

SHORT WRITINGS FROM TAIZÉ

10

Cardinal Walter Kasper

Brother Alois

Brother Roger,  
Founder of Taizé

Two Views of His Life

## Brother Roger, Symbol of Spiritual Ecumenism

Several years have passed since the tragic death of Brother Roger, the founder of Taizé. You yourself went to preside at his funeral service. Who was he for you?<sup>1</sup>

Brother Roger's death moved me deeply. I was in Cologne for World Youth Day when we heard about the death of the prior of Taizé, the victim of an act of violence. His death reminded me of the words the prophet Isaiah spoke about the Servant of the Lord: "Ill-treated and afflicted, he never opened his mouth; like a lamb led to the slaughter-house, like a sheep dumb before its shearers, he never opened his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). Throughout his life, Brother Roger followed the way of the Lamb: by his gentleness and his humility, by his refusal of every act of human greatness, by his decision never to speak ill of anyone, by his desire to carry in his own heart the sufferings and the hopes of humanity. Few persons of our generation have incarnated with such transparency the gentle and humble face of Jesus Christ. In a turbulent period for the Church and for Christian faith, Brother Roger was a source of hope recognized

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<sup>1</sup> The president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, Cardinal Walter Kasper gave this interview to *L'Osservatore Romano* of August 15, 2008.

by many, including myself. As a theology professor and then as Bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, I always encouraged young people to stop in Taizé during the summer. I saw how much that time spent close to Brother Roger and the community helped them better to understand and to live the Word of God, in joy and simplicity. I felt all that even more when I presided at his funeral liturgy in the large Church of Reconciliation in Taizé.

What is, in your eyes, the specific contribution of Brother Roger and the Taizé Community to ecumenism?

Christian unity was certainly one of the deepest desires of the prior of Taizé, just as the division between Christians was for him a true source of pain and regret. Brother Roger was a man of communion, who found it hard to tolerate any form of antagonism or rivalry between persons or communities. When he spoke of Christian unity and of his meetings with the representatives of different Christian traditions, his look and his voice enabled you to understand with what intensity of charity and hope he desired "all to be one". The search for unity was for him a kind of guideline in even the most concrete decisions of each day: to welcome joyfully any action that could bring Christians of different traditions closer, to avoid every word or act that could slow down their reconciliation. He practised that discernment with an attentiveness that bordered on meticulousness. In the search for unity, however, Brother Roger was not in a hurry or nervous. He understood God's patience in the history of salvation and in the history of the

Church. He never would have acted in ways unacceptable to the Churches; he never would have invited the young people to dissociate themselves from their pastors. Rather than the speed of the development of the ecumenical movement, he was aiming at its depth. He was convinced that only an ecumenism nourished by the Word of God and the celebration of the Eucharist, by prayer and contemplation, would be able to bring together Christians in the unity wished for by Jesus. It is in this area of spiritual ecumenism that I would like to situate the important contribution of Brother Roger and the Taizé Community.

Brother Roger often described his ecumenical journey as an “inner reconciliation of the faith of his origins with the Mystery of the Catholic faith, without breaking fellowship with anyone.” This road does not belong to the usual categories. After his death, the Taizé Community denied the rumours of a secret conversion to Catholicism. One of the reasons those rumours arose was because Brother Roger had been seen receiving communion at the hands of Cardinal Ratzinger during the funeral Mass of Pope John Paul II. What should we think about the statement that Brother Roger became “formally” Catholic?

Born in a Reformed family, Brother Roger had studied theology and had become a pastor in that same Reformed tradition. When he spoke of “the faith of his origins,” he was referring to that beautiful blend of catechesis, devotion, theological formation and Christian witness received in the Reformed tradition. He shared that patrimony with all his brothers and sisters of Protestant affiliation, with whom he always felt himself deeply linked. Since his early years as

a pastor, however, Brother Roger sought at the same time to nourish his faith and his spiritual life at the wellsprings of other Christian traditions, crossing certain confessional limits in doing so. His desire to follow a monastic vocation and to found for this purpose a new monastic community with Christians of the Reformation already said a lot about this search of his.

