

Brother John

What Is Distinctive About the Christian Faith?

How can we define the distinctive character of the Christian faith? Does it lie in baptism, in the creed we sometimes recite, or in particular moral values? Does following certain practices, such as going to church on Sunday morning, make one a Christian? Does it mean having certain specific ideas about the world or human life? This question is obviously of the utmost importance, both for those who want to profess this faith and for those who intend to reject it. Otherwise, it may even happen that we reject it for the wrong reasons. As for those who accept it, it would be a shame if they were

to discover that, neglecting what is essential, they were focusing on elements that are only secondary. In so doing, they do not help others to discover what is characteristic about Christianity.

In the following pages, then, we will attempt to answer this crucial question in successive stages.

A religion?

If this question were asked point-blank to people selected at random, the answer would certainly be: Christianity is a *religion*; indeed, it is one of the major religions of the world.

This reply, however evident it may be in the minds of many today, is basically a modern and Western view of things. For its definition of religion as meaning “a particular system of faith and worship,” the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives no examples before 1300, and most of the quotations come from 1560 on. The word existed earlier in the Latin-speaking world, to be sure, but meant rather scrupulous attention, respect for the sacred, veneration of the gods; in the Christian era, it referred first of all to the choice of a particular way of life, that of a monk or nun.¹ Similarly, the word in English was first simply applied to monastic

¹ The etymology of the word *religio* remains controversial. Scholars hesitate between *relegere*, “to re-read, to treat or consider carefully” and *religare*, “to bind, link, connect”.

orders. It was only in modern times, thanks in part to the progress of the social sciences in the West, that there arose a notion of the world as divided into several different “religions” – Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, animism and so on – each one giving different and parallel answers to the same human questions and needs. And if, at first, the different religions were viewed as inseparable from the civilizations that gave rise to them, today we tend more and more to detach them from their lands of origin and to make them the simple object of personal choice. No one raises their eyebrows any longer when someone who comes from a Jewish family in Florida declares himself a Buddhist without ever having set foot in a Far Eastern country.

There is admittedly something in this notion of “religions” that corresponds to the empirical situation of the contemporary world. With respect to the question that concerns us, however, it risks leading us astray. First of all, because it imports into the reality of the Christian faith a concept that is fundamentally foreign to it. Neither Jesus of Nazareth nor his disciples had the faintest idea that they were in the process of starting a “new religion.” First and foremost, whatever we may wish to say about his true identity, Jesus was an itinerant Jewish preacher, fully integrated into the life of his people. That is where we need to start in order to understand the historical movement which found its origin in him. By putting into the same boat, so

to speak, complex historical realities such as Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, we are in danger of misunderstanding the distinctive nature of each one, and still more of their founders. Jesus, the Buddha and Muhammad did not have the same self-understanding, nor did they make the same claims. If we are not careful, the enterprise of comparative religion can lead us to set in parallel realities which are essentially heterogeneous.

We will not find what is specific about Christian faith, then, in the fact that it is a religion. Even for more precise reasons, linked to the content of this faith, theologians have sometimes been very reticent about calling it a religion. The German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, executed in 1945 by the Nazis for his activities in the resistance against Hitler, is emblematic in this sense. Bonhoeffer's reticence had at least two causes. First and foremost, religion by definition concerns only a part of human existence, whereas in his eyes, Christ Jesus had necessarily to be in relationship with the whole of life. All attempts to confine him to a restricted sphere, to limit him to particular times, places or practices, could only distort the true meaning of his life and work. Writing from prison at the end of his life, Bonhoeffer said in words which have become famous: "Jesus does not call to a new religion, but to life" (letter of July 18, 1944). It should be emphasized that this was not a last-minute discovery of his, as can be seen from another statement which dates from 1928: "Christ

is not the bringer of a new religion, but the bringer of God."²

Bonhoeffer was also unwilling to identify faith in Jesus Christ with a religion because in his eyes, the notion of religion was partial in another sense, too: it was not equally valuable at all times and places. In his last years, seeing around him people for whom religion did not seem to be a vital necessity, he sensed the advent of a society where religion would no longer play a decisive role in day-to-day life. Convinced that Christ had come for these individuals too, Bonhoeffer did not think it essential to try and reawaken in them a "need for religion" in order to lead them to Christ; he considered such an attempt unworthy. And he saw a parallel with the early Christians, who gradually realized that to accept and live the Good News of Jesus Christ it was not necessary first to become a Jew. During the final period of his life in prison, Bonhoeffer wrestled with the question of how to bear witness to Christ to a world that had "come of age," for which the consolations of religion held little interest. Although his reflections were unfortunately cut short by his death, and beyond the possible limits of his diagnosis of the contemporary world (in this new century "religion" seems more alive than ever, at least if we look at things from a global perspective), his conviction that the

