

AN INTERVIEW WITH EDUARDO BONNÍN CONDUCTED BY BISHOP PAUL JOSEF CORDES

In early 1997, Eduardo Bonnín received a visit from Bishop Paul Josef Cordes of the Vatican (now Cardinal and President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council “Cor Unum”). Bishop Cordes was called to interview seven founders from prominent ecclesial Movements in preparation for the First World Congress of Ecclesial Movements which would be held in 1998 in Rome.

1. Bishop Cordes: Can you tell us briefly about yourself and your spiritual growth? What kind of environment did you grow up in and what type of formation did you receive?

Eduardo Bonnín: Very sincerely I believe that the Lord, using many circumstances has manifested his will, little by little, throughout my life. Although my confidence in Providence is radical, I have never realized the ideal that I had chosen for my life in my youth. Leading me by other paths the Lord has proven in many circumstances, I should say in all circumstances, that he has better taste than I do.

The environment in which I was born and grew up has certainly been one of the most precious gifts that God has given me. In our family there were ten children, three boys and seven girls. One of my brothers is a diocesan priest and one sister, now deceased, was a Carmelite nun.

Because of my age during the Spanish Civil War and World War 2, my military service lasted nine years. Before that, my schooling took place at La Salle College and at the Augustinian father’s college. Without a doubt, the most primary determining factor in my life is my passion for reading and this is still a factor. Already when I was very young, I had the habit of saying that I would rather go a whole day without eating than a whole day without reading. I have always spent all the money that was at my disposal on books.

2. Bishop Cordes: When you were a young man, what importance did faith have in your life?

Eduardo Bonnín: It was very important. In my humble opinion, faith when it is Christian, is evangelical because it is centered on Christ. Such Christ centered faith sheds light, clarifies and gives direction to all the circumstances of ordinary life, even the unpleasant and complicated ones we encounter on our way to God and to His Church.

3. Bishop Cordes: How did you perceive the question of God?

Eduardo Bonnín: Never has it occurred to me that God could be question, but rather an answer. He is not just an answer but THE answer. I have experienced that when a person has faith, when he believes, he trusts and has confidence in the most amazing reality and in the most difficult thing to understand. God in Christ, loves us, loves me. Everything else flows abundantly and as an unexpected gift from that.

I sincerely believe that sometimes, with the best of intentions, we make a mistake in believing that God came into the world to save it. I humbly confess, that I do not believe this. I believe that He

was incarnated and came into the world to save man not the world, so that man can be happy because of the faith that he has in God.

In my life I have seen people who are very happy although they have nothing and others who are not happy, dying of boredom even though they own much.

All of this helps me to better understand why God says that His kingdom is not of this world and why He puts His Kingdom where He is present where He wants to be present and also where it pleases Him to stay. It is in the interior of each person, in his intelligence and in his heart. In the union of God with man by grace, his ego can be conquered, together with his pride and ambition and that each day his conviction, his determination and his perseverance can be more conformed to the Christian message. Even with all that, I am convinced that even though God's kingdom is not of this world he can give sense and "fullness" to the kingdoms of this world.

4. Bishop Cordes: Since your youth, have you experienced a strong intervention from God in your life, which is significant for the present time?

Eduardo Bonnín: In my mind I have always found my thinking is summarized in the prayer of petition that from the very beginning we addressed to God in the "Apostolic Hour". "Lord make sure that we don't need miracles to believe and act but that our faith be such that we deserve that miracles happen."

I've always been more impressed by the silence of God and his patience than by the miracles and apparitions. The truth usually comes to us through people who appear, and without doubt only appear to be, people who are far away from the purity of our Father and the eternal freshness of the Beatitudes.

5. Bishop Cordes: The Charism of the Cursillo is tied to the history of its Founder. The Movement was born at a precise historical moment that was presenting particular needs to which you have responded. In the light of your personal history, what were the first steps that contributed to the birth of the Movement?

Eduardo Bonnín: I have read this quotation from Ellermeier. "A historical phenomenon can only be properly understood when a light is shone on its origins."

What we could name as "the beginning" of everything was when I left for my military service in 1938, I realized that the world was very different to the image that I had of it. In that environment the values that were being lived were completely opposed to those that I had lived in my family. This is what started me to question myself. "Are these people the way they are because they find the law tiresome or, are they just ignorant of the doctrine?" In observing the details of the lives of these men, gradually I was convinced that it was not the law that was tiresome, but that ignorance of the doctrine weighed heavily on their lives.