As the years passed, the faith of the prior of Taizé was progressively enriched by the patrimony of faith of the Catholic Church. According to his own testimony, it was with reference to the mystery of the Catholic faith that he understood some of the elements of the faith, such as the role of the Virgin Mary in salvation history, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic gifts and the apostolic ministry in the Church, including the ministry of unity exercised by the Bishop of Rome. In response to this, the Catholic Church had accepted that he take communion at the Eucharist, as he did every morning in the large church at Taizé. Brother Roger also received communion several times from the hands of Pope John Paul II, who had become friends with him from the days of the Second Vatican Council and who was well acquainted with his personal journey with respect to the Catholic Church. In this sense, there was nothing secret or hidden in the attitude of the Catholic Church, neither at Taizé nor in Rome. During the funeral of Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Ratzinger only repeated what had already been done before him in Saint Peter’s Basilica, at the time of the late Pope. There was nothing new or premeditated in the Cardinal’s act.

In a talk he gave in the presence of Pope John Paul II

in Saint Peter's Basilica during the young adult European meeting in Rome in 1980, the prior of Taizé described his own personal journey and his Christian identity with these words: *"I have found my own Christian identity by reconciling within myself the faith of my origins with the Mystery of the Catholic faith, without breaking fellowship with anyone."* In fact, Brother Roger never wanted to break "with anyone," for reasons which were essentially linked to his own desire for unity and to the ecumenical vocation of the Taizé Community. For that reason, he preferred not to use certain expressions like "conversion" or "formal" membership to describe his communion with the Catholic Church. In his conscience, he had entered into the mystery of the Catholic faith like someone who grows into it, without having to "abandon" or "break" with what he had received and lived beforehand. The meaning of some theological or canonical terms could be discussed endlessly. Out of respect for the faith-journey of Brother Roger, however, it would be preferable not to apply to him categories which he himself considered inappropriate for his experience and which, moreover, the Catholic Church never wanted to impose upon him. Here too, the words of Brother Roger himself should suffice for us.

Do you see any links between the ecumenical vocation of Taizé and the pilgrimage of tens of thousands of young adults to this small village in Burgundy? In your opinion, are young people sensitive to the visible unity of Christians?

As I see it, the fact that every year thousands of young people still make their way to the little hill of Taizé is truly

a gift of the Holy Spirit to today's Church. For many of them, Taizé represents the first and main place where they can meet young people from other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. I am happy to see that the young adults who fill the tents of Taizé each summer come from different countries of Western and Eastern Europe, and some from other continents, that they belong to different communities of Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox tradition, that they are often accompanied by their own priests or pastors. A number of young people who come to Taizé are from countries that have experienced civil wars or violent internal conflicts, often in a still recent past. Others come from regions that suffered for several decades under the yoke of a materialistic ideology. Still others, who perhaps represent the majority, live in societies deeply marked by secularization and religious indifference. In Taizé, during the times of prayer and sharing on the Bible, they rediscover the gift of communion and friendship that only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can offer. In listening to the Word of God, they also rediscover the unique treasure that has been given to them by the sacrament of baptism. Yes, I believe that many young people realize what is truly at stake in the unity of Christians. They know how the burden of divisions can still weigh heavily on the witness of Christians and on the building up of a new society. In Taizé they find a kind of "parable of community" that helps to go beyond the rifts of the past and to look towards a future of communion and friendship. When they return home, that experience helps them to create groups of prayer and sharing in their own life-context, to nourish that desire for unity.

Before heading the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, you were the bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart and, in that capacity, you welcomed in 1996 a young adult European meeting organized by the Taizé Community. What do these meetings contribute to the life of the Churches?

