

THE FOUNDATIONAL CHARISM OF THE CURSILLO MOVEMENT

Korea September 30 to October 5, 1997

INTRODUCTION

Before talking about the Foundational Charism of the Cursillo Movement, we need to define what a charism is.

According to the Pastoral Directory, Verbo Divino (Divine Word 1988), the Greek term charism, means gift, present, and is tantamount to Grace, endowment, also to calling, vocation. Practically it means functions and activities.

Charisms are therefore, the effects of Gods' spirit on a particular believer. A charism can never be demanded or exacted by any person, neither can it be foreseen or anticipated in any way by the official organs of the Church. Nor can they be procured through the reception of the Sacraments.

In its proper and relevant meaning, a charism can be defined as a continuous and concrete vocation (it comprises time and eternity) which operates within the Christian community, forming it and building it up in a permanent way and at the service of our fellow creatures through our love. The definition in the dictionary goes on to say. *Since its forms are unforeseeable, the charism has to be discovered and accepted again and again, in ways which are always new and this calls for a delicate discernment and attentiveness to the Spirit within the Community of the Church.*

Theology says that a charism is a gift that God gives to whomsoever He wants, but is not meant for the person who gets it, but rather for the welfare of the whole Community and the Church.

A charism has certain elements and these are that it is:

A gift of God.

To specific men or women

For people and the Church

Recognized by the Hierarchy



1. A GIFT FROM GOD.

Therefore there is no speck of doubt that the Cursillo Movement has its own operative Charism, because it is a gift from the Holy Spirit to His church. Through a group of laymen, from the beginning of the Movement in Mallorca in 1944, the Cursillo has been accomplishing the process whereby many, many people have been able to rediscover themselves, God, through Christ and the brothers and sisters. A Charism recognized by the Hierarchy.

2. A GIFT TO SPECIFIC MEN

In order to get a better understanding of our charism, it is necessary to state precisely the human circumstances of its birth.

It was to a specific group of young laymen, specific people, in a particular place and time, who after much prayer, study, and deep reflection came up with the structure of the “Cursillos in Christianity Movement” and set it in motion.

Although there is no doubt that it is a gift from God, the Cursillos had their beginnings and what we could call human gestation.

In order to be able to understand better its true process we could call to mind that sentence of Ellermeier which says, “an historical phenomenon can only be properly grasped when light is shed on its beginnings.”

The beginning of the beginning, what we could call the first stage, consisted of a perceptive and experienced restlessness caused by the understandable confusion in the aftermath of almost two consecutive wars, the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War.

People were praying at that time for many people were seriously concerned and they asked themselves, “What is going to happen?”. But first one and then others thought, “Can something be done in addition to praying?”

And so by getting together, praying, thinking and researching, praying and praying again, one, who did not belong to the Catholic Action yet, decided to study the situation in detail.

It happened that an address given by Pope Pius XII to parish priests and Lenten preachers in Rome on February 6, 1940, attracted the attention of first, this one person and later others. This talk made a tremendous impact on us. Among other things the Pope was telling the priests, to be very observant and to assess the situation by making a clear and detailed topographical picture, street by street, to recognize that there existed on one hand faithful people, mainly the dedicated members, potential members of Catholic Action. On the other hand, the groups of people who had moved away from Christian life: “These are also sheep that belong to the parish, stray sheep. You are guardians responsible for these sheep, and I would even say, mainly for these.” Pope Pius XII, Easter, Rome, 1940.



The reading of this address given by the Pope motivated us to carry out a thorough and deep study of the environment in a more serious and systematic way and to put it on paper in a very concrete way. The outcome was a text which already at that time, 1940, we named "Study of the Environment".

We tried to determine the way to reach that Environment, how to make that environment into a Christian one. In those days we also carried out a survey which we called "The Good Ones", in which with an unconstrained irony typical of our youth, we came to the conclusion that the leaven we could count upon was not the most appropriate for our task.

In that state of affairs, in 1941, the High Council for the Youth of Catholic Action had been motivated by its national Chairman, Manuel Aparici to gather 100,000 young men who lived in God's grace, in Santiago de Compostela. All this was a response to the Encyclical, by Pope Pius XI in 1937, "With Burning Anxiety" on the situation of the Catholic Church under the German Reich, in which he said that the world needed to be able to count on a Christianity, which through solid Christian values could become an example and guide to the world.

A commission of young people went to Rome to promise the Holy Father that they, the Youth of Catholic Action, would strive and endeavor to have Spain supply that Christianity which the Pope longed for.

With this aim and taking advantage of Christmas and Easter holidays, they travelled to different dioceses and gave short courses (workshops) that lasted for a week and were called "Advanced Courses for Pilgrims" [Adelantado de Peregrinos], when given for a whole diocese or "Courses for Leaders of Pilgrims" [Jefes de Peregrinos] – if given to a parish only. Their aim was to raise the interest of young people to make the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

Expressions like "Saints to Santiago !!!" and "To make the pilgrimage means nothing, to make the pilgrimage with faith means clearing the way", became very popular in those days.