² Quotations drawn from the book by Sabine Dramm, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Eine Einführung in sein Denken* (Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001), p. 228.

distinctive feature of the Christian faith was not connected to its “religious” character remains permanently relevant, and opens a way forward for our quest. “Jesus does not call to a new religion, but to life.”³

A spirituality?

In our day, another word which comes spontaneously to mind to describe Christian faith is *spirituality*. The term places the emphasis on a personal, inner journey, on convictions and practices which foster spiritual growth, on the gradual development and deepening of an inner life. And in fact, when we read the New Testament, we see that Jesus began his ministry by calling people to follow him one by one. Given that, for Christians, Jesus is not a mere figure of the past but, risen from the dead, continues to be present for and among his followers, we might well wish to situate the essential aspect of Christianity in a personal relationship between

³ In his earlier years, Bonhoeffer was deeply influenced by the great Reformed theologian Karl Barth, who also undertook a criticism of religion in the name of faith in Jesus Christ. Barth, for his part, considered religion mainly from the angle of human beings attempting to reach God by their own powers. He affirmed that such a Babel-like undertaking, far from being praiseworthy or even neutral, was in fact a formidable obstacle to the salvation which comes from God alone through Christ. By passing through Christ, however, religion can be saved, just like the rest of human existence. This theological and abstract conception of religion differs from that of Bonhoeffer, which is more historical and empirical.

the individual believer and Christ Jesus. Each man and woman receives a unique call by which they set out in the steps of Christ – not outwardly, by walking along the roads of Galilee, but inwardly, by living their life day after day in accordance with this relationship and this call.

It is perhaps interesting in this regard that one of the best-known works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer bears the German title *Nachfolge*, “discipleship” (in English *The Cost of Discipleship*). More generally, it is not the least of the merits of certain strands of Protestant Christianity to have emphasized strongly the personal relationship of the believer with his or her Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and to affirm that no institution, no outward rite can replace this. Even if he is invisible to our bodily eyes, Christ is present for the believer just as he was for his disciples in Palestine 2000 years ago. In a certain sense he is even more present, because his presence is not limited to an outward contact: Saint Paul can go to the point of writing that “I live, yet no longer I: Christ is living in me” (Galatians 2:20). Certainly, all the Christian traditions are familiar with this truth. It is enough to recall that the best-known work of spirituality in the West from the fifteenth century onward was *The Imitation of Christ*, or to consider the importance of contemplating the icon of the face of Christ in the Eastern Churches. Given all this, it is nonetheless Protestantism that has brought out most unambiguously the importance of devotion to the

person of Jesus and of a personal response to his call.

The Christian faith can be understood as a spirituality from another angle as well, by identifying it with the “life according to the Spirit” which Saint Paul describes, notably in chapter 8 of his letter to the Romans. If for him faith in Jesus Christ begins as a gift, the free gift of God’s love to human beings who could never have earned or acquired it,⁴ it is equally true that this gift has to be accepted by a free human choice. The God revealed by Jesus Christ never forces the human heart, and true love solicits and awakens a free response. To the gift of God communicated by Christ thus correspond the reception of this gift on the part of human beings and the attempt to put it into practice. And since this gift is above all that of a Breath of life (translated in our Bibles by the word “Spirit”), the only way to receive it is to make it our life.

In short, Christianity can be seen as a spirituality to the extent that it is rooted in what the Bible calls the human heart, the depths of our being that can welcome love and respond to it, translating this love into concrete choices in our day-to-day life.

