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### ***Good Stewardship and the Cursillo: The Necessity of Knowing Its History***

Ellermeier said, "any historical phenomenon can only be properly grasped when light is shed on its beginnings." Acknowledging the wisdom of this observation, it would seem both profitable and wise for anyone who wants to live the authentic Cursillo to study its roots<sup>1</sup>. An important first step in understanding the Cursillo experience is to study what it was and still is in the place where it began. Even a cursory examination of this history reveals the importance in this study of the role Eduardo Bonnin played in the birth, growth, and development of the method and movement. Any study of the *Cursillo de Cristiandad* would be incomplete without a through look at and understanding of his role in its history.

Only by examining its roots do we come to understand the why of the movement. Cursillo is a lay movement within the Church. However, we know that the Cursillo was not meant for the Church but rather for the person, the far-aways, those who had not come to know and to believe and to live that God loves them completely and unconditionally. Cursillo was always intended as a means to provide a person, through the medium of friendship, with an opportunity to make three essential encounters: with self, with God, and with others. These encounters were to be followed up and nurtured by means of the Group Reunion, the Ultreya and the School of Leaders. In this way, the conversion begun as the result of the influence of the lived conversion of another (precursillo) could deepen and grow in the fourth day of his/her postcursillo. This lived conversion of the postcursillo has the potential to attract and influence others thus transforming environments with the Good News of the Gospel. This, in a nutshell, is the Cursillo method of precursillo, the three days and postcursillo.

For many of us the Cursillo is what we experienced on our weekends. In reality the Cursillo weekend is the incubator and spending time in the incubator provides a good beginning but it is only a beginning. If we do not study the movement and the method, then how are we to utilize the method and the movement so that it becomes the answers to all of mankind's difficulties and problems? So, let us spend a few moments examining

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<sup>1</sup> *Signs of Hope: Interview with Bishop Cordes and Eduardo Bonnin*, 1997, p.5

the roots of this marvellous method and movement which grew from and is sustained and nurtured by the Charism that the Holy Spirit gave to Eduardo Bonnin, not for his own benefit but rather for the benefit of us all.

The *Cursillo de Cristiandad* has as its birthplace the island of Mallorca off the coast of Spain. It celebrated its sixtieth anniversary in 2004. The first Cursillo took place in Cala Figuera from August 19 to 22, 1944. There were fourteen candidates, three team members, and a priest who, though not part of the team, provided the necessary sacraments. The rector for that weekend was Eduardo Bonnin, a man credited with receiving from the Holy Spirit the charism that animates the movement and is its keystone.

Bonnin's formative years nurtured within a strong faith and an inquisitive mind. His nine years of compulsory military service brought this sensitive, intelligent, and genial person face to face with the impact upon society, especially the young, of the Spanish Civil War and World War II. Young people were not practicing their faith because they had no faith to practice. It was a "lost" generation whose upbringing and life experience denied them this opportunity to choose between a worldly ideal and a Christian Ideal. Yet, Bonnin noted that even though these were *faraway* from God, they still knew how to do good for one another. There was an *esprit de corps* within the barracks' community that demonstrated that the elements necessary for the development of a vibrant Christian community were all present. They needed something or someone to show the way. This began Bonnin's pilgrimage of prayer, study, prayer, discussion, and prayer. His work attracted others who became immersed in this pattern of prayer and study and discussion. The inspiration of a speech by Pius XI, the framework of Catholic Action, and the charism given to Bonnin by the Holy Spirit all culminated in that first Cursillo weekend in 1944.

The outlines, which were developed for the creation of the Spanish Rollos used in Mallorca and which were recently translated into English through the efforts of the Mallorcan Secretariat and the CCCC, are now the outlines used for many Cursillo weekends.<sup>2</sup> In 1949, when they started numbering weekends, the meditations were added

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<sup>2</sup> *Cursillo Weekend Outlines*. Canadian Conference of Catholic Cursillos (CCCC), June 2003.

and these are a part of the Cursillo experience as well. *The Cursillo de Cristiandad in Mallorca is essentially the same today as it was in 1944.*

The Cursillo was very fortunate in having its founder alive and active in the movement until recently. His work and that of the Mallorcan secretariat and FEBA<sup>3</sup> have enabled those involved in leadership in the Cursillo to keep it true to its charism and to the vision of its founder. Bonnin's extensive writings about the Cursillo and his willingness to be engaged by those seeking to live the authentic Cursillo have provided the world with a gold standard against which to assess *Cursillo* in their own areas.