From that moment on my principal occupation consisted of finding out what was in reality, the fundamental core essential to the doctrine and to the Christian message, and what was being said

by the Christian authors that in my opinion were explaining it the best and the most clearly. I read St Augustine, St Theresa, and St John of the Cross.

I was also interested in learning about the person towards whom the message is directed. Amongst many authors, I read Dante, Cervantes, Baltasar, Gracian, etc.

Although the hours during my service in which I had nothing to do were numerous, the time that was available obliged me to give priority to certain books. Amongst my preferences were those that I could read that would be most effective: Hugo and Karl Rahner, Romano Guardini, Father Plus, Cardinal Mercier, Cardinal Suenens, Tristan Amoroso Lima, etc. and the psychologists: Carl Rogers and Maslow.

For my part, I believe today, as I believed then, that it is the Gospel that synthesizes and summarizes best the Christian doctrine. Jesus' message is first and foremost news for man from which is born a preoccupation and arouses a desire to know Him. This Christ who through His Grace, offers the surprising possibility of becoming His friend, awakens and reinforces inside of each person the best of who he is.

To go forth in the knowledge of Christ and also in the knowledge of himself as a person, with his capacity for conviction, determination and perseverance is what interested me the most.

To progress in my knowledge of Christ the following books helped me a lot: 'Life Abundant,' Arami, 'Soul of the Apostolate', Chautard, 'The Glories of Divine Grace', M.J Scheeben, etc.

To reach a better understanding of men I read these different books 'Les puissances de je', Louis Lavelle, [In Spanish: Las potencias del Yo], 'We Have Been Friends Together' Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, and later, 'In tierra extrana', [In a Foreign Land] by Lili Alvarez, etc.

6. Bishop Cordes: That's a lot of important texts but there must have been something more than just these books, which influenced your thinking!

Eduardo Bonnín: All this, and mostly my contacts with people made me realize in a direct contact with reality, that when the message of the Gospel is accepted with personalized faith and it reaches the specific singularity, the originality and creativity of each person, it reinforces the human qualities of the person. These qualities, as soon as the life of Grace starts to grow and becomes conscious, brings each human being – in the Christological process, through the logic that Christ habitually uses- to grow in his or her desire to live in thanksgiving for the gift of life, and to experience the joy that results from transmitting it to the widest number possible.

The Movement of Cursillo, by the Grace of God and the prayers of a lot of people, was born of an intense preoccupation with real people in the ordinariness of daily life, ordinary people whose main preoccupation is with simply living, rarely have time to ask themselves why, and even less to find time to be preoccupied with the meaning of their own existence.

What we wanted at the beginning and have always desired, is that the liberty of man encounters the Spirit of God.

Around that central idea, convinced that efficiency consisted mainly of finding the point of convergence that would facilitate that happy encounter, we ourselves have proposed – myself first and after that some others – to study what would be the place and the most adequate method to achieve that result rapidly, simply and in an attractive manner.

At that time the superior council for young men of the Catholic Action was pushed by its national president, Manuel Aparici – who later became a priest and chaplain of the same council – to gather 100,000 young people, living in the Grace of God, at St. James of Compostela. This was an answer to what Pius XI had stressed in 1937 in his encyclical with “Burning Desire”, regarding the situation of the Church in the German Reich: meaning that the world should be able to count on a Christianity founded on solid Christian virtues which would become an example and a guide.

A commission of youth from Catholic Action went to Rome to promise the Holy Father that they would try to make the answer to this need in the world, a reality in Spain.

From that, and using the holidays of Christmas and Easter, they went to many dioceses to present courses on Christian life. These Cursillos lasted a full week. They gave themselves the name of Pilgrim Leaders, for those working at the diocesan level, and Pilgrim Guides, for those working at the parochial level. The intended goal was to motivate young people to go to [the shrine of] St. James in pilgrimage. The following slogans became very famous at the time: ‘Saints for Santiago’, ‘to make the pilgrimage is nothing, to make a pilgrimage with faith is to clear a way’.

When the first of these Cursillos took place in Mallorca I didn’t want to go, in spite of the invitation I received. In fact, I did not belong to Catholic Action and the manner in which they acted did not motivate me to become one of them.

When the second course of this type was given the year after, the president insisted that I go, which I did. I then saw in these young men a life-style, a joyful and relaxed attitude that convinced me.