There are some drawbacks, however, in employ-

⁴ “God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love of his with which he loved us, made us alive with Christ when we were dead because of our sins – your salvation is a free gift – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, so that all the ages to come might see how unbelievably great God’s generosity is through his goodness to us in Christ Jesus. You have been saved as a free and undeserved gift, through faith. This is not your doing; it is a gift from God.” (Ephesians 2:4-8; see also Romans 5:8.)

ing the notion of spirituality to define faith in Jesus Christ. In today’s world, this notion often has eclectic and individualistic connotations. People tend to borrow elements taken from the most diverse horizons, leaving aside anything that does not mirror their own taste. Such a made-to-order spirituality does not correspond to what is distinctive in Christian faith. As we have seen, faith is essentially a relationship with the person of Christ rather than an acceptance of disparate doctrines. The main thing is the trust placed in him, beyond what we can understand from the outset. As was already the case with Abraham, believers consent to setting out on the road without knowing where they are heading (see Hebrews 11:8), sustained solely by faith in the One who calls them and walks with them. To borrow a phrase dear to Brother Roger, the founder of Taizé, faith is a permanent invitation to “live beyond every hope.”

In addition, the Christian faith is not an individualistic endeavor. Whoever hears Christ’s call and answers it takes their place in the community of all those walking along the same road. The relations between the disciples are just as important as the one with the Master, because they express in tangible fashion, beyond words, the content of their faith in Jesus. In this respect it may be useful to make a distinction between the words “personal” and “individual.” Faith is eminently personal, based as it is on a unique call and an intimate relationship of trust with Christ; in a

word, it is rooted in the heart. But this faith is not solely an individual affair, because it immediately inserts the believer into a network of relationships by making him or her a full-fledged member of the family of God.

A life in common?

“Jesus does not call to a new religion, but to life.” If Christianity indisputably possesses elements that could be called religious, since it places its followers in relation to the Absolute, and if in some respects it resembles a personal spirituality, it would be closer to the mark to see it as a way of life, more specifically a *life in common*. What made an impression on the inhabitants of the Mediterranean basin two thousand years ago was seeing people from the most varied backgrounds, languages and social classes call one another brother and sister, and live a shared life, “Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, men and women” all together (cf. Galatians 3:28). And again: “There is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free...” (Colossians 3:11). Although there were some philosophical reflections on the unity of the human race in the ancient world, for the first time the dream of one human family began to acquire tangible form. And it can be argued that it

was this lived-out reality, more than any particular doctrine, that gave early Christianity its power of attraction.

Three times in his book on the first Christians, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Saint Luke gives us a summary of their life. The first of these is found at the end of chapter 2, following the first Christian Pentecost:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to prayers. Everyone was in awe; many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. All the believers were united and held everything in common. They would sell their property and possessions and share them insofar as anyone was in need. They used to gather every day in the Temple by common consent and break bread in their homes, sharing food in gaiety and simplicity of heart, praising God and having the esteem of all the people. And day by day the Lord kept adding to their number those who were finding salvation. (Acts 2:42-47; cf. 4:32-35; 5:12-16.)

What we see here essentially is a community living in the midst of the Jewish people (and soon called to go beyond the borders of the nation) and practising two complementary forms of sharing. First of all with God, entailing an intense life of prayer. This included traditional prayers and new practices, notably “the breaking of the bread,” which refers in all likelihood to the Eucharist. And then among themselves, a sharing not just spiritual but material as well, to each according to their needs.

A somewhat idyllic impression emerges from

this portrait. A closer reading of all the relevant texts concerning the early Christians shows that the reality was not always so perfect, in spite of the strong impetus given by the death and resurrection of Christ. Saint Luke does not describe the first Christian community in this way, however, because of a romantic or nostalgic bent, but to answer our question concerning what is distinctive about faith in Jesus Christ. It was not found so much in new ideas about God as in a shared existence. And according to Luke, it was this life in common that attracted people and explained the success of the new movement.

Another indication that, for Luke, we have here the essential dimension of the faith is given by the placing of this text at the end of chapter 2. We mentioned that Jesus was fully rooted in the people of Israel. This nation considered that it had received a particular vocation among all the nations on earth. The God who formed this people from a ragtag collection of immigrant workers in Egypt was not a mere tribal or local deity, but the Creator of the universe and the Lord of history. As a consequence, the historic role of the Jewish people was to witness by their existence to this God unlike any other so that, one day, all the nations of the earth would recognize him and thus live in peace and harmony (see e.g. Isaiah 2:2-4).