The willingness to share on the part of this individual and these groups is a testament to the importance of this history. Without studying this history, the Cursillo runs the very real risk of becoming a mere shadow of what God intended it to be. The history of the spread of the Cursillo has shown what happens when there is insufficient study and little or no contact with the founder and the originating movement.

It is not the purpose of this presentation to provide an extensive review of this history. The *DVD History of the Cursillo* available from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Cursillos (CCCC) provides an excellent overview and is highly recommended for this purpose. Rather, in this presentation the focus will be on the importance of knowing the history in ensuring that all Cursillistas become good stewards of the method and movement.

Eduardo Bonnin, a layperson committed to the Gospel, received, from the Holy Spirit, a charism, a gift meant not for him but for the world. The charism inspired and shaped a vision and this was shared with others. This grew into what we know today as the *Cursillo*. It was meant as a means of bringing the Good News of the love of God to all those who, for whatever reason, had not come to know His love and forgiveness. These are the *faraway*; those whose life style and developmental history prevent contact with the richness of God's love and His Vision for creation. They are not the outcasts of society nor are they necessarily confined or limited to particular strata of society. These *faraway* are persons—citizens who are part of the social, economic, and political fabric of any environment.

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<sup>3</sup> **Fundación Eduardo Bonnin Aguiló:** a foundation created to collect, catalogue, and preserve for the Cursillo de Cristiandad, the many writings of Eduardo Bonnin

Friendship is the means of reaching out to these *faraway*. It is to be a friendship not of convenience or of reciprocity but rather one that views the individual as a person created in the image and likeness of God. This view of the person is rooted in a solid understanding of friendship, person, joy, normality, criterion, liberty, life, love, sincerity, conviction—the ten topics of the First Conversations of Cala Figuera that Eduardo and the Mallorchan secretariat shared with invited Cursillo leaders from many parts of the world on the occasion of the 50ieth anniversary of the Cursillo in 1994.

The *Cursillo* is in the Church but it is not exclusively for the Church: it is for the world. It was never intended to be a recruitment program to fill the ranks of the various ministries of the Church. It is for the person. The Cursillo Weekend, which is part of the *Cursillo de Cristiandad*, offers the person a chance to experience, *initially through the friendship of another*, a life of hope rooted in the love and forgiveness of God through His Son, Jesus Christ. It gives the individual a chance to “step out of the world,” a chance to be free of the world for a short time so as to hear, on a personal level, what God wants to say to him/her. It is an opportunity to travel deep into self in the company of a warm, loving, and accepting community, so as to encounter the person within, that person whom God values, enlightens, empowers, and sends forth to be His disciple, the Good News, in the world which is his/her home. It provides both the means and the method to live the Cursillo for the rest of life. That is the way it was envisioned and initially lived and is still lived in its birthplace.

*Make a friend, be a friend, and bring that friend to Christ* is not a recruitment slogan. It's the Gospel lived out in the normality of everyday life. The gift is God's love made tangible through friendship. That is what animated the founder of the Cursillo and his friends. That is what has kept it going through all of the difficulties that it has faced and is facing.

Its early years were not without difficulties and there were many who distrusted this lay movement simply because it was a lay movement. The benign influence of Bishop Hervas aided its early development; however, this did not prevent its critics from trying to discredit it. It was one of the reasons why Bishop Hervas was transferred out of Mallorca and replaced by Bishop Enciso. The new bishop ordered an end to any further Cursillo activity in Mallorca. If the Cursillo had been nothing more than a weekend

experience, this period of enforced inactivity probably would have destroyed it. However, it did not because the Cursillo is not a weekend; it is the Gospel lived out in the normal, everyday routine of life. Those who believed in the method continued to live it in their daily lives and this lived conversion continued to attract others and to leaven their environments. They found ways to carry on.

Cursillo does not rely on weekends alone to achieve its purpose; the weekend provides an intense introduction to the method and an opportunity to experience this method within a loving community. However, the weekend cannot accomplish its purpose unless it is has a strong and healthy pre and post Cursillo. It has been said that if you had to remove one thing from the Cursillo experience without adversely affecting it, that one thing would be the weekend. This, of course, is only true in places where the method and movement are understood and authentically lived. In such places where this is true, the pre-cursillo and post Cursillos are both strong and vibrant. Even without the weekend, the substance of the rollos can be shared, understood, and lived.