That meeting was indeed a time of very great joy and profound spiritual intensity for the diocese, and especially for the parishes that welcomed the young participants from different countries. Those meetings seem to me extremely important for the life of the Church. Many young people, as I said, live in secularized societies. It is hard for them to find companions on the road of Christian faith and life. Spaces to deepen and celebrate faith, in joy and serenity, are rare. The local Churches sometimes find it hard to walk alongside the young in their spiritual journeys. It is in this respect that large meetings like those organized by the Taizé Community respond to a true pastoral need. Christian life certainly requires silence and solitude, as Jesus said: "Shut yourself in your room and pray to your Father who is in that secret place" (Matthew 6:6). But it also needs sharing, encounters and exchanges. Christian life is not lived out in isolation, on the contrary. Through baptism, we belong to the same one body of the Risen Christ. The Spirit is the soul and the breath that animates that body, making it grow in holiness. The gospels, incidentally, speak regularly of a great crowd of persons who came, often from very far away, to see and hear Jesus and to be healed by him. The large meetings held today are part of this same dynamic. They enable the young better to grasp the mystery of the Church as communion, to listen together to the words of Jesus and to put their trust in him.

Pope John XXIII called Taizé a "little springtime." For his part, Brother Roger said that Pope John XXIII was the man who had affected him the most. In your opinion, why did the Pope who had the intuition of the Second Vatican Council and the founder of Taizé appreciate one another so much?

Every time I met Brother Roger, he spoke to me a lot about his friendship for Pope John XXIII first of all, then for Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II. It was always with gratitude and a great joy that he told me about the many meetings and conversations he had with them over the years. On the one hand, the prior of Taizé felt very close to the Bishops of Rome in their concern to lead the Church of Christ along the ways of spiritual renewal, of unity between Christians, of service to the poor, of witness to the Gospel. On the other hand, he felt deeply understood and supported by them in his own spiritual journey and in the orientation that the young Taizé Community was taking. The awareness of acting in harmony with the thought of the Bishop of Rome was for him a kind of compass in all his actions. He never would have undertaken an initiative that he knew was against the opinion or the will of the Bishop of Rome. A similar relationship of trust continues today with Pope Benedict XVI, who spoke very touching words when the founder of Taizé died, and who receives Brother Alois every year in a private audience. Where did this mutual esteem between Brother Roger and the successive Bishops of Rome come from? It was certainly rooted in human realities, in the rich personalities of the men concerned. In the final analysis, I would say that it came from the Holy Spirit, who is coherent in what he inspires in different persons at the same time, for the good of the one Church

of Christ. When the Spirit speaks, all understand the same message, each in his or her own language. The true creator of understanding and brotherhood among the disciples of Christ is the Spirit of communion.

You are well acquainted with Brother Alois, Brother Roger's successor. How do you see the future of the Taizé Community?

Although I had already met him previously, it is above all since Brother Roger died that I have come to know Brother Alois better. A few years earlier, Brother Roger told me that everything was planned for his succession, on the day when that would be necessary. He was happy about the prospect that Brother Alois was going to take over. Who could have ever imagined that that succession was going to take place in a single night, after an unthinkable act of violence? What has astonished me since then is the great continuity in the life of the Taizé Community and in the welcome of the young. The liturgy, the prayer and the hospitality continue in the same spirit, like a song that has never been interrupted. That says a lot, not only about the personality of the new prior, but also and above all about the human and spiritual maturity of the whole Taizé Community. It is the community as a whole that has inherited Brother Roger's charism, which it continues to live and to radiate. Knowing the individuals concerned, I have full confidence in the future of the Taizé Community and in its commitment for Christian unity. That confidence comes to me from the Holy Spirit as well, who does not awaken charisms in order to abandon them at the first opportunity. God's Spirit, who is always new,

works in the continuity of a vocation and a mission. He will help the community to live out and to develop its vocation, in faithfulness to the example that Brother Roger left it. Generations pass, but the charism remains, because it is a gift and a work of the Spirit. I would like to conclude by repeating to Brother Alois and to the whole Taizé Community my great esteem for their friendship, their life of prayer and their desire for unity. Thanks to them, the gentle face of Brother Roger remains familiar to us.