Sometime after, when another course like the previous ones was again given in Mallorca, I was asked to be a part of it, using the outline of the talk on the “Study of the Social Environment”, and some other data that it was evident had a different perspective to the rest of the talks.

I couldn’t free myself from a question that preoccupied my mind, “What will happen after the great pilgrimage?” With some friends, we asked ourselves the following question: “After Santiago, what will happen?”

Out of this model we got the idea of how to give the message at the depth that we wanted, to convey, to communicate our ideas – (different to those that were given to us, as I already said, because they were situated at a different level and had a very specific goal) – it wasn’t the talks and explanations that would motivate them, but to live the message with them, to infect them. To live with them, bringing them to an isolated place and forming groups that would facilitate the dialogue between people. In these Cursillos we also retained some of the topics of discussion; because we couldn’t only create new things, we had to adapt to the rhythm of the people, while at the same time reflecting on the ways in which to animate them.

7. Bishop Cordes: Therefore, you gave worth to the concept of the Cursillos, already organized by Catholic Action. But it is evident, with the new things that you added, that you were pursuing something new?

Eduardo Bonnín: What appeared clear to us was that the Cursillos organized by Catholic Action, lasted too long and this was detrimental to the number of people who could receive the message. We thought that a period of three days would be ideal and if these three days included Saturday and Sunday, it would be simple to take one day off, Friday. Since the Cursillo begins on Thursday night, it became easy to gather a group for a weekend; this was a way to simplify the road in order to have the message reach a greater number of people. But what was most interesting was to study what was at the heart of the message in question, in order to communicate it effectively, with integrity, brevity and depth in a manner which was both attractive and yet which revealed its possibilities, to the greatest number of people.

Reflecting, praying, studying, and praying again, was the way in which the Cursillos in Christianity were conceived, born and developed. At first, they were called simply Cursillos, but afterwards, in order to distinguish them from all the courses existing at the time – courses for professors, for policemen, etc. – others, not us, gave them the name “Cursillos of Conquest.” This was absolutely displeasing to those of us who started them. The prayer that we said at the beginning of reunions or when the tension in the debates required it, gives an idea of the climate that emanated from these reunions. At this time, I already belonged to Catholic Action, but I didn’t like the apathetic routine and pious rhythm that we had to give to all activities so that we would be unobtrusive.

We were moving with a different rhythm in a different direction, always concerned with the needs of those who are far away from the Church. To avoid any tensions with Catholic Action – instead of opposing them – we kept ourselves on the fringes but with a desire to bring about renewal. We realized that we had to maintain a good distance so that we could observe things from another perspective. To reach this goal we gathered to study more faithfully and more deeply the doctrine that we wanted to communicate. In order to give the message in the most personalized way we studied the environments in which the people that we wanted to reach lived.

First, in our group we began the *study of the environment*.

I brought to the group everything that I had been reflecting on for a long time; we wanted to know how people are and to give more precision to that study, we tried to group people in our imaginations according to what they were living. This included atheists all the way to those who were living and acting as authentic Christians and Catholics. From this we made some personal files, still in our imaginations, formulated from the reality of life. For example, in the file of the young soldier it was noted: “the young soldier who obeys his superiors, when he is in front of them because he cannot help it but who quibbles and mumbles behind their back because he has had enough”.

No priests assisted at these meetings, not from a deliberate will to exclude them but because their multiple tasks rendered their presence difficult.

Besides that, we understood that the innovations of our ideas, especially before they were well structured and balanced, would be shocking to their mentality, which was rooted in their tradition and ministerial practice.

Some anecdotes from this time would clarify what we were looking for by positioning ourselves in this way.

What we are saying is that Cursillo has to be heterogeneous, – that is, all kinds of people had to join together in the adventure: people that are near and those that are far away, the intelligent and the ignorant, the workers and the ‘high and mighty’, students and manual workers, etc.- but we were told that what is interesting for a student can never interest a docker [longshoreman].

The comprehensive attitude that we were forced to have was that the recently converted person had an enthusiastic spirit, which was an affront to the petrified rigidity of the ordinary people, and this showed the difficulty of our position. When these people came at an unacceptable hour – the only one possible for them after their work – to ask a priest to say the apostolic hour in the church, the answer was very clear and sharp: “We can’t open the church at this hour”. From their point of view, they were completely right but we had to use precious time, running against the clock, because we were always trying to get the parish priests to understand the mentality of these young, recent converts and to make sure that what was happening wouldn’t give a reason to develop instinctual prejudices against the parish priests.