When the first 'Advanced Course for Pilgrims' [Adelantado de Peregrinos] took place in Mallorca, I did not want to go in spite of the fact that I had been invited. Furthermore, I did not belong to Catholic Action at that time and the way their leaders were and behaved did not move me to join them."

When, in the following year, the second of these short courses took place, the diocesan Chairman of the Association was very insistent that I should attend which I did. I could observe in those young people a style and attitude that convinced me or won me over. Subsequently, when some time later they held another course in Mallorca, they asked me to take part, which I also did. They asked me to take part, adding to their schedule the rollo Study of Environment and some other things which obviously had a totally different view and approach than the rest.

I could not help being concerned with what would happen after the great Pilgrimage and together with some others, we asked ourselves, "after Santiago, what?"



From these courses we got the idea that if we wanted to be listened to and our message to sink deep in those to whom we wanted to communicate our ideas, it could be accomplished by living it with those we wanted to carry with us, and not just by giving them lectures and explanations. Our ideas were different to the ideas of the previously mentioned courses which, as I have already said, were on another level and had a specific aim. The way the Cursillos were carried out could be done in the same way but the goals were different. We had to gather them in an isolated place and form small groups in order to facilitate dialogue between them. Apart from this idea, we took from the Catholic Action courses the names of some of the talks. We could not do everything new, we had to set our pace to find a rhythm in what needed to be done while we were trying to find the way to enliven them and shorten their duration.

We knew that the Pilgrim courses lasted too long and determined this was to the detriment of the type of people we wanted our message to reach. We thought that three days would be an ideal length and if we included Saturday and Sunday in these three days, then things would become very simple since it was rather easy to get one day off, Friday. If we started our Cursillos on a Thursday night, it would be more feasible to gather a group of people over the weekend. In this way, we were making things simpler to get the message through to many more people.

However, what we were most interested in was to thoroughly study the ideas that formed and synthesized the message, in order to be in a position to communicate it to as many people as possible in a lively, whole, non-complicated, feasible and attractive way.

By mulling it over, praying for it, studying it, and praying again, the gestation, birth and development of the Cursillo Movement took place. In the beginning, they were called simply "Cursillos", but afterwards somebody, not us, called them "Cursillos of Conquest" which was done to distinguish them from the various short courses that were given in those days – courses for school masters, sergeants, etc. although we founders did not like the new name at all.

A prayer that we used to pray at the opening of the meetings or when decisions of the deliberations made it advisable, gives an idea of the atmosphere presiding in those meetings.

At this time, I had become a member of Catholic Action, but did not like the apathetic routine and the pious bias that we had to give to our activities so that they would not appear out of tune.

The rhythm and goal were different. We always had in mind the "faraway". In order to avoid conflict with Catholic Action, we felt that we should keep at a necessary distance to be able to observe things from a different perspective. Always we had the idea of improving Catholic Action; we were not against it, but we were distinct from it.

We passionately read all the Christian writers who were fashionable in those days: Hugo Rahner, Karl Rahner, Romano Guardini, Cardinal Mercier, Tristan Amoroso, Jacques LeClerc, Father Plus, etc. For this purpose, we would gather together to study the doctrine that we wanted to pass on to other people as faithfully and as deeply as possible and in particular the circumstances of the person for whom the message was intended. We did this in a personalized way.



The first thing we did was study the environment together and I contributed all the material I had been working on long before to this study. In order to be able to study everything in detail, we tried to understand people and their behavior and in our imaginations we grouped people together in ways that went from the true, authentic, practical Christians who think and act in a Catholic way, to the intellectual or theoretical atheists. We also devised imaginary note cards drawn from the realities of everyday life, such as: 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.

A few anecdotes of that time can shed much light on the intention of our attitude.

For instance, we said that Cursillos had to be heterogeneous and bring together people from all walks of life: those who were close to the Church and the Faraway, rich and poor, educated and ignorant people,uppies and workers, students, blue collar workers, etc. etc.

The personal style of our life as laymen, and the renewed strength of the ever renewed message of the Gospel that propelled us forward, would collide with the narrow minded and bigoted mentality of the great part of the Mallorcan society of those days, even with the mentality of the conservative clerical sector. All this brought about a series of tensions that are still here today, though in a latent or embryonic form, between priests and Cursillos in the diocese where they were born. It all stems from priests not being able or willing to understand the true part or role of the lay people in the mission of the Church or their lack of appreciation or of valuing the legitimate autonomy of the lay apostle in respect to the hierarchy. And what is even worse, when they confuse the obedience of a member of a movement with the obedience of a priest, cleric or monk. Rationally, the reaction to an irrational and indiscriminate demand for submission and obedience could not be other than 'controlled disobedience' or rather the indispensable obedience so that we would not fall out of ecclesial communion.

It would also help to understand the Foundational Charism to know some of the features which with time have become part of the Cursillo.

3. FOR MAN AND THE CHURCH (Man in a generