



HOW THE IDEA OF THE “STUDY OF THE ENVIRONMENT” OCCURRED TO ME

An excerpt from the book “My Spiritual Testament”

The underlying original seed of the idea of Cursillo grew out of the conflict that took place in me, when the education I had received from the family environment that I had always lived in collided with the environment at the barracks when, at the age of 18, I entered military service. This lasted 9 years, during which I was a private, as everyone else, and not in secondary services.

Completely different values were lived there, quite opposite to those that had been my light and guidance since my youth.

This shock, continuously proven in my life at the barracks, prompted me to have the following thought: do these people feel weighed down by the Law or do they ignore the Doctrine?

For a great many reasons I came to the conclusion that, rather than feeling weighed down by the Law they had no idea of the Doctrine; no idea of the Truth; this Truth which, if we believe it with faith and practice it with joy, makes us free men and women.

Most of them had a wrong and fearful concept of religion. For them religion was just a series of prohibitions placed upon them which hindered their lives and prevented them from using the freedom they could enjoy according to their own whim, especially now when they lived so far away from their family environment.

The barracks were located close to, almost in the heart of, the red-light district of our City of Palma, and collective visits to brothels were frequent. At night, on returning to the barracks, their conversations were extremely interesting, all of them almost always revolving around their frequent incursions into that environment of vice.

I never liked to raise important questions before a group of people; I always thought it was much better to speak heart to heart, from one person to another, so that a constructive dialogue could start, where the possibility of reaching an understanding and even of starting a new friendship is much higher.

I always tried and sometimes managed to get a private talk with the leader of the clique and I almost always did it in the same way, i.e. by asking:

“Did you have a nice time?” The answer was always the same: “yes”, but I insisted: “Did you really enjoy it a lot, very much?” The response would be: “Well, you know...”; and when we reached the intimate, personal and confidential level, he used to say: “I cannot stop thinking about my fiancée and how upset



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my mother would be if they knew about these adventures of mine and besides, if I am to be honest, I will tell you that after this type of adventure there is no peace in me”.

So, in the end I spent all my extensive time at the barracks trying to find out what people were like, and I came to the conclusion that at the heart, at the very heart, everybody is the same.

This spurred my desire to dig deeper into the core of Christianity and my almost instinctive usual urge to read focused now on the books whose authors at the time were at the crest of the wave of the Christian world: Hugo Rahner, Karl Rahner, Fr. Plus, the husband and wife Raïssa and Jacques Maritain, Karl Roggers, Maslow, Leon Bloy, Van de Meer of Malcheren, Rene Schwob, Gustavo Thibon, Erich Fromm, Jacques Leclerc, etc.

Then, a book entitled “H.H. Pious XII and Catholic Action,” came into my hands and on page. 45, num. 59, I read a paragraph which reads literally, “It is the duty of the parish priest, with a quick and agile look at the dual aspect of his parishioners, to form a clear and carefully detailed picture, we would say topographically, street by street, of his community. i.e. On the one hand the population of the faithful, especially its outstanding members, which could bring out the elements to promote Catholic Action within the community, and on the other hand the groups that had moved away from the practice of Christian life. They are also sheep that belong to the parish; lost sheep, and also for these, and even for them particularly, you are responsible custodians, my dearest children, and as good pastors you must not dodge any effort or work to find them and win them over again, nor must you indulge in any rest until all of them have found safety, life and joy in the return to the fold of Christ. (Address to the parish priests and Lenten preachers in Rome, on February 6, 1940).

That letter, which I have wanted to transcribe in its entirety, had an unusual effect on me and brought me to the decision that the most important thing to start with was to have at our disposal, as the Pope advised, a “detailed study” of the situation. That conclusion led me to examine each of the constellations of individuals in the world, in my world and in the Church that I knew and frequented.

Then I also felt it necessary and appropriate to observe each of the individuals separately to find out, for example, what the young soldier was like, and I thought: “He obeys his officers because he cannot do otherwise, he grumbles and murmurs behind their backs because he cannot bear any more”. I carried on in this way trying to get an idea of what the young student, the young worker, the young undergraduate, the young clerk, and so on, were like. All this, as I said before, was aimed at getting an idea as accurate as possible of the real truth of the matter.

From all this, in 1943, the “Study of the Environment” was born and it was the beginning and origin of all that came afterwards.

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