonished the first day to see that everyone says hello and people speak to one another while waiting in line for meals! In such a climate of trust, it is easy to make friends and to open up to others. "I was surprised," said Rodica, a young woman from Romania in Taizé this summer, "to see that a discussion in Taizé can be at the same time quite ordinary and quite profound. It is not rare during a discussion, despite language problems, to speak about personal questions almost without realizing it, sometimes even intimate subjects."

In Taizé there is no gap between the public and the private spheres, and this too offers a significant contrast with life in contemporary soci-

ety. There is, instead, time for solitude and personal reflection, and time for working and sharing with others. But it is obvious that these dimensions are both part of an underlying unity. Many young people, like their elders, are searching for this unity in their life, not a unity imposed from without, but one that springs from a common source that is able to unify the myriad aspects of life. To put it another way, many are looking for a faith that is one with their life. As a young man from Senegal who spent two months in Taizé put it, "My experience at Taizé shows me that religion and life are not two separate and independent spheres set side-by-side. At Taizé, you can be 100 percent young, listen to the music other young people do, dress like they do, and yet make your life a fully Christian life."

TO THE SOURCES OF THE FAITH

Something should now be said about the daily Bible introductions given to all those who take part in the international meetings in Taizé. Until the late 1970s, there was no systematic attempt to teach those who came; the accent was placed on sharing and searching together. Then, more and more, the young people themselves asked for some direction to help them discover the wellsprings of the Christian faith and the Bible. Our experience has been that, across the board, there is an ever greater ignorance in recent years concerning the basic teachings of religion; for many, the Bible is a closed book. At the same time, a significant minority of the young is deeply committed and eager to deepen their knowledge of their faith. So for both these populations, it seemed important to provide input that would help them to discover and deepen their understanding of what Christians believe.

Each morning, participants in the meetings hear one of us explain a biblical text or topic for approximately forty-five minutes. At the end, the brother gives some questions, which are usually followed by a time of personal reflection and then sharing in small groups. The questions try to help participants to understand the text better, but also to relate it to their daily life. Naturally, through only six talks in the course of a week, it is impossible to provide a comprehensive introduction to the Bible. Perhaps the most important thing we can do is to give people a taste for such reflection, to help them see that the Bible is not an outdated and incomprehensible book irrelevant to their concerns, but rather that it sheds light on the questions that they themselves ask about their

existence and its meaning. We also look for topics that are central to the Christian faith, that enable us to touch upon basic themes and teachings. For example, this past summer one group spoke about the story of the disciples of Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) and another about the first four chapters of Genesis.

In one sense, the ignorance of many of the young works in our favor because, unlike their predecessors, they are not prejudiced against the Christian faith. For some of them, indeed, Christianity is almost as exotic as Buddhism! This enables them to discover the teachings of the Bible and of Jesus as if for the first time. This of course involves a great challenge for us; we are called not simply to repeat tried-and-true phrases but constantly to reinvestigate the meaning of what we ourselves believe. It is a truth known by all teachers that it is impossible to interest one's students unless one is captivated by the material oneself. In this sense, one always preaches first of all to oneself.

If the Bible introductions in Taizé seem relevant to the young, whereas in religion classes in parishes or universities this is not always the case, it may also be because the teaching is situated in a context where the Christian life is being lived in a way that embraces all of existence. The young people join the brothers for prayer in the church three times a day; they participate with them in a life of community, simplicity and service to others. Thus the words spoken and the ideas discussed are in harmony with the rest of the day. The brothers are not just teachers; their life has sign-value as well. As Pope Paul VI put it in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975, no. 41): "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." Or to quote Cardinal Walter Kasper: "Following Christ's example we must be personally involved in this transmission [of the faith] and make ourselves a gift for others. . . . Christian tradition means giving oneself. It comes about through witnesses who are personally involved, whose entire life is a sign."¹ In the final analysis, and at the risk of seeming simplistic, Taizé's relationship with young adults seems to be a fruitful one because it is rooted in mutual *trust*. Where trust is absent, fear and suspicion gain the upper hand in encounters with others, even if they are clothed in seeming indifference. Trust on the other hand permits each party to benefit from the gifts and intuitions of the others. It gives rise to the conviction that together we can achieve far more than each one can do by themselves.