## Human Kindness, a Reflection of God's Goodness

The older Brother Roger became, the more kindness became a key word for him.<sup>2</sup> He loved to quote Saint Basil, for whom human kindness was a reflection of God, God's image in human beings.<sup>3</sup>

When, a long time ago, I was asked to prepare to take responsibility for the community after him, he did not give me any directives. He did not tell me how to exercise that responsibility, but he left these words: "For the prior, as for his brothers, discernment, the spirit of mercy and an inexhaustible goodness of heart are irreplaceable gifts."<sup>4</sup> There is a prayer that I like to say often: "May your breath of goodness lead me onwards."<sup>5</sup> We can go forward if we are sustained by that breath.

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<sup>2</sup> This article was written for the review *Communio* and was published in the March-April 2008 issue. [Translator's note: The same French word "bonté" can be translated either as "kindness" or "goodness". Both will be used in these pages depending upon the context. "Bonté de coeur" has usually been translated as "kindheartedness".]

<sup>3</sup> "You come to be in the likeness of God by acquiring goodness. Forge a heart of mercy and kindness for yourself, in order to put on Christ." (Saint Basil, fourth century, *On the Origin of Man*, Sources chrétiennes 160, Paris, 1970, p. 209).

<sup>4</sup> Brother Roger, *No Greater Love: Sources of Taizé*, London 1991, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 143:10.

Seeing God as a harsh judge has wrought havoc in many people's consciences. Brother Roger took the opposite tack from such an outlook by affirming that "all God can do is love". God loves unconditionally: it was essential to recall this above all to a younger generation in whom repeated warnings are an obstacle on the road towards a God of love.

One day, the Eastern Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément told us that, in his eyes, this insistence of Brother Roger's on God's love marked the end of a long epoch when, in the various Christian confessions, people were afraid of a God who punished.

Brother Roger dared to express God's love so strongly because he found support in thinkers who went before him. I cannot forget how he beamed with happiness when he discovered these words from Isaac of Nineveh (eighth century): "All God can do is give his love."<sup>6</sup> He wanted them to be made into one of the songs of Taizé.

Other admirable pages are found in the Letter to Diognetes, in Saint Irenaeus,<sup>7</sup> Basil, Francis of Sales, in a writer like Dostoyevsky or a theologian like Karl Barth, who rediscovered the Christian universalism of certain Church Fathers. But fear of God arose over and over again, managing to overshadow the force of these witnesses.

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Olivier Clément in *Taizé, A Meaning to Life*, Chicago 1997, p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons affirmed the goodness of humanity and of all creation in the face of Gnostic pessimism.

In his youth, Brother Roger had known Christians who thought that the Gospel imposed burdens on believers. Because of this, there was a time when faith became difficult for him. Throughout his life, trusting in God was a struggle. But his mother remained a point of reference. She said that the words of Saint John, “God is love”<sup>8</sup> were enough for her. She drew the consequences from this; she was a witness to kindheartedness for those dear to her.

Brother Roger was very sensitive regarding the choice of Bible readings for our community prayer: might someone be disconcerted by this or that text which was not easy to understand? He asked that only readings be chosen that gave people access to the core of the Gospel, the infinite love of God, and that more difficult texts be studied in small groups.

He had the gift of communicating God’s love to others. To countless people he communicated this conviction: you are loved by God just as you are; he is close to you for all time.

Of course such an attitude should not be mistaken for the intent to water down the faith and get rid of anything demanding. It was never a question of designing a custom-made image of God, a God who would be at the service of our personal comfort. But he wanted to run the risk of expressing his hope: God’s goodness will have the last word in the life of every human being.

I remember Easter 1973. Very young, I had come to Taizé with others to celebrate the Resurrection. Many were touched by Brother Roger’s words commenting on Paul’s Letter to the Romans: “Who will condemn us, when Jesus, the Risen Lord, intercedes for us?”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> 1 John 4:16

<sup>9</sup> Romans 8:34. Brother Roger published this meditation in *A Life We Never Dared Hope For*, New York 1981, pp. 35-37.

