

Église Saint Pierre de Chaillot  
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**Let us dare to gather under the same roof**  
frère Alois, the Prior of Taizé

With joy I accepted the invitation to participate in the 25th anniversary of the creation of the Ecumenical Association of the Etoile-Champs-Élysées. We, the brothers of Taizé, we can but support the parishes of the various denominations which seek to do as much as they can together. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share with you the concerns that we all share. In our ecumenical journey one of the challenging questions is the following: How can we show, we Christians, that unity is possible, while giving due regard to pluralism? If we can achieve this, it will not only benefit Christians, but we will do the world a great service. If we succeed to assemble in a true unity, while nonetheless recognizing a plurality of views, we shall become an emblem for all humanity, which itself longs for unity.

Today, the globalization of the world is often seen as a threat. Fears arise from the unification of economic policies and political regions, a fear to lose our roots. Tensions or even violent conflicts are born in disputes over language, of identity. Many find it difficult to see globalization in a positive light. As a result, some are drawn to accentuate their differences.

This is also true among Christians. Indeed, there has never been as much communication between churches as today, but there have never been as many churches and different Christian communities. What distinguishes them is sometimes presented as an opportunity to meet the needs of the greatest number. Without any doubt, the new Christian communities that constantly are springing up correspond to the aspirations of people who sincerely love Christ. But some go as far to wonder if a visible communion between Christians is truly desirable?

By his crucifixion and his resurrection, Christ united us in a new covenant with God. Those who love Christ are invited to follow His example to form a great community of friendship. This, we name: communion. In this way, they all have a contribution to offer to heal a wounded humanity: without forcing anyone, they can favor a globalization of solidarity that excludes no people, no person.

Christ went as far as to give his own life to “bring together into one body all the scattered people of God.” (1) He broke down the walls; on the cross, he stretched out his arms from one side to the other, embracing those who were separated. Since then, there is nothing that can really justify distancing ourselves from each other.

But, as Christians, we are ashamed to have done so little to achieve Christ's desire for unity. Young people, especially, hunger for a sense of meaning and for clear directions. For not much longer can we give them only the confusion of our divisions. They grow impatient as we continue to present them with the confusion of our disagreements.

*Let's take a new starting point!*

We are confronted with this obligation: the communion between all who love Christ can only be established if it respects their diversity; but to provide a real direction, the communion must be visible. In his text on the “joy of the Gospel”, Pope Francis said that the “unity of the Holy Spirit brings into harmony all forms of diversity”, and he speaks of a “reconciled diversity.” (2) This evening, as a first proposal, I would like to indicate that we need a new starting point to make progress toward such a reconciled diversity.

When we speak of unity and diversity, two questions arise, and these bring out two possible pitfalls. First: does encouragement of diversity lead ultimately to fragmentation? The second is the inverse: does insistence on unity result in uniformity? These are two real risks. To avoid both of these, we must follow a delicate path, a narrow trail on a sharp ridge.

Permit me to quote a pope again. Before, in fact, becoming Benedict XVI, Cardinal Ratzinger wrote in 1986: "Division is an evil when it leads to hatred and impoverishment of Christian witness. But when the division is little by little depleted of the venom of hatred and when, thanks to a mutual acceptance, diversity no longer merely produces an impoverishment but rather a new wealth of listening and understanding, it can transform into a *felix culpa*, even before the evil is completely cured." Then Ratzinger cites the Protestant theologian Oscar Cullman who speaks of a "unity through diversity", and he expresses "the hope that finally the division will cease to be a division and remain only a set of differences without contradiction." (3)

How can we achieve this harmonization of unity and diversity? I just said that we need a new starting point for our ecumenical quest. Too often the starting point has been the description and the analysis of the divisions. Maybe this was necessary as a preparatory step. But today the starting point must be Christ Who, Himself, is not divided.

In a completely different context, Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated well the starting point that we would like to take in Christ; he wrote: "It is by Jesus Christ alone that we are brothers for each other. I am brother for another because of what Jesus Christ did for me and in me; the other has become a brother for me because of what Jesus Christ did for him and in him. The fact that we are brothers only by Jesus Christ is enormously important.... The more our communion becomes true and deeply felt, the more everything else will pass into the background among us.... It is only by Christ that we belong to each other, but by Christ our reciprocal belonging is real, integral and for eternity." (4)

Let's take another starting point! The risen Christ brings together into one unique community men and women from all lands, languages, and cultures, and even from enemy countries. It is this starting point that obliges Christians, in their diversity, to seek a visible communion.

*Let's gather under the same roof!*

To suggest taking this new starting point brings me to a second proposal which follows from this: today, shouldn't Christian churches dare to gather under the same roof even before an agreement is found on all theological questions?