This vocation proper to Israel was hindered from the start by the vagaries of history. Many of the faithful, therefore, believed that a new beginning was nec-

essary to realize it fully. This would involve a brand-new manifestation of God by which he would finally accomplish his original intention. The first disciples of Christ, after the apparent failure of his violent death, saw this new beginning in the Good News of the resurrection: the cause of Jesus was not over but in fact had just begun. It involved a new outpouring of the Breath of divine life, the Spirit, to enable Israel to be what it had always been in God's mind since the beginning: the nucleus of a renewed and reconciled humanity. So if Saint Luke begins his second book with Jesus, risen from the dead, sending the Holy Spirit upon his disciples to give new impetus to his mission after the interruption of his death, it is not surprising that he ends his narrative with the description of a community where this mission assumes a tangible shape.

In fact, the structure of the Acts of the Apostles is made up of two complementary movements. On the one hand, the followers of Christ are sent out on the highways of the world to communicate the good news to the four corners of the earth and create a network between those who respond to the call, and, on the other, they come together around the Lord's Table, expressing by their unity the meaning and purpose of their mission. "How good and pleasant it is for brothers and sisters to live together in community!" (Psalm 133:1).

It is enlightening to superimpose these two movements characteristic of the first Christians upon the current situation of our Churches. The

outward movement of expansion has borne fruit in abundance. A powerful impulse towards this came from the fact that in the fourth century of our era, the Christian Church went from being a disdained and even persecuted sect to having an officially recognized status in the Roman Empire. Parallel to this, Christian missionaries have brought the message everywhere, often at the cost of their lives. In short, Christianity has become a worldwide phenomenon.

If the major Christian denominations, beginning with the Catholic Church, have thus grown to planetary dimensions, it has to be admitted that the aspect of coming together in unity has not known the same success. First of all, because over the centuries the Church of Jesus Christ has split up into segments indifferent or even hostile to one another. And in addition, because the numerical and geographical progress of Christianity has apparently gone hand in hand with a diminishing of the intensity of its life. In dissolving into the mass, the salt of the Gospel has sometimes lost some of its saltiness or, to change the metaphor, the yeast seems to have vanished into the dough, at least for the time being. To find examples of communities known for an intense life of prayer and mutual support, one has to turn to the smaller evangelical or Pentecostal denominations, or else to groups within the larger historical Churches, for example so-called monastic or religious communities, or what are known as the new eccle-

sial movements. And even then, these groups do not always bring together people from very different backgrounds. It is obviously very difficult, humanly speaking, to unite in practice universality and intimacy. In the portrait of the early Christians given in the New Testament, however, we do find just this, and from the very outset. One sees groups which, on account of their faith in the crucified and risen Christ, share their existence fully with one another while remaining open to people from a great diversity of backgrounds. These groups retained a strong life of solidarity without becoming sectarian in the least, for they kept the conviction that they did not exist for themselves alone but had received a calling that concerned the whole human race, that of being a ferment of reconciliation and peace. In short, these communities held in harmony an intense common life and a universal outlook.

The standard word for this sharing of life is the Greek term *koinônia*, translated into English as “fellowship” or “communion.” Of all the New Testament writings, the prologue of the first letter of Saint John gives us the best key to its significance. Writing to people who entered the Christian community later than those of the first generation, the author speaks of Christ Jesus not as one individual among others but as “Life,” “the Word of Life” or “eternal Life.” In him, in other words, God’s very own Life has entered into human history in amazingly tangible fashion. And he continues:

We proclaim in turn to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may have fellowship (*koinônia*) with us. And our fellowship (*koinônia*) is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things to you so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:3-4.)

This Word of Life that has been communicated creates a *koinônia* – a sharing of life, a solidarity – among those who receive it. And this shared existence is not only a human reality, insofar as it is not based on the feelings or on the good will of the women and men involved. No, it is a participation in God's own Life, in the communion that unites Christ with the one he calls *Abba*, Father, in the unity of one Spirit. And finally, Saint John says that this life shared among believers and with God is a source of true and perfect joy. If this is the case, is it not because it satisfies the deepest desire of human hearts, to be loved and to love with no restrictions in time and space?