## Taking the risk of kindness

Discovering God’s goodness leads us to reawaken goodness, kindness, in our life. God’s Word is alive: listening to the Gospel’s call to goodness and letting this call fall into our ears triggers a change in our hearts. We are attracted by that call; our will finds the taste to respond to it.

Brother Roger had that experience himself. As a young man, he was struck by a text from the prophet Micah: “What does the Lord ask of you, but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?”<sup>10</sup> He realized that God’s goodness called out to ours. “One alone is good.”<sup>11</sup> Our own goodness does not find its source in us. It contains a lack; it points towards an absolute, a greater goodness. Its essence is to be a sign of God’s goodness.

As a teenager, Brother Roger contracted a serious illness, tuberculosis of the lungs, which at the time was often fatal. During his convalescence, taking long walks all by himself helped to mature his vocation. And always the same call to kindness was at work within him: “Those years of illness allowed me to realize that the source of happiness is not in prestigious talents or great expertise, but in the humble giving of oneself in order to understand others with kindheartedness.”<sup>12</sup>

There can be found one of the origins of the dynamism with which he founded our community: “I have never lost the intuition that community life could be a sign that God is love. Gradually the conviction took hold of me that it was essential to create a community with men determined to

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<sup>10</sup> Micah 6:8

<sup>11</sup> Mark 10:18

<sup>12</sup> Brother Roger, *God is Love Alone*, London/New York 2003, p. 37.



give their whole life, a community where kindheartedness and simplicity would be at the centre of everything.”<sup>13</sup>

That conviction was so strong that, in his eyes, our community had to involve only a minimum of structures, so that it might be rooted first and foremost in brotherly attentiveness and love.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

## Kindness and simplicity

When kindness and simplicity are joined, they create hope. We notice this both as we welcome thousands of young people and when we go to share the lives of the poor on different continents. Kindness allied to simplicity of heart makes us attentive to the most destitute, to those who suffer, to the pain of children.

Hospitality awakens kindness. When we prepare a young adult meeting in a city, we invite thousands of families to welcome into their homes one or several young people whom they are not acquainted with and who may even speak a different language. And we see that very little is needed to reveal the goodness present in the hearts of so many women and men.

Whereas harshness is an obstacle to faith, kindness opens a door to it. Kindness astonishes; it leads to wonder. A new horizon is opened up, beyond the hard realities of life, the sufferings of the innocent, all the forms of injustice and even harshness of an affluent society that conceals so much material and spiritual misery. Such an experience can bring to birth the choice to trust in God.

On several occasions I had the opportunity to speak with Genevieve, the last of Brother Roger's seven sisters, who died in 2007 at the age of 95. Her resemblance to her brother was striking: she avoided all harsh words, all definitive judgments. Naturally, such a character trait has other sides to it. But Brother Roger was able to put that natural gift at the service of the Gospel! And we brothers know that it sometimes led him to the very limits of what a person can bear.

## Kindness with no ulterior motives

Not giving prominence to one's own interests is another expression of goodness. God never imposes himself. There is no violence in God<sup>14</sup>; God wanted human beings to love him freely. In personal relationships, that same selflessness plays an essential role; it gives the other person his or her freedom. It is not in the least passivity, but it gives the Holy Spirit room to act in the other person.

True love has no ulterior motives. Brother Roger often reminded us brothers that we were not spiritual masters but men who listened. If so many young people keep coming to Taizé after his death, it is because they have understood that, like John the Baptist, Brother Roger did not point to himself but towards the presence of God.

Young people know that our community would like first and foremost to offer them a place to seek God. Many of them tell us, "In coming here we come home; we feel at home."

It is essential for young people to feel free, that they are not being manipulated in any way, either pastorally or emotionally. Of course they come looking for friendship, and we try and give them as much of it as we can. But this requires discernment on our part in order to allow them the room to get closer to God.