The ‘spirit of Cursillo’, which is the substance of the Gospel adapted to the diversity of individual situations, erupts sometimes in a person with a powerful drive that was not always easy to contain. The bursting force of a bubbling and overflowing generosity that was shocking then and shocks still today, when not choked by rules or bureaucratic procedures.

We must thank God for the complementary roles of the priest and the lay people in the three-day weekend. There, if the things are done the way they should be, the priest will feel more as a priest and content in knowing it, he lives that good expression of St. Augustine: “With you I am a Christian, for you I am your bishop”.

On the other side, at the level of the lay people, Cursillo brings the discovery that if their human values are consecrated to live a more Christian life instead of being used to resolve the internal problems of the Church, it contributes to increasing the prestige of the Church and bringing it closer to the world.

We have to thank some priests who had confidence in us, letting us explore freely to find new ways, wishing to find the most adequate one in order to communicate the good news that in some way would break through old ideas and would overcome boring habits with the eternal strength of the Gospel.

Needless to say, that new ideas always cause problems. We went through very hard times, and some of those experiences lived in the Movement are still painful today and hurt my sense of justice.

8. Bishop Cordes: God has always fermented different Charisms in the Church.

Eduardo Bonnín: It has always been evident to me that God has never abandoned His Church. In His infinite providence He makes sure all through history the love He has for men will always manifest itself one way or the other.

The ways that He utilizes to touch man's conscience and to open it to the unbelievable, but possible, friendship with Him is always different and varies, depending on the person.

Sometimes to obtain the attention and the will of a man God will use another person or an event or an idea, a community an institution, a behavior, etc.

9. Bishop Cordes: What is a Charism for you?

Eduardo Bonnín: I firmly believe in what the theology affirms. We can verify that a charism is a gift of God given to the one He chooses. It is given not for the one who receives it, but for the community so that the community and the Church will benefit.

10. Bishop Cordes: A Charism realizes itself in the heart of the Church.

Eduardo Bonnín: To feel Christian and not to feel self as a member of a Church seems to me to be a contradiction. When this happens, I tell myself that it signifies an ignorance of what it is to be a Christian or what the Church is. It is a very common contradiction. The message of Christ reaches many men uniquely and exclusively by way of rigid and demanding moral precepts that are separated from the source of their truth. It appears absurd to them, and the notion of the Church reaches them in a manner so diminished and false that for many, the Church is formed solely by a few men who are light years away from the reality of life, and who use a language that makes communication very difficult and makes dialogue impossible.

11. Bishop Cordes: What has been and is your relation to the ecclesial structure? And with the Pope, responsible by his function for the discernment of charisms?

Eduardo Bonnín: In my humble opinion, it is the responsibility of the ecclesial structure to discern, to encourage but not to choke initiatives or ideas.

In this respect, I was very happy to read: "The judgment of the authenticity of a charism and its reasonable exercise, is the responsibility of those who have the authority in the Church; it is their duty, above all, not to choke the Spirit, but to examine all and to retain all that is good."

The Cursillo Movement is a movement in the Church, but not for the Church, but rather for the world, meaning for everybody in the world, in the same way that the Church herself is. As part of the Church, it needs priests and lay people in it, who, in addition to a constant dialogue, must be faithful to and not distance themselves from the Foundational Charism. Unfortunately, importance has always been given to alienating things, mainly on the juridical level, and to the ideas of those who give the impression, that they are searching more to glorify themselves than to studying seriously, and in depth, the "WHY" of Cursillo and "TO WHOM" it is directed.

I believe it is clear, that at all times I wanted to be a son of the Church. What I notice is that history repeats itself many times: when someone has an idea different to the oldest of ideas, there are always people who rise up, using all their energy, to persecute and discredit it. I find it very good that the hierarchy should do the discernment. In my opinion, new ideas can be passing sparks or flames, capable of lighting up the horizon. Sometimes, the innovators – and I have myself experienced this affirmation – adopt an attitude similar to the one adopted by Jesus’ disciples when people did not want to receive Him in Samaria: “Lord, may the fire of heaven be upon them!” I have often thought that the Lord must have rejoiced at the strength and vehemence with which His disciples were making their request. This never distracted Him from maintaining His own serene attitude, and consequently the fire of heaven never struck.

I believe that all initiatives and preoccupations that surface in some way everywhere, have, without doubt, a need for discernment by the hierarchy, to calm the spirit and ease their ardor, accomplished by them studying what merits exist, according to their discernment. But I am asking myself why the way to reach it has to be so complicated.

