



PROCESS OF WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE ITS BEGINNING

THE FIRST CURSILLO

What has been called the First Cursillo was not really the first Cursillo; the first Cursillo in the history of our Movement took place in a villa, in Cala Figuera (Santanyí - Mallorca), and it started on August 19, 1944. Therefore, this year it will be forty-five years since the first Cursillo in history. I point this out for the sake of the truth. It is the first thing that must be made clear and that one must know to avoid confusion.

CURSILLOS OF OFFICERS AND ADVANCED PILGRIMS

Back in those days in Mallorca, as well as other dioceses in Spain, the national leaders of the Higher Council of Youth of Catholic Action held a few Cursillos (courses) that they called "Cursillos of Pilgrim Officers" or "Cursillos of Advanced Pilgrims". These were held to instruct people. Those Cursillos had the specific mission of preparing people spiritually and materially for the National Youth Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. These Cursillos lasted a week and developed in a very positive atmosphere of joy and friendship. They addressed themselves exclusively to those who were already members of Catholic Action.

IDEAL: PILGRIMAGE TO THE FATHER

In our group of young lay people in Mallorca we thought that, besides preparing for the pilgrimage to Santiago, it would be ideal to find a similar way to inspire others with the idea of a different pilgrimage, the pilgrimage to Our Father, which is life itself. We felt that we should do this in a way that enabled the message to reach and mainly to reach those who were not or did not believe themselves to be Christians. Most of our friends considered this to be impossible. But some of us threw ourselves into the business with the measure of faith, audacity, reflection, and prayer that we knew the subject deserved.

THE CURSILLO IS BORN

The whole structure of what is today the Cursillos in Christianity was forged in the weeks prior to the Cursillo in Cala Figuera; at that time, it was just called "Cursillo", without any adjective, but later on, some people who witnessed the overwhelming impact that Cursillo produced, began calling them "Cursillos de Conquista" (Cursillos of Conquest). This was in spite of our objections. We took



advantage of our experience in the Cursillos of Officers and Advanced Pilgrims. We took from them a good number of organizational features and modified all those that seemed unsuitable for the persons we wanted to attend and take advantage of our Cursillo. These were namely those who are not believers. One modification was the duration, (which we reduced from one week to three days, plus the beginning or final night). As for the rollos, we incorporated some ideas from the Cursillos for Pilgrims, and we kept the titles of some of them - Piety, Study, Action and Leaders - although logically we had to rewrite them, in order for them to serve our intended purpose. Our rollos were totally innovative. We provided them to the priests who were willing to help us, along with the outlines of the themes on grace from the Cursillos for Advanced Pilgrims.

I served as rector in that first Cursillo. The rest of the team of lay leaders was Jaime Riutort and José Ferragut. The spiritual director was the Reverend Fr. Juan Juliá. I have the joy and feel the duty to say that this was already a genuine and comprehensive Cursillo in Christianity and facilitated its cursillistas in making the triple encounter with themselves, with Christ, and with the brothers. Let me also mention that, whenever I have been fortunate enough to participate in a Cursillo, I have always used the same outlines and the same paperwork that we prepared on the eve of the Cursillo in Cala Figuera. Of course, with the minor exception of the very few outlines that have later required revision - Ideal, Layperson in the Church, and Group Reunion.

Between 1944 and 1948 there were six Cursillos, with similar success, by the grace of God.

THE CURSILLO OF SAN HONORATO

Then why is the Cursillo that took place in the Monastery of San Honorato between January 7 and 10, 1949 usually considered as the first Cursillo?

Let me try to explain it. Catholic Action, in Spain in the forties, had very specific sociological connotations. It grouped together people of the middle and lower middle classes and was led by laymen of that same social strata. The priests that the bishop appointed to Catholic Action were really limited to their role as advisors. I believe that this is the meaning of the position of counselor. They had an enormous respect for our lay autonomy. The young Catholics of the upper social classes usually circulated in orbits around the congregations and associations that they had known in their years of study in prestigious private schools that were run by various religious Orders and Congregations.

Catholic Action, and anything that could arise from it, did not enter into other realities worthy of the attention, because, in that context of apostolate for the "chosen minority" or the elite, outweighed any other considerations.

DOCTOR [BISHOP] HERVÁS AND HIS COLLABORATORS

But in Mallorca the picture changed dramatically in 1947 when Dr. [Bishop] Hervás was appointed coadjutor bishop, with right to succession, for the diocese of Mallorca. His pastoral experience in his native land, Valencia, had focused precisely on Catholic Action. Dr. [Bishop] Hervás soon valued our efforts in a very positive way, and remarkably, he also grasped the meaning of our Cursillo. Right away, in 1948, he installed two of the "main swords" of the clergy of Mallorca as diocesan counselor



and vice-counselor of the youth of Catholic Action. The first one, Fr. Sebastian Gayá, was already prestigious and had a brilliant record, and the second, Fr. Juan Capó, a recent arrival from the Gregorian University of Rome; because of their great personalities, they could not be mere advisers, but became significant leading actors.

Beginning in 1949 this official support allowed people who were otherwise inaccessible to us to attend the Cursillo. Also, the organization of the Cursillo ceased to be an endeavor that was always full of obstacles and in the hands of a few “crazy” people with no means. This organization brought many notable changes. Among other things, the Cursillos began to be numbered, and to be held much more frequently.