In the same spirit of giving without looking for anything in return, we have never wanted to bring together young people in a movement around our community. During his visit in 1986, Pope John Paul II had explained this

<sup>14</sup> "God willed to save man by persuasion, not by compulsion, for compulsion is not God's way of working. In sending Christ God called men, but did not pursue them; he sent him in love, not in judgment." (*Letter to Diognetes*, second century, VII, 4-5)

to young people in words that touched us: "...One passes through Taizé as one passes close to a spring of water. The traveller stops, quenches his thirst and continues on his way. The brothers of the community do not want to keep you. They want, in prayer and silence, to enable you to drink the living water promised by Christ, to discern his presence, to respond to his call, then to set out again to witness to his love and to serve your brothers and sisters in your parishes, your schools, your universities, and in all your places of work."

It is still the same selflessness that our brothers live when they go to share the existence of the poorest in neighbourhoods in Africa, Asia or Latin America. They go without any other aim than to be witnesses of God's love for everyone, beginning with the most abandoned. They want their presence to be a sign that it is possible to overcome the gaps between different cultures. Not seeking primarily to organize successful projects can enable us to be a presence of kindness with no ulterior motives. And then concrete initiatives arise that we may have never imagined.

## Some confirmations

Some confirmations have sustained us on this journey.

### *Good Pope John*

Frère Roger often talked about the impact that Pope John XXIII had on him. That pope is the man that he probably venerated most on earth. Why? In him God's mercy shone through: "John XXIII saw in his interlocutor the image of God. He discerned in the person he was speaking to what was best, the purity of intention. Only compassion enables us to see the other as he or she is. Looking with love discerns in each person the profound beauty of the human soul."<sup>15</sup>

John XXIII gave the place of honour to goodness and kindness. He was sometimes considered naive and this made him suffer. Far from being blind, goodness involves an inner struggle. It is aware of the dark side that exists in others, just as it does in us.

Frère Roger shared with John XXIII a positive vision of human beings. Both invited us to let our way of looking be changed: "God enables us to make our way forward with a spark of goodness in the depths of our soul, a spark which asks only to burst into flame."<sup>16</sup>

For Brother Roger, trying to keep alive kindheartedness in the community was invaluable: "It may be one of the clearest reflections of the beauty of a communion."<sup>17</sup>

What is true of a small community is also true of the

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<sup>15</sup> These lines are among the notes that Brother Roger left behind at his death. He was preparing a new book which would have contained a chapter on John XXIII.

<sup>16</sup> Brother Roger, Letter *To the Wellsprings of Joy*, European meeting in Hamburg, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

Church. To Brother Roger, "communion" was one of the most beautiful names of the Church. In it there should be no room for reciprocal judgments: "When tirelessly the Church listens, heals and reconciles, it becomes what it is at its most luminous, a communion of love, of compassion, of consolation, a limpid reflection of the Risen Christ. Never distant, never on the defensive, freed from all forms of severity, it can let the humble trusting of faith shine right into our human hearts."<sup>18</sup>

### *The Russian soul*

Frère Roger loved the Russian Orthodox Church. Because of the trials that Christians of that Church went through, he had an unconditional respect for them: "They have known how to love and forgive. Goodness of heart is a vital reality for many of them."<sup>19</sup>

Dostoyevsky knew that paths of reconciliation open up when we become aware of the treasures of goodness buried within ourselves: "If each person realized how much sincerity, loyalty, outright gaiety of heart, purity, and longing to do good lay hidden within them... they could instantly make everyone happy."<sup>20</sup>

An article about St. Seraphim of Sarov written by Father Sergei Bulgakov in 1933 shows that, though the harsh events in Russia seem to confirm a pessimistic vision of human beings, the memory of Seraphim allows us to believe in the basic goodness of every human being. The resignation of those who say: "Man is a wolf to man" is countered by the vision of the saint: "Man is a source of

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<sup>18</sup> Brother Roger, *Peace of Heart in All Things*, London 1996, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Brother Roger, *God Is Love Alone*, p. 63.

<sup>20</sup> Pierre Pascal, *Dostoïevski l'homme et l'œuvre*, Lausanne 1970.

joy for his neighbour.” Seraphim greeted each pilgrim with these words: “My joy!” And he added, “Christ is risen!” It is the light of the Risen Lord that reveals the kindness of which man is capable.