The Cursillo in Mallorca never changed; however, outside of Mallorca the Cursillo underwent certain adaptations. It was adapted in the mainland by Bishop Hervas and it went from the mainland to South America in many instances with these adaptations. These adaptations were made to make the Cursillo acceptable to those who had the power to prevent its open practice. These alterations tended to change the focus *but this is only apparent to those who possess a through understanding of the history of the Cursillo de Cristiandad*. The one who received the foundational or original charism did not make the changes nor were they made by the secretariat that was guiding the growth and development of this fledgling lay movement. But they were made and that is what is significant and revealing. That's why it's important to study the history. The Talmud says that, "we do not see things as they are; we see them as we are." In order to look beyond our own biases, we need to equip ourselves with as complete a knowledge of this history as is available to us.

The important thing to take from these first adaptations is that they happened and that there was no malicious intent. The continuation of the Cursillos was in question and changes were made that allowed it to go forward. Unfortunately, these changes altered the focus and that has been an issue every since. We still have people asking how the

Cursillo fits the pastoral plan of the diocese. It doesn't. It fits the pastoral plan only in that the pastoral plan of any diocese is the pastoral plan of the whole church. It is for personal renewal, a renewal that is worked out in and with the aid of the larger community: the Church. Eduardo Bonnín, as the recognized founder of the method and movement, is certainly an individual whose witness should be sought and considered when any change or adaptation is being considered. In the case being referenced, he was not part of the decision making that led to the changes.

Whenever people *who do not fully understand the core values and history* of any organization or group, initiate change, even the most benign change, they run the risk of changing the focus and direction of the group or organization. The history of the Cursillo and its spread throughout the various parts of the world community is marked by a number of these changes or adaptations. None were done with the view to destroy the Cursillo. They came about, for the most part, because of an imperfect understanding of the charism, the vision it produced and nourished, and the history of its growth and development.

There has been a growth of national and international Cursillo movements, some of which recognize the role of Eduardo Bonnín as the receiver of the charism and the person whose vision and passion helped to give the movement both shape and direction. Bonnín, the Mallorcan Secretariat, and FEBA have worked and are working closely with and within these various communities to ensure that the *Cursillo de Cristiandad* remains true to its roots.

The *First and Second Conversations of Cala Figuera* are testaments to their desire to assist all movements to establish and maintain the authentic *Cursillo de Cristiandad*. The very fact that these meetings were held is evidence of their concern and their genuine desire to help. Bonnín and the Mallorcan secretariat did not invite leaders from various world movements to Mallorca to lecture them about the Cursillo nor to admonish them for the changes and adaptations that had crept into the various movements. They invited them to the birth place of the *Cursillo de Cristiandad* to *converse*, to share with them the history and rationale of the Cursillo and its development in the hope that by sharing the *why* of the Cursillo they would provide those attending with a perspective from which to examine their own movements and provide

encouragement to these movements to seek ways in which to recover the Charism as it was given.

In Canada, these *Conversations* initiated much study and reflection and this study and reflection revealed the changes and adaptation that had crept into our Canadian Catholic movement. This study and reflection have led to fundamental changes in the method and movement and these changes have as their goal and purpose the realignment of the Canadian Movement with that of Mallorca. Prior to the *Conversations* the Canadian <sup>Catholic</sup> movement thought it knew HOW to do Cursillo. What the *Conversations* and the subsequent years of study have provided us with is the WHY we do what we do in the Cursillo. We have learned to be critical of our own efforts, subjecting them to the litmus test of the Mallorcan model. We have learned that *Ultreya* is both a cry of encouragement and an uncompromising directive. Study begets more study and answers are stepping-stones to more questions which in turn take us where we were always supposed to go: *into the deep*.

It is in studying the history of the Cursillo Movement that we will be able to determine if our movement is the genuine and authentic *Cursillo de Cristiandad* of its founder's vision and early history. It is also in this history where we may find the adaptations that have crept into the movement and the actions or steps needed to realign the movement with what it was supposed to be.

The best hope for the continuation and the development of the *Cursillo de Cristiandad* rests in stewards who understand their role as guardians, not owners, of this gift that God has given to the world. The wise steward knows his Master's business and does nothing that would interfere with or change the focus and outcome that the Master decreed.