

1970

1970 was above all the year which saw, at Easter, the announcement of a planned “Council of Youth,” which would be prepared in the following four years before opening in August of 1974. The journal entries for this year recount numerous conversations with young people striving for greater justice in society, particularly from Latin America, as well as with priests attempting to come to terms with the turmoil in the postconciliar church. Brother Roger’s pen, however, periodically describes the scenery and the weather at Taizé, as if he found in this evocation of the natural world a respite from the painful tensions in society and in the church. Two journeys to other countries also marked this year—to the South of Spain in February, and to Rome in December, including a memorable visit to the South of Italy—two opportunities for the prior of Taizé to discover the face of Christ in the poor and forgotten.

January 1, 1970

The year of 1970 will be the one in which we shall dare new things.

Today's dialogue with the young people was a real boxing match. The ones peppering me with questions pushed me to my limits. I was laughing inwardly, but sometimes it took my breath away.

We spoke of the role of Mary today. She, a woman, is going to lead us to make a discovery. The church has left it to men to take all the initiatives. Mary teaches us that initiatives are the concern of women as well. She is the foremost witness of the church, and invites man to rid himself of his self-sufficiency, his authoritarianism, in order to collaborate with God.

The last question dealt with our contacts with the working classes. My reply: in our fraternities far away, there are new possibilities. But in our region, the gates of the nearby factories were closed to us when, living in a *fraternité* thirty kilometers from Taizé,¹ we were considered to be too lucid about the conditions of many workers there. Since then it has been impossible to find a job in any local factory. Yet every day there are brothers who go off to work nearby.²

What I should have added is that, as the new year begins, I cannot see who is offering any real solution for greater justice. I have no more confidence in liberal democracies led by oligarchies than in systems dominated by police repression, as in certain socialist countries. How to foster a leap forward towards a just society?

1. In the mining town of Montceau-les-Mines, from 1951 to 1953.

2. At that time, Brother Robert was working as a doctor in Cormatin, Brother Alain in an agricultural cooperative, and Brother Reynold taught computer science at Cluny.

January 2, 1970

Marc³ is back. He relates his mother's last day. Without saying anything to her family, she announces to someone there that she will die during the day. The day goes by as usual. Those present pray compline with her, as they do every evening. She prays more fervently for many of those entrusted to her. Then she says good night to her husband and collapses: death had come.

Two days later her husband, an unpretentious man, sees her alongside him. She is resplendent with light and insists, "Do not be sad. Go peacefully through these days. Know that I am no longer of earth but of heaven."

January 5, 1970

In the presence of others, a young Italian couple asks me to say a few words meant just for them. He is a worker. His wife is on the staff of a labor union. The question intimidates me a little and I would prefer to avoid it. Their expressions are so open and appealing that I venture to ask them: you are attached to Christ, but how can you serve him together also within his body, the church? That means not living suspended between earth and heaven, but with both feet planted firmly on the ground.

January 6, 1970

Talked with Italians and Spaniards, all involved in the working world. The same concern about the church as yesterday. Of course, loving the church for its own sake would lead to disaster. For "reasons of state," what injustices have not been committed in the course of history? Similarly, for "reasons of church," what has not been done? Loving the church in isolation, without Christ, would lead to intransigence. But loving Christ alone, without his

3. Brother Marc (Heinz Rudolf, 1931–), Swiss German brother who worked as an artist in different media. He spent many years with the brothers in Japan and Korea.

body, encourages a narrowness within us. Loving Christ, loving the church: the two are one. These words challenge me ceaselessly.

January 7, 1970

Have set on the mantelpiece in my room a calendar brought back from Italy. Each day's date is very big, printed in red. In this way I can remember the day to be lived, today, January 7, and no other—a day given for friendship, peace, and joy. True, a bad letter has arrived, but it has not been able to put out the latent fire.

January 8, 1970

Yesterday evening, conversation with a young poet. Listening to him, everything around us took on new life and, in this cold winter, I could sense in the row of trees young shoots stirring beneath the dead leaves.

January 10, 1970

The race to succeed, the ambition that lies behind it: what devastation that is for Christians! When someone has no other means of regaining confidence in himself, he is heading for dislocation; he drains away the best of himself.

January 11, 1970

Listen, always listen. Jo, an African economist, speaks of this in a new way. Listening, he says, is in Africa the role of the chief. Surrounded by others who help him to understand properly, he listens to each in turn. And then a direction becomes clear. Appearances notwithstanding, the head of a tribe often has a highly demanding life to live, since he is obliged to listen to all.

January 12, 1970

These last weeks, Alain⁴ has been coming home every day with new burdens that are almost unbearable. For sixteen years now, so much energy spent sharing in the transformation of the living conditions of the least well-to-do farmers. In the evening, I listen to him for a moment. What else can I do but share his present worries?