This does not mean that from then on we would sail along with an abundance of means and with social acceptance. Our problems have continued for many years, but it was a qualitative step, involving a greater role for the institutional Church. I was also “called” to be the rector of the first numbered Cursillo, in San Honorato, which was the same as all those in Cala Figuera, except for the first meditations, which Fr. Juan Capó provided with a new approach on the only night he was with us in that Cursillo. These meditations were incorporated into the method.

THE CURSILLO, THE LIVING OF THE CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTAL

Clarifying the historical data and context, I must affirm that today more than forty-four years later, I see that first Cursillo in Cala Figuera as a true Cursillo, a compendium of the struggle of man's quest for God and of the love of God in His quest for man. We tried then as we do now to focus the man on the real and the natural so that he can be real and naturally evangelical. We knew that fermenting our environments with Christianity, the environments in which we find ourselves, is the most effective way for the world to be penetrated by the Holy Spirit; and that the way of friendship is the most appropriate for the layman to receive and to transmit all the energy in fundamental Christianity.

Of course, at the same time, I cannot contemplate that seminal moment without recalling the wonders with which the Lord amazes us all the time. Nor can I forget the difficulties that we have encountered so that the Cursillo could continue on the road for which it was conceived and not lose what some now call “the foundational charism,” or to recover it if they do so.

DIFFICULTIES EMERGE

Along this line, now may be a good time to call attention to just how difficult it was in the beginning to get the counselors to accept the Group Reunion. It was hard for them to accept that the basic instrument of the postcursillo was a regular meeting of laypersons not presided over or supervised by a priest. But the Group Reunion went ahead because of the enormous cohesive force that friendship has and because the groups multiplied like the fish and the loaves on the shore of lake Galilee. This made it impossible for them to provide the so-called supervision they wanted. In the same way it was extremely difficult to convince them that the Cursillo for mature men should be the same as the ones that we had started with young people. We started that way because we were young and we always advocated environmental and natural action, namely action towards our friends. Of course, that was just the latest edition of the news-flash of warnings of failure that the learned people had always made when we told them that, in the Cursillo, we wanted to integrate young people who were not well educated with those who were students.



Perhaps it was hardest for them to understand us when we pointed out the necessity for holding Cursillos for women. The priests could only manage to think about women in terms of not hindering the activity of their husbands, that is, when they did not reject them outright. But we finally were able to impose the evidence of the idea on them. So, they began, but not without tremendously “hare-brained” precautions, such as prohibiting the attending priests from being photographed with the cursillistas and forcing them to take their meals in a different room than the women. But at last the Cursillos were given for women too, and not only wives of cursillistas. And they were given with the same content and style as the one of Cala Figuera. It is almost comical that some of the little inquisitors of those days with respect to this matter have now become the champions of the so-called mixed Cursillos, which we do not consider genuine, but rather as “mixed-up Cursillos”. We feel this way for reasons already explained elsewhere.

Faced with these internal difficulties, believe me that the external ones — from the Pastoral Letter of Dr. [Bishop] Enciso to the political impositions in other territories - have not had great significance and have not generated real or great dangers.

THE EVANGELICAL SEED IS ALWAYS EFFECTIVE

Today some insist on adapting the Cursillo substantially according to their countries or the times, “provided that the perfume of the essence of the foundational charism is respected”. We greatly fear that such a convoluted phrase is just saying again what we have been hearing since 1944: “We are going to do something special for ...”

If the Cursillo has already shown us anything it is the universal dimension of its basic message because, whenever it has fallen on good soil, the seed always acclimates naturally and without any special laboratories. Nursery stock is a quite different matter. It is accustomed only to the laboratory and the artificial climate of the experts on duty/of the moment. We do not fear the adaptations arising from life, those that come without an initial pompous desire to change things and whose leading actors are ordinary Christians. But we do not want those that are proposed by laymen who have almost become professionals in the Church, or those that come from pastoral guidelines without careful confirmation. We can say something because all these difficulties have not yet succeeded in drowning the vigor of the Cursillo almost anywhere; however, they have prevented it from really developing its full capacity. That is why we can say that the Cursillo is still to have its debut, even though it is more than forty-four years since Cala Figuera.

WHAT WE ALWAYS PROPOSE REGARDING FERMENTING

There is no doubt that our Movement has changed many lives and improved them. And Cursillo has done a lot of good in many families and other personal relationships; however, where are the human environments that are really impregnated with Christian meaning that we set out on the quest to “ferment” forty-four years ago? Could it be that we have devoted too much effort to intra-ecclesial actions? And have we lost the message of the Study of the Environment rollo? It was precisely the first one that we developed, and the one which brings purpose and meaning to all the others.



TO THE YEAR 2000

I see that the first Cursillo was something necessary so that by the year 2000 we will be able to expose both the prophets of calamities and the prophets of the return to the past by developing in spirit and truth, from our own human realities, the power of loving and being loved. This involves having truly encountered Christ in a Cursillo, and also not allowing ourselves to be later manipulated in his name to dedicate ourselves to sowing in a respectable but foreign field. All this means maintaining the simplicity of what is fundamental to being Christian and the infinite enthusiasm of those “poor cursillistas” of Cala Figuera, who have not even been able to boast of having attended the first one, because it was not until five years later that they started handing out the “cursillista carnets”.

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