The offer in progress of a universal communion in God

We are finally at the point where we can reply adequately to our question concerning what is distinctive about the Christian faith, having come closer to this answer by a series of more and more

exact approximations. First of all, even if this faith has a “religious” dimension, since concerns our relationship with that Absolute commonly called God, the notion of *religion* does not seem to be very helpful in order to grasp its unique character. Would it be better, then, to call it a *spirituality*? Yes, in the sense that it offers a personal and lived-out way of penetrating the meaning of life more deeply. This way, however, is not left to the discretion of each individual; it is not made up of elements that we can take or leave according to our own whims. Far from being an aimless wandering amidst the flotsam and jetsam of the spiritual traditions of humankind, it is a pilgrimage in the steps of Christ, and it sets the pilgrim necessarily in a relationship to all those who are walking along the same road.

Is Christian faith a *life in common*, then? This definition has the great advantage of corresponding to the life of the early Christians as we discover it in the pages of the New Testament. Still, we must immediately add that this shared life is far from being a simple human sociability; it is rooted in God. It is a sharing in the divine Life, a Life that is Love and thus Life for others. As a result, already at its birth and even if its concrete manifestation is very limited, this common life is by nature inclusive, universal; it radiates outward to encompass potentially every human being. In this sense, the boundaries of the Christian community are not defined once and for all; in the final analysis they

cannot be distinguished from the entire human family, or even from the whole of creation.

In its essence, then, faith in Jesus Christ can be defined as *the offer in progress of a universal communion or fellowship in God*. Let us examine this definition more closely.

First of all, Christian faith, far from being a human undertaking, is essentially an *offer* or invitation coming from the side of God. This reversal of perspectives is in fact the “Copernican revolution” that characterizes all biblical revelation. This was already true for Israel of old: that nation drew its identity not from geographical or genealogical criteria, but from the free choice of a mysterious and transcendent God. With the coming of Christ Jesus, this quality is even more salient. For his disciples – and here we have a situation virtually unique among the founders of religions or schools of spirituality – Jesus was not someone seized without warning by the divine or who attained enlightenment after a long process of searching; he was not in the first place a prophet, a teacher of wisdom, a philosopher or a seer. In him, however unthinkable this may seem, the very Source of life comes to encounter us.

If the Christian faith is an offer coming from the side of the Absolute, the role of human beings is essentially to welcome the invitation and to reply to it. It is not up to them to define its contours. And if God calls, through Christ, to a sharing of life, to a communion, then this invitation is addressed to

the most personal dimension of human beings; it seeks to awaken freedom in them. For all these reasons, such an offer is at the opposite extreme from every form of constraint. Any attempt to impose it by coercion, whether overt or subtle, is absolutely foreign to its nature. Alas, we all know that this truth has not always been grasped, either by Christian authorities or by the rank-and-file, to the great detriment of the true progress of the Gospel.

Secondly, the Christian message is an offer *in progress*, in other words an invitation that is real and not theoretical. It is not primarily a question of ideas, of a correct understanding of intellectual truths. In more technical terms, faith is not a gnosis. Just as Jesus communicated the essence of his message by his life given for us to the point of dying on a cross, disciples turn their own lives into the message they want to get across. As Saint Paul puts it, Christ gave his life for us “so that the living live no longer for themselves but for the one who died and rose for them” (2 Corinthians 5:15). And this existence “for Christ” translates into an existence “for others.” We are thus led back again by a different road to the primacy of shared life. Christianity is perhaps unique in that, if it is not to be emptied of its substance, there can be no dichotomy between doctrine and practice. On the contrary, the doctrine is identical to the practice, for in both cases it is a matter of communion with God and among human beings. If Christians do not practice love for others, if the Churches live in

mutual indifference or competition, their preaching will inevitably remain a dead letter.

The Body of Christ

We can recapitulate all we have discovered about the specificity of the Christian faith by drawing out the implications of some key notions of Saint Paul.

Let us begin with a question: what is the link between Christianity as a spirituality, as the imitation of Jesus, and as a life in common called to become more and more universal? Are these simply two different approaches, or is there a deeper logic that unites them?