*Edmond Michelet*

The French government minister Edmond Michelet liked to come to Taizé, and a heartfelt affection united him deeply to Brother Roger. I understood why more clearly by reading *Rue de la Liberté*, the book in which he recounts his experience of being deported to Dachau.

In the mid-twentieth century, could the goodness of man, placed in him by a good God, still be affirmed? Yes, Michelet could affirm it, and he had that in common with Brother Roger. After years of unimaginable suffering, Edmond Michelet was able to write these amazing words: “Everyone has the right to draw from his concentration-camp experience the conclusion he wishes to. Personally, I want to draw from my adventure a lesson of hope in man. I want to believe that the genuine will to seek, above all, whatever can restore confidence in the incredible possibilities of the human soul is the only way to pass through an experience like the one we have undergone.”<sup>21</sup>

*Stanislas Lyonnet*

In the early 1980s the Jesuit Stanislas Lyonnet, who taught in Rome, came to Taizé several times. Frère Roger loved to listen to him affirm the continuity of God’s love throughout the Bible. With enthusiasm, he showed us how the New Testament was illuminated by the Old. He always returned

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<sup>21</sup> Edmond Michelet, *Rue de la Liberté*, Paris 1955, 2002, p. 247.

to the proclamation of the new covenant in Jeremiah and Ezekiel: God forgives and he recorded his will no longer on tablets of stone but in human hearts. A brand-new freedom opens up, larger than that of discerning good and evil; it leads believers to do God’s will as if it were their own.

Father Lyonnet thought that the image of a God who punishes was a major obstacle to faith. He had paradoxical expressions that were surprising, but they were not spoken lightly: “In the Bible, fear of God is trust in him.”

*Paul Ricoeur*

Paul Ricoeur wrote his first article on Taizé already in 1947. Frère Roger found in him support for his own thinking and, in 2001, he did not hesitate to call his book *God Is Love Alone* because he could rely on these words of the great philosopher: “The only power of God is love disarmed. God does not want our suffering. The all-powerful God becomes the ‘all-loving.’ God has no other power than to love us and, when we are suffering, to speak to us a word of help.”<sup>22</sup>

And why did Paul Ricoeur come to Taizé? “What I need to verify is that however radical evil may be, it is not as deep as goodness. And if religion, if religions have a meaning, it is to liberate that core of goodness in human beings, to go looking for it where it has been completely buried. We have to liberate that certainty, give it a language. And the language given here in Taizé is not the language of philosophy, not even of theology, but the language of the liturgy. And for me, the liturgy is not simply action; it is a form of thought.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Ricoeur in *Panorama* no. 340, January 1999, p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “Liberating the Core of Goodness,” [www.taize.fr/en\\_article102.html](http://www.taize.fr/en_article102.html).

**Kindheartedness until his last breath:  
August 16, 2005**

That evening, during the community prayer, in a pathological act a young woman put an end to Brother Roger's life. The Church of Reconciliation was crowded with thousands of people. A young Spaniard rushed forward to try to intervene. He noted an expression of pain on the face of Brother Roger, who turned to see who had attacked him. And this young man saw that, before losing consciousness, Brother Roger's look of pain turned into a look of love and forgiveness. Until the last moment of his life, Brother Roger returned to that Gospel value which is kindheartedness.

The thousands of letters, telegrams and e-mails that we received in the following days, from every continent, were evidence that the message of love and kindness shown by his life and his death had made an impact on a great many people.

We understood more deeply that kindness was not an empty word, but a force capable of transforming the world because, through it, God is at work. In the face of evil, goodness of heart is a vulnerable reality. But the life Brother Roger gave is a token that God's peace and trust will have the last word on earth.

I would like to conclude with this prayer that Brother Roger wrote one day and that he liked to say: "God, you love us. May the contemplation of your forgiveness become radiant goodness in the humble hearts that trust in you."