There will always be differences between Christians; these will always remain a challenge and an invitation to dialogue frankly, and thus they can also be enriching. But hasn't the time come to make the priority our baptismal identity that is common for all? As the theologians of the Dombes group have said, in all churches it is the confessional identity that has been put first. We define ourselves first of all as Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox. But in fact, it is the baptismal identity which should be primary. (5)

In another sense, the memorable Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément wrote something similar: "There is but one church, the secret foundation of all, and thus unity does not need to be built, but rather to be discovered: the reemergence of an undivided church which, despite so many clashes between identities, is without any doubt the decisive phenomenon of our time." (6)

Unity can no longer be imagined as a static and monolithic reality, but as an equilibrium that adjusts itself constantly between opposing views, for example, the strong Catholic understanding of the sacraments can be balanced by the insistence of the Reformation on the freedom of God that is

beyond our control.

It is not sufficient to say these things – they have often been said. But to take steps in this direction obliges us to approach others to pray together, to welcome into ourselves the gifts that God has instilled in other Christians. Among all who have been baptized, there is a communion that already exists. Even if imperfect, it must be given a high value. The recent visit of Pope Francis to a Pentecostal church and the welcome that he received are more than friendly gestures – they have an ecclesiological value.

Let's get together under the same roof! A family lives together in a common home. If all Christians form one family, would it not be most natural to live under the same roof, even without waiting until all the difficulties within a family are fully in harmony?

The New Testament and the Fathers of the church speak often of Christians as a family or as a home. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: “You must know how to behave in the house of God – I mean by this the church of the living God.” (7) And St. John Chrysostom had this beautiful expression: “We must all live in the church as in a single home.” (8)

If I can suggest that we gather together all under the same roof – it's because I am speaking of our own experience. The history of Taizé can be read as an attempt to assemble under the same roof. Coming from more than 30 different countries, languages, cultures and different confessions, we live under the roof of one shared home. And when, three times a day, we come together for communal prayer, we put ourselves under the unique roof of the Church of Reconciliation.

This communal prayer service does not only bring together the brothers but also youth from throughout the world--Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox. These young people also share their daily life, meals, work, and their quest for God. We are surprised to observe that they feel deeply united, yet without taking their faith down to the lowest common denominator or watering down their values. Instead, they deepen their own faith.

And this occurs not only at Taizé but also at the meetings that we organize in cities in collaboration with local churches, for example during the European meeting in Strasbourg nearly a year ago, or at a more local event in Riga, Lithuania, two months ago.

If the youth can live this unity in the context of the Taizé gatherings, why can it not be possible elsewhere? Christ gives unity when and as he wishes it, it's a gift. But we still need to accept this gift. If we don't assemble under one roof, how can He give us the gift of unity? It was when the apostles and Mary were all together that they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit unifies us always, even with all our forms of diversity.

### *Five suggestions*

I would now like to draw some conclusions and make five practical suggestions.

– Beginning at the level easiest to reach for each of us, in our local community, we can put ourselves “under the same roof”, somewhat like “grass-roots communities” among neighbors and families, to pray together, share and help each other, cooperate, get to know each other and thus show that we all belong to each other.

– Between local communities and different confessions, in several places already there are joint efforts to study the Bible, for social and pastoral work, for catechism. These efforts could be intensified. In the ecumenical charter signed in 2001 at Strasbourg, the churches of Europe made a

commitment to “act together at all levels in the life of the Church, conditions permitting.” (9). Let's put this commitment into practice! Each community, with the Christians of other confessions, could do all that is possible to do together, and no longer do anything without including the others. You are seeking to practice this here, and your journey together could be an example for others. The more your trust grows, the more it will be possible to take new steps together.

–Theological dialogue must continue. Could you imagine doing this even more in a framework of common prayer and in the spirit of being together under the same roof? The dialogue would be invigorated. It would no longer be confined to an ecclesiastical no man's land, and the young generations would be more involved. In living and in praying together, we see in a new light questions that are strictly theological. Perhaps we might expect the same for reflecting on ethical questions.

–The question of the ministries in the church. In a Christian family that is the Church, all believers are called to take responsibilities, each must be “a good manager of God's different gifts” said the apostle Peter (10), all have received some sort of pastoral gift. And there are those who have received a more specific ministry, namely, of communion, those who are responsible for safeguarding unity. In the house of God, they go from one to another, they listen, encourage and exhort with the goal of upholding a fraternal communion.

Such ministers of communion are necessary at all levels, from the local level and up to a universal level. In our epoch of globalization, a universal ministry of communion seems more relevant than ever. This ministry is traditionally associated with the Bishop of Rome. He must uphold the fraternal communion, he must assure that the doors of the house of God remain open to all and that no people are excluded from the family of God.