Concerning “Cursillo”, that dialogue has never been possible nor has listening to the Founders. I must confess that I am not speaking the truth when using the plural, but to singularize myself leaves me uneasy. It is possible that this is all my fault, because I chose the easy solution by being silent on the truths I lived, not by a choice of facility, but by experiencing in my own flesh, an infinite number of times, that to obey was more important than the truth and my interest was that the “Cursillo” should flourish in spite of everything.

12. Bishop Cordes: Can you tell us how your charism is lived in concrete terms, and how the persons living in your movement are expressing it in their lives?

Eduardo Bonnin: I must say, before anything else that the “your” in the question puts me ill at ease. I believe that what the movement has achieved, all that it has tried to accomplish in the world, has become a reality because its author is the Holy Spirit.

According to my understanding, the charism has been confirmed with time, because of the manner in which people, possessing the right disposition necessary for the three days of the Cursillo, and who grasped the simplicity of the message, have welcomed it into their lives, by trying to live it daily, fixing and affirming what they have learned in the Cursillo, namely the Group Reunion, for the personal dimension, and the Ultreya for the social dimension.

In both cases, it is by carefully cultivating the dynamism of conversion, through the unifying force of friendship, which not only brings people together and creates a bond, but it makes them also feel voluntarily united in the daily and human life of a small group, which creates and maintains, in the small things, a heartfelt closeness, where each one can express himself as he is, in front of the others.

The lively and attractive bond in these groups is facilitated by the personal disposition of each one in pursuing, in their own life, the three things asked on the first day of the Cursillo, his spirit of hopeful enthusiasm, the gift of himself, and love.

This disposition is lived in an atmosphere of great brotherhood that engenders a special type of relationship, with its own language and its own style of sincere and natural joy. It is a very distinct and different spirit than what the so-called “pious people” are used to living.

The conclusion drawn by those who have lived the experience of Cursillo is the evidence that God loves everyone in Jesus Christ.

Each knows that to be Christian is to first feel being loved by God, and to live in wonder of it, since what is most authentically Christian is to let God love us. The interior attitude created by this reality, when believed and lived fully, becomes a leaven and is transmitted to others. But, to grasp this, to experience it, to encounter God who is love, it is necessary to present ourselves to Him as we truly are.

13. Bishop Cordes: Normally we believe that the Good News only addresses itself to the specialists. To whom is your Charism destined? Why do laity and the consecrated live it together?

Eduardo Bonnín: Since the very beginning the Cursillo Movement proposes that the Good News is addressed to all the people of the world without distinction. The Charism of Cursillo is for all but we say also that if these persons that we qualify as locomotives, in our terminology, come first, it would be much easier for the railcars to follow.

Wherever and whenever the Charism of the Cursillo has manifested itself, the priests and the laity understood it. There is always a beneficial encounter for both and the most urgent and pressing preoccupation for all who are called to follow the Cursillo method will succeed in knowing the grace of God and living it. This will encourage sincere friendship and will help to eliminate prejudices and misunderstandings. What makes Cursillo different or most unique, is that diverse people participate and follow it, when only the essentials, the fundamental points, of Christianity are explained.

The Cursillos are always concrete and always aimed at the uniqueness, personality and personal creativity of each one. It means that a man, when he becomes aware of the good and the evil that he can reach in discovering and exercising his liberty, discovers that he is not alone and that He has the Spirit of God with him. It defines and explains the need for self-esteem and that money destroys and prostitutes. He learns to discern what has price and what has value compared to what is unchangeable starting always from the value of the Gospel. It ensures that the message reaches the most people who will learn the Good news that God loves them, and that Good News is communicated in the most effective way, which is by means of friendship. Realizing that the triple encounter which takes place in the Cursillo, with oneself, with Christ and with the brothers is in reality, becoming friends with oneself, with Christ and with the brothers. This, together with loyalty to God’s grace, offers a Christian criterion which facilitates a more accurate orientation, the necessary light, and the constant courage to solve any problem according to God’s light. Then, little by little, we understand that Christ has come to bring us true happiness, making the way simple and giving us the necessary means, we experience then, with Christ living in us by grace that we can go through difficult circumstances and feel good. We are called to make God’s tenderness present in this world.

