

## *Message for 2023*

# Inner Life and Solidarity

Where can we find the source of a universal brother- and sisterhood, both at the heart of our human family and with the whole of creation? Different answers to this question have developed over time in the spiritual traditions of the peoples of the earth.

For Christians, the time has come to reach a deeper understanding of their faith. Not to put themselves forward or to claim they have answers to everything, but to join more effectively in a common search with those who do not want merely to submit to their fate, but who choose to work on the great issues of the day. This message for 2023 seeks to identify courses of action to help renew Christian life in our time.

“Prayer and righteous action.” In the terrible years of the Second World War, that was the intuition of the pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer.<sup>1</sup> While in prison, he reflected on the essential

aspects of Christian life. In the midst of the tragedy of the war, he took a stand. In the darkness of his time, he saw clearly:

*Our being Christians today will be limited to two things: prayer and righteous action among human beings. All Christian thinking, speaking and organizing must be born anew out of this prayer and action.<sup>2</sup>*

How can we translate this intuition for today? Each person can give their own reply. At Taizé we would say: by deepening our inner life and our solidarity with others or, in other words, by nourishing our prayer life and widening our friendship.

To discover the signs of God's presence in our lives, the witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer can help us. He was very aware of the absolute evil at work in his day, and yet an inner impetus enabled him, like many other people past and present, to opt for hope and for trust in God in situations of extreme violence, without despairing of humankind.

In the present situation we can, in our turn, choose to trust. We are free to discern, at the heart of our world, a light that comes from elsewhere. Even when we are going through a hard time, even when God does not seem to answer our cry, that light already rises like the morning star in our hearts (2 Peter 1:19).

*f. Abis*

1. Active in the resistance against Hitler and in the Confessing Church, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was imprisoned in 1943 and executed in 1945. His writings, especially his letters and reflections written while in prison, were highly influential after the war and remain so to this day.

2. "Thoughts on the Day of Baptism of D.W.R. Bethge" (May 1944), in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 300.

## Opting for trust

Today, when the younger generation—and others too—are weighed down by heavy burdens, what can change our outlook and awaken our creativity? There are certainly many reasons to feel a profound anxiety, circumstances that can deeply affect our vision of the world and the way we see ourselves. Some people even come to the point of calling into question God and God's presence in the world.

Worry is an understandable reaction. It can be beneficial when it leads us to see and to understand the perils that threaten us, to be clear-sighted and not naive. We must be careful, however, not to give in to fatalism, cynicism or fear, which risk trapping us in a negative spiral.

In order to avoid such a dead-end, the Gospel orients us by pointing towards Christ Jesus, who goes before us. Throughout his life Christ experienced joy, and worry too. He was subject to a growing hostility that led in the end to the extreme violence of the cross. But death did not have the last word, because God brought him back to life and he is alive forever. That is the amazing thing about the Gospel. Its first witnesses invite us to run the risk of trusting in this message.

Christ continues to walk alongside every human being today, to communicate to all people the unconditional love of God. By the Holy Spirit, the breath of God, he enables us to take a stand, conferring on every person a fundamental dignity.

Let us be guided not only by what comes to us from without, but let us also welcome that inner light, that trust which bears the name of faith.

## Seeking renewal in prayer

In order to view our lives, other people and the world in a new way, a personal step is needed. This takes place in the depths of our being, when we welcome into our existence the kindly presence of God. It involves an inner change of direction, which the Gospel calls conversion and which leads us to welcome God's consolation and to love more and more.

We can all look for times and places to find an inner silence, to open a space of listening, and to discover a communion with God. Jesus already invited his friends to do this: "When you pray, go into your room and close the door, to pray to your Father who is there in secret" (Matthew 6:6).

Today, this invitation seems to go somewhat against the stream. We are going through a time when things are becoming much more polarized and when divisions are growing in our societies, sometimes even in Churches and in families. In this context, noise and lies seem to drown out the silent inner developments that require time.

That is why prayer is all the more essential: it is a source of hope, a road to serenity; it makes us able to keep the doors of dialogue open, even with those who are opposed to us or who come from other horizons than we do.

## Walking together with others

In addition to personal prayer, there is another call: to walk together with others, with a view to that universal brother- and sisterhood whose signs we are trying to discern. Inner life is not

an isolated aspiration; it continues in a common undertaking with those who share the same search.