A first element that helps us to discover this logic at work is the Semitic concept of the eponymous ancestor. For the world of the Bible, the founder of a people or a collectivity represents in some sense the entire group. Israel, for example, is a name used both for the patriarch Jacob and for the nation that sprang from his loins. The Israelites are “the sons (or children) of Israel” and the son is in his father’s image (cf. Genesis 5:3). Similarly, for Saint Paul, Adam is not merely the first individual to have been created but at the same time the “founding father” of humankind. In a mysterious but real sense, Adam is each of us and

each of us is Adam. If “all have sinned” in him, this participation in his sin becomes concrete in the real choices that each of us makes in our own existence (see Romans 5).

This way of thinking gives the apostle a marvelous possibility to explain the relationship between Christ Jesus and us. With one small difference, however: unlike Adam or Israel, the followers of Christ are not his children but, through him, children of God; we are sons (and daughters) in the Son. Through baptism, which expresses Christ’s call and our “yes” in response, we die to our previous life marked by separation and enter the family of God. In this way, Jesus is “the eldest of a multitude of brothers and sisters” (Romans 8:29); he is in us and we are in him. “I live, yet no longer I: Christ is living in me” (Galatians 2:20).

A second element concerns the notion of the body. Paul uses it first as a metaphor, quite common at the time, of the Christian community. The relationship between the body and its various parts enables him to articulate the relationship between unity and diversity in the community: animated by the same Breath of life, believers nonetheless still maintain a variety of gifts and approaches. This image emphasizes as well the close unity between the faithful: “we are all parts of one another” (Romans 12:5).

In the apostle’s mind, however, this explanation goes much further than a simple metaphor. He writes to the Corinthians, “Just as the body is one

and has many parts, (...) so too is *Christ*” (1 Corinthians 12:12). Notice that he does not write “so too is our community” or “...the Church.” And a bit further on he says explicitly, “You are the body of Christ; each of you is a part of it” (12:27). In those days, the body was not conceived of as a lump of flesh, as is often the case in our materialistic age, but as someone’s presence in the world, more precisely a presence to other people. Calling the Christian community the Body of Christ thus means affirming that Christ remains present in the world through the shared life of his followers. All together they re-present him, literally making him present in the world of space and time.

One more step, and we enter into the vast perspective of the letters to the Colossians and Ephesians. Both begin with the great design of God which is “to recapitulate” (Ephesians 1:10) or “to reconcile” (Colossians 1:20) all creatures to himself, and consequently to one another, through Christ. The sign and the means of this double reconciliation is the communion of believers, the Church, a reality in constant evolution, drawing its energy from its relationship to its Head, Christ Jesus:

Living according to the truth in love, we will grow up in all ways into Christ, the Head, through whom the whole body fits and holds together with the help of each joint, according to the working of each part, enabling the body to keep growing by building itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16; cf. Colossians 2:19.)

A Body nailed to a cross in Palestine two thousand years ago, giving birth, on the other side of death, to a Body that grows in the course of centuries by bringing together in different ways a countless number of women and men, and on the horizon, a vision of the whole of humankind as one family living in peace: this image expresses perhaps better than any other the distinctive identity of the Christian faith. To use an expression of Saint Augustine, one of the greatest Christian thinkers of the West, Christianity, in the final analysis, is nothing other than the *totus Christus*, the “whole Christ,” Head and Body, a reality that has also been called the “Christ of communion.”

It is thus not by chance that the central activity of the Christian faith has always been the celebration of the Eucharist. The crucified Christ remains alive and present through the words he spoke over the bread and wine before his death: “This is my Body... This is my Blood.” Gathered together around the same Table, his followers are nourished by that Body given for them on the cross and given to them in the sacrament, in order to be that Body for others in the world. Nor it is a misuse of language to call this sacrament Holy Communion. In the Eucharist, the heart of the faith is expressed with unparalleled clarity. It is revealed there as a sharing of life with God, through Christ’s self-giving, which unites us more closely among ourselves and sends us out to encounter every human being.

We can conclude our reflections with two quotes, the first from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the second from Brother Roger. They sum up our discoveries well:

The Church is not about religion, but rather about the figure of Christ and its taking shape in a multitude of persons.⁵

Are we sufficiently aware that, two thousand years ago, Christ came to earth not to start a new religion but to offer every human being a communion in God?⁶

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, quoted in Sabine Dramm, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Eine Einführung in sein Denken*, p. 232.

⁶ Brother Roger of Taizé, *God Is Love Alone* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2003), p. 51.