14. Bishop Cordes: Today, how do you see your relationship with God?

Eduardo Bonnín: My relationship with God is evident in my cordial relationship in sincere and profound friendship with marginalized persons, mostly prisoners, drug addicts and alcoholics. Never did it occur to me to teach them anything, rather I try to profit from them by what I can learn from them. Many of them are experts on the virtue of hope, others have been able to forgive things that we cannot even imagine, others hope in spite of their own hopelessness, and many, in spite of the wounds of their hearts, prefer the possibility of giving joy to others, trying to alleviate in some small way, their bitter life.

I believe that this contact, that I build up with tact, without paternalism, in a brotherly and friendly closeness, has brought me nearer to God, in prayer, in the sacraments, in a living relationship with Him, in His Church.

15. Bishop Cordes: How do you meet God in your journey?

Eduardo Bonnín: Today, as well as yesterday and forever, I see, or better I experience, the relationship with God through the gift He has given me of being able to live in His grace. I try to be conscious of it and to cultivate this gift through prayer and regular reception of the sacraments.

I have always been astonished, and I have a hard time to understand, the need to find motivations that are relevant to our times and even to the place where we live, in order to stimulate in persons, the love of Christ.

I believe, in all sincerity, that if we would put the supreme motivation in the forefront (the reality of the love that God has for every person and all that would happen in this regard, if one deepened it, studied it, found and explicitly used the means to achieve it) one would obtain much more from each one. Every Christian, instead of encouraging the so called “religious” aspect around them, would achieve more if they could succeed in affirming in a Christian way, the hearts and minds of many.

I have always entertained the idea of using those responsible for the animation of Christian communities. I believe that if these energies were used for the goal of bringing each one to find and to come to a knowledge of self, thereby discovering their own qualities, the way would be simpler, and the people would learn to be thankful for these qualities. This way they would then be in a position to accept them, and even to acknowledge their own limitations with optimism.

I believe it is the right direction to take so that each person obtains, according to his or her personal response to the supreme truth, that God loves us in Christ, a Christian criterion, so that he or she can discern in the light of the Gospel, anything that he/she might encounter in daily life.

When we love, we have a certainty; we know we love, when we are being loved, it is a matter of believing. The one who loves has doubts about everything, whether or not they are loved in return, but the one who feels loved, doubts nothing. Along this line, when one experiences things in this way, because faith in being loved by God in Christ is the motive, the orientation, and the goal of

life, one perceives that being a Christian is not only knowing that one day one will render accounts, but is to live in the awareness that one is alive, which prompts one to give thanks to God.

When one has this attitude towards life, one realizes that life is beautiful, that people are important, and that life is worth living.

16. Bishop Cordes: Therefore, it is indispensable to be grounded on the Gospel?

Eduardo Bonnín: For me, the Gospel is always the right orientation, an illuminating light, and a constant encouragement at all the crossroads of my life. My goal has always been to be able to pray the Our Father, daily and in truth.

17. Bishop Cordes: What is the meaning of “to evangelize” today?

Eduardo Bonnín: In my view, this means the same thing in the past and in the future. The Gospel does not change; it is up to us to change. The Gospel is always new and renews us. It is the means to live it that are changing. I see that the difficulty at present comes from the fact that man prefers what is immediate more than what is true, and this happens because the whole world is organized to prevent man [people] from thinking, or having time to think, to dominate him [them] and manipulate him [them], and to propose anything to him [them], except to act as a man [person].

To evangelize a person is not only to speak about the Gospel, but it is necessary to place them in circumstances where it will permit them to grasp Christ’s message, and in the midst of the complications of their life, they discover, under the light of faith, that the Gospel gives them the right orientation to use their liberty and to be happier, a light by which to find the precise balance that gives them interior peace and constant encouragement to interpret the events of life, good and bad.

18. Bishop Cordes: How is your Charism reflected in the heart of the modern world?

Eduardo Bonnín: Even though they are obscure, I do not want to doubt the good intentions of those who always use the personal generosity of new converts, by giving them an orientation, not towards the world in which they are living, but into the internal affairs of the Church. This is manifested in teaching catechism or visiting senior citizens etc. since there is a whole range of activities where good people are needed. Is there something better for these persons converted in the Cursillos? If the result is that this task pleases them, they have a sense of satisfaction, they believe they have made it; the dynamics of their conversion, that was supposed to continue, is turned in on self, they are very pleased at the good they are doing. They feel satisfied.

We cannot avoid thinking that it would be different and more effective to direct these converts of the Cursillos towards the world, towards their world, where they are living, to live in it as Christians, in a natural way, with joy and spontaneity.