We can already begin by helping the visible unity of Christians to grow! Not of course in order to be stronger in the face of a hostile world, but to set free the dynamism of the Gospel. We do not need to wait for all the theological questions to be harmonized in order to come together to pray.

When we meet with Christians of different denominations, at times we become aware of positions that seem incompatible—and sometimes in fact can be so—at least on a conceptual level. Instead of emphasizing them, another approach is possible: to begin again and again by praying together. Such a practice of unity will allow God's people to head towards a common confession of faith.

Perhaps this too will enable us to change our way of seeing the Church: could we consider it more and more as the great family of those who, in the steps of Christ, choose to love? To be a leaven of peace, it is time to stop fostering divisions among ourselves, remaining on parallel tracks that never meet!

This search for visible unity must go hand in hand with the recognition of the evil that has sometimes been done in our Churches and a firm commitment to make the necessary changes. Many people have seen their trust shattered. At Taizé too, the trust of some people has been betrayed; we are well aware of this. Trust is a fragile reality that often needs to be renewed and rebuilt, and this is possible only by listening to those who have been wounded.<sup>3</sup>

3. On this subject, see the message of Brother Alois "In the Church and at Taizé, the work of ascertaining the truth must continue," published on the occasion of the European meeting in Rostock and accessible on line at [www.taize.fr/protection](http://www.taize.fr/protection)

## Widening our friendship

In order to contribute to the creation of a worldwide family, the Church is invited to be a sign of God's coming Kingdom and to discover what the Holy Spirit calls us to do today. Here are some of those calls, to be deepened together with others.

- Today, for many people, a sense of belonging is becoming more essential so as to forge their identity. This belonging can develop, however, not in opposition to and in conflict with others, but through respect and encounter. Yes, let us look for the part of truth that is there in the other—that will help us to grow.
- A place of mutual respect can be the dialogue between believers of different religions. In this dialogue, openness to others is possible when we ourselves are rooted in our own religious tradition, like a tree that needs deep roots to develop branches that are wide open. An authentic friendship is possible, even if it includes a certain suffering due to the fact that the others cannot share our deepest convictions.
- Many people today are painfully aware how deeply racism and all forms of discrimination weigh upon interpersonal relationships and upon so many societies across the world. Let us seek together all that can help us change our way of seeing others, for instance by listening to those who have left their country of origin. Let us accept the part of otherness that makes every encounter a treasure.
- Are we attentive enough to the cry of the earth? Our human activities and our negligence damage our marvelous planet, as the environmental disasters and the extreme weather conditions that have been increasing lately remind us. It is

urgent to recall the responsibility entrusted by God to humankind. Political and economic decisions are imperative, but each of us can already simplify our way of life and renew a sense of wonder at the beauty of creation.

- In the context of the war that is ravaging Ukraine and so many other places in the world, some people find it very hard to pray, as if God were absent or silent in the face of evil. And yet praying for peace awakens our sense of responsibility and our solidarity with all who are suffering so terribly from the tragedy of war. It is not a matter of asking for a facile peace that concedes victory to the aggressor, but a true and demanding peace that, in order to be lasting, must include justice and truth. Yes, praying for peace is more urgent than ever.



For those of us who are believers, trust in God can give us a hope that is more powerful than fear of the future. Not a naive trust but the conviction, rooted in our hearts, that God is at work in creation and calls us to be at work in our turn, by taking on our responsibility for ourselves... and for the next generation.

When peace seems an inaccessible ideal and violence is tearing apart the family of nations, when all sorts of dangers unsettle us, let us remind ourselves: in an inner life which may be very poor, by solidarity with our neighbor and friendship that grows ever wider, the Risen Christ comes to meet us. Christ changes our outlook, leading us into a wider world and inviting us to take unexpected steps forward. Will we welcome him?

## **Together**

An event is being prepared to help Christian unity to grow, “Together”, a “gathering of the People of God.” It will take place on September 30, 2023, at Rome and in other parts of the world. For more information: [www.together2023.net](http://www.together2023.net)

Information on the meetings in Taizé, the special weeks during the summer and the next European meeting, to be held at Ljubljana in Slovenia from December 28, 2023 to January 1, 2024, can be found on the Taizé website: [www.taize.fr](http://www.taize.fr)