A universal ministry of communion is not in competition with other ministries. Gregory the Great spoke of the Bishop of Rome as “a servant of the servants of God”. The Bishop of Rome can support those who, in sometimes difficult circumstances, work with all their energy to make the church the “common house of all”. (11) So could he not be recognized as the servant of the communal life, safeguarding the harmony of his brothers and sisters?

Perhaps we are not sufficiently aware that, even inside the Catholic Church, there exist differences: Greek Catholics do not consider the position of the Bishop of Rome exactly in the same manner as Latin Catholics. However this does not compromise the unity between them. Couldn't we imagine different degrees, perhaps with intermediate steps, to accept this ministry?

–The Eucharist. Are we too accustomed to be separated at the Lord's Supper? If the expression of the Christian family means anything, how can we justify a separation at the Eucharist? In a shared home, the table is shared.

It is doubtful that the Eucharist could magically unite Christians who, elsewhere, are in conflict or who even detest each other. Churches who require unanimity of the faith as a condition to receive communion together accurately reflect this situation. But inversely, when Christians so love each other, even going as far as to give their lives for others, to be segregated at the source of the Eucharist doesn't make sense.

The apostle Paul argued that the Christians of Corinth were not truly part of a Eucharistic communion if, in other practices, they were not able to share and have a true community. They could very well celebrate the Eucharist, but their divisions provoked the apostle to say: “when you come together, it is no longer the Lord's supper that you take” and he accuses them of “despising the Church of God”. (12)

This raises a serious question: can we truly celebrate at the Lord's Table if we exclude others who were baptized and who have a strong desire for a visible communion?

There are no doubt good reasons to link the Eucharistic communion to a common understanding of the Church. But instead of emphasizing only the need for an agreement on church structures, shouldn't we give as much weight to the harmony of brotherly love? According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, the apostle Peter represents the church as a structured organism, while John represents the experience of brotherly love. The Petrine principle needs the Johannine principle. Communion in love is indispensable for institutional unity.

Could churches that insist on the importance of ministry then offer a more welcoming Eucharistic hospitality to those who truly believe in the real presence of Christ and who show by their lives the desire of unity? It will be essential today to better take into account the fact that the Eucharist is not only the peak of unity but also the path toward unity.

### *The beauty of the vocation of the church*

When Christians from one place or city or country or even from the whole world seek to love each other as we love each other in a family, in a common home, they bear witness to the peace of Christ, they prepare a peace among human beings, and this occurs even in situations of serious tensions and upheavals.

Many Christians and most churches and Christian communities would like to join together as such witnesses of peace. Ecumenical dialogues have prepared the way. Let us now harvest the fruits!

Let us agree to follow a path, not knowing where it will take us, and taking strength from the words of Isaiah: "I will guide the blind on paths that they have never followed. For them I will change darkness into light."(13) We place our trust in the Holy Spirit so that He will guide us on paths that we have never followed. His inspiration prepares us to become authentic witnesses of communion.

<sup>1</sup> . <a href="#">Jean 11, 52.</a>
<sup>2</sup> . <a href="#">Evangelii Gaudium 230.</a>
<sup>3</sup> . <a href="#">J. Ratzinger, <i>Zum Fortgang der Ökumene</i>, in: <i>Theologische Quartalschrift</i> 166 (1986) 243-248.</a>
<sup>4</sup> . <a href="#">Dietrich Bonhoeffer, <i>De la vie communautaire</i>, Genève, Labor et Fides, 2007, p.29-30.</a>
<sup>5</sup> . <a href="#">Groupe des Dombes, <i>Pour la conversion des Églises</i>, Centurion 1991, pp 11-12.</a>
<sup>6</sup> . <a href="#">Taizé, <i>un sens à la vie</i>, Bayard 1997, p. 14.</a>
<sup>7</sup> . <a href="#">1 Timothée 3,15.</a>
<sup>8</sup> . <a href="#">In epistulam II ad Corinthos 18, 3 ; PG 61, 528.</a>
<sup>9</sup> . <a href="#">Conférence des Églises Européennes et Conseil des Conférences Episcopales Européennes, <i>Charta oecumenica</i> du 22 avril 2001, N° 4.</a>
<sup>10</sup> . <a href="#">1 Pierre 4, 10.</a>
<sup>11</sup> . <a href="#">In Matthaeum 32, 5 ; PG 57, 384.</a>
<sup>12</sup> . <a href="#">1 Corinthiens 11, 20 et 22.</a>
<sup>13</sup> . <a href="#">Isaïe 42,16.</a>