But instead of doing this, the contrary has almost always been promoted: our members have been solicited to work in Caritas, to be responsible for a course in catechesis, to be part of the parish choir, etc. All this leads on a regular basis, and in a somewhat despairing manner, to the following alternative: if the person is very intelligent, but not very holy – I say very holy – he pulls the

blanket onto his side and if he agrees to anything that is asked, he or she can say goodbye to their husband or wife, their children, their work relationships and their friends, because they have no time left for themselves. In my humble opinion, maybe they will become very holy on this path, but they will not be the kind of saint that the world and the Church needs today.

In this prearranged setting, those working in the cultural field, in politics, in economy and in their own social life, have been uprooted from their environment where God planted them and have been transplanted into the sphere of pious things. If these persons think, because they are in the habit of having their own ideas and their own personality, they are told to pray. I do not wish to think that those who pray cannot be a bother, or that a priest can be better served by twenty obedient people rather than by someone who is capable of having his own ideas; but If a person lives a deeply Christian life, with his or her personality molded by grace, this allows him/her to evangelize by being the light, the salt and the leaven among his/her work companions, among friends, and without any doubt, to effectively influence his/her own environment.

I cannot avoid thinking that one will not go very far if the culture, the politics, the economy and social life cannot count on truly Christian persons, with conviction, determination and perseverance. Cursillos are not the unique way to achieve it, but where they were used according to their purpose, it was possible to make this a reality, which already from the beginning, filled us with joy. This is well underlined by a certain Fr. Beda Bernegger: “If Christianity is capable of showing to the people outside of faith, that it can unite in one family spirit, persons of the most diverse social classes, from the academician to the craftsman, from the civil servant to the daily worker, from the businesswoman to the ordinary woman, then the simple reality will act with an irresistible vigor and will become the most perfect tool for apostolate.”

19. Bishop Cordes: As for you, what relationships have you with those who do not have faith, who belong to another religion or another Christian denomination?

Eduardo Bonnín: I have excellent relationships, much better than those I have with those who have always been Christians, who believe that they have made it – and I want to believe that all this is done in good will. These Christians, who believe that religious practice is an end unto itself and not a means to achieve the end, it is they who have a hard time to understand that Christians should enter into conversion, on a daily basis, into a process that is more and more ongoing, and that what it is to be in relationship with God, to understand better, to know that one believes rather than believing that one knows.

One of the things for which I will never be thankful enough to God and, without doubt, one of the best gifts that He has given me, is to have been invited many times by our separated Protestant brothers and sisters of the United States. They are brothers and sisters from whom we are separated whom I would call my desired brothers and sisters.

The different invitations I have always accepted are those which had as their goal the opportunity to explain what the Cursillo Movement is and what it is supposed to be. Each meeting has been warm, fruitful and a source of mutual good. I could speak freely, noting the big difference with the meetings with the “high level” of the OMCC (Organismo Mundial de Cursillos de Cristiandad),

where I was never listened to, and where the rules give a different direction than the one, we, the Founders, have always attempted to follow and are willing to continue to follow.

20. Bishop Cordes: What are the challenges presented to today's Church?

Eduardo Bonnín: Often, I have asked myself: what is the most pressing need in today's world: either a people of the Church or a Church of people? What is needed are persons who are truly persons, that is men and women capable of conviction, determination and perseverance.

There was a time when human things served to protect the divine things. Today, we note that the divine realities by themselves, if they are lived through people who assume them with conviction and put them into place with determination and perseverance, can serve as references to scientific and technical progress, to have the necessary human depth for authentic progress where men [and women] can feel themselves as brothers [and sisters].

Sincerely, I believe that the unique institution which possesses all the qualities for being a direct highway, clear and strong towards the future, is the Catholic Church, on the condition that she be always turned toward the people in the world, and not towards the world of people, and that she stops existing solely for herself.

21. Bishop Cordes: According to you, is the Church prepared to face the future?

Eduardo Bonnín: Since the devil never takes vacations, not even, at Christmas, and since he is always on the alert "like a roaring lion", Christians cannot sleep.

In my humble opinion, the dangers are always the same, and they are all produced by the absence of God in the minds and the hearts of human beings. The numerous offences prevalent today, as well as yesterday and forever, all have a similar cause. If we reflect well, we always come to the same conclusion as the sisters of Lazarus, when Christ came to them after their brother's death: "If you had been here, our brother would not have died."