January 14, 1970

My sister Yvonne, just back from the Congo, had this story to tell about her four-year-old granddaughter Stephanie. She discovered that, in the house next door, an African boy of the same age had to spend the whole day with the servants, without his parents. He cried constantly. So every evening, at nightfall, Stephanie would go to the bottom of the garden where a small hole in the wall opened on to the grounds next door. The little boy would be waiting for her and they held hands through the opening, having no common language to speak.

January 15, 1970

For the past two days a bishop from Brazil has been here. Once again I am given an insight into the treasury of faith, of sensitivity, into the creative capacity of the Christians from that continent.

The relationship between us has been falsified by centuries of ecclesiastical exportation to Latin America. But today in Latin America, women and men are arising who will come to evangelize in us all that remains steeped in self-sufficiency, paganism, and unbelief.

4. See p. 11, note 8.

January 16, 1970

Letter to a young Italian Catholic:

“To live Christ for others. To take part concretely, by giving all one’s life, in the reawakening of a vocation proper to the Catholic church—to be a leaven of fraternal and visible unity within the whole human community. Surely that is our call and, henceforth, our common path.”

January 19, 1970

At this beginning of the week of prayer for Christian unity, denominational inertia is more apparent than ever.

Yesterday, many people from the region were gathered in our church. The priests were sitting among my brothers. The diocesan bishop preached. We live equally close every year. Yet we still remain apart for the Eucharist, and we all believe in it with a common faith.

But optimism still does not desert me. The impossible opens the way to the possible.

January 20, 1970

This day, January 20, calls my father to mind. Twenty-four years ago he was struck down with an illness that was to take his life within a few days.

A grey day; the weather could hardly be gloomier. But however overcast the sky is, there is always a brighter patch somewhere.

I strive to live as a man familiar with his inevitable portion of solitude.

January 23, 1970

Marked by conversations with someone so tense that all I could do was listen attentively and very receptively. At such moments I

sometimes wonder: are these situations part of God's plan? This morning the reply would have been: the church carries along with it all our humanity and a person's inner tensions are part of it.

January 27, 1970

A short stay in Paris. Evening spent with a young astrophysicist from Bombay.⁵ I share with him this question which never leaves me: now that I sense Easter drawing near, I wonder if we shall have the strength to go ahead in a commitment with the young. I would like to give up the idea of a council of youth.

After he left, I continued the same reflection alone: as far as I am concerned, nothing is disastrous, not even my own death. But I am not the only one involved in all this. Should I put a stop to what we have begun? Would giving up be an act of cowardice towards the young? Have I looked closely enough to see if everything necessary is ready?⁶

January 28, 1970

Reading certain writings, even in very serious periodicals, how many invitations there are to lose touch! The ideas are there. Then, with a little imagination, a web of gilded alibis is woven—more than enough to take leave of reality.

January 29, 1970

If I am with a nonbeliever, is the presence of Christ excluded? His presence is other, more I cannot grasp.

5. Moiz Rasiwala (1937–), born in Bombay to a Muslim family, studied astrophysics in Germany and France, and became a Christian without ever rejecting his roots. He was active in the preparation of the Council of Youth and spent time in Taizé, helping with the international meetings there. Later he settled in the West of France with his wife and children and was ordained a Catholic deacon while maintaining close ties with the Taizé Community.

6. See Luke 14:28.

January 30, 1970

A young man asks me, “How do you see the service of authority in today’s church? How do you conceive it for yourself, as prior of Taizé?”

Authority has too often been identified with a temporal power, but in the church it is first of all communion. Authority is neither monarchical nor democratic; it is pastoral.

Personally I see my ministry as a service of unity. To be prior of Taizé is, in my eyes, to be a man of communion.

Christ says of the shepherd that he gives his life, that he exposes it before the ravenous wolf ever ready to divide.⁷ I need a shred of the courage of Christ not to give up in the face of difficulty, not to flee but, on the contrary, to foster unity, sometimes to arbitrate in situations, and also to keep those who are mine in communion with the whole church.

Power is of no interest to me in exercising this ministry. I simply know that our community’s vocation is to live, each day, a parable of unity and that it cannot do so without a servant, the prior, who sums up the whole.

Such a service of unity does not set the one exercising it at the top of a pyramid, but right in the midst of all.

February 1, 1970

Throughout the day, wherever I go and whomever I may be with, I find ways of watching what is happening in the sky. So much creativity constantly in action, so many shades of gold set off by brilliant greys—joyfulness wells up inside me, and it is not so hard to bear the burden of contradictions.

7. See John 10:1–18.