How is such trust engendered? Certainly not by a conscious strategy. One is trusted because one trusts, and one can trust because one knows that one is trusted. The young people sense that the brothers trust them; they also realize that they are not being manipulated but are simply invited to enter a common life. The life of the community itself is built on mutual trust, and this mutual trust is rooted in a God who is trustworthy. In the words of the late philosopher Paul Ricoeur, a frequent visitor to Taizé for fifty years, "At times I have the impression that, in the kind of patient and silent meticulousness that characterizes all the acts of the members of the community, everyone obeys without anybody giving orders. This creates an impression of joyful service, how can I put it, of loving obedience, yes, of loving obedience, which is the complete opposite of submission and the complete opposite of an aimless meandering. This fairly narrow path between what I have just referred to as submission and meandering is broadly marked out by the life of the community. And we, the participants (not those who attend, but those who participate), as I feel myself to have been and to be here, benefit from it. We benefit from this loving obedience that we in our turn exercise with respect to the example that is given. The community does not impose a kind of intimidating model, but a kind of friendly exhortation . . . a shared peacefulness."²

So many young and not-so-young people, even (or perhaps especially) those without much religious formation, are still burdened by the image of a God who condemns, who loves conditionally, that is, as long as we follow certain rules and regulations. What many find in Taizé is simply the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the revelation that "all God can do is love," to quote some words Brother Roger is fond of using to characterize the teaching of Saint Isaac of Nineveh, a seventh-century Syrian Christian. When they are invited to pray around the cross on Friday evenings to entrust their burdens to Christ, they discover a God who accepts them as they are, with all their limitations, and this discovery in many cases can lead to radical changes in a person's way of relating to him- or herself and to others.

Our community's deepest aspiration is to make accessible the sources of trust, so that people, especially the young, can live lives rooted in this trust. In a world where fear and mistrust seem to reign more and more between individuals and nations, is this not the best way the great religious traditions of humankind can show their perennial value, by allowing a mutual trust between humans, one rooted in the

Absolute, to define the parameters of life in society? It is not for nothing that for years now, the name we have given to our endeavors with the young is that of a "pilgrimage of trust on earth."

I would like to conclude by recounting a small experience that many of us brothers have had when speaking to the young pilgrims. In some ways, although minor in itself, it sums up what we have been talking about these days at this conference. So many times, when they return to see us, sometimes after an interval of several years, these words come spontaneously to their lips: "Returning to Taizé is like coming home." Coming from a generation raised on all the creature comforts to the nth degree, from young people who take for granted their own room, their own bath, their own electronics warehouse, their own car, these words have something stupefying about them. In Taizé they sleep in tents or cabins; the food is nourishing but far from gourmet, or even Burger King; they are expected to attend religious services three times a day; there is no television, movies or popular music . . . and yet they feel at home! Are these words not an eloquent testimony to the fact that "human beings do not live on bread alone," that there is a longing in us that is not stilled by the good things of this world? Do they not attest to the fact that even the excesses of a consumer society built on a growing worldwide gap between rich and poor cannot uproot this longing from people's hearts and that, when they find a place where it can be expressed together with many others, their hearts can breathe at last and they feel that they have at last arrived at their spiritual homeland? If they say that they feel at home in Taizé are they talking about a village in Burgundy? Are they not really saying that there they have touched, however briefly, their true identity, the mystery at the core of existence, what the Bible calls the "heart"? In that case, the place in Burgundy would be a "sacrament" that makes this other dimension accessible. It seems to me that this reaction of the young helps us glimpse the true calling of our churches and other religious institutions: to offer a space where people's deepest longing for Reality can be liberated and begin to breathe, to point beyond the short-lived attractions of a culture built on sand to the true Home for which human beings were created and where they are meant to live, wherever in fact they may be.