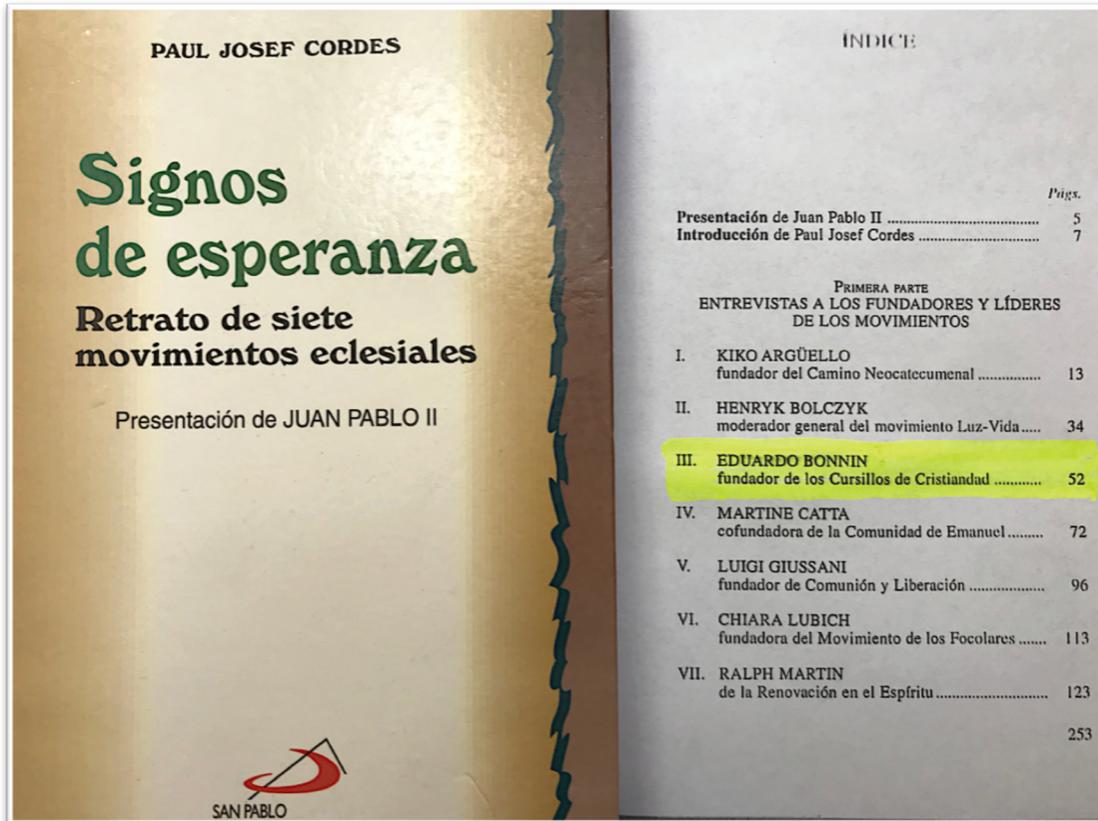
I have always thought that when the Church has failed to be human because of the frailty of her people, she has also failed to be Christian. And that which is Christian, when not human, is not Christian.

I believe that what is Christian happens, when the wave of the sea of the world hits the cliff of Christian conviction. What counts is that man who lives in the heart of the world, in his lay world, where God has placed him, can see from that place, the tremendous power of the attraction manifested in the wonderful meeting between what is human, because it is Christian, and what is Christian, because it is human. Bad events can become good in the heart of man.

As a son of the Church, I want to follow all that the Pope points out as a direction for the 3rd millennium.

To achieve getting different people to come face to face with themselves, with Christ and with their brothers and sisters, is without doubt the best means for us to be better prepared to be able to follow with more conviction and more spirit the leading of the Church.

In his book, “Signs of Hope – Portrait of Seven Ecclesial Movements”, Bishop Paul Josef Cordes (Vice President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity 1980-1995) interviewed seven founders from prominent ecclesial movements in preparation for the first World Congress of Ecclesial Movements to be held the following year in Rome. Bishop Cordes contacted Eduardo for an interview regarding Cursillos in Christianity to which Eduardo would give a testimony in Rome in 1998.



Cover of the book by Bishop Paul Josef Cordes, “Signs of Hope: Portrait of Seven Ecclesial Movements, Presented to Pope John Paul II”. The book was published by San Pablo in 1998. A photo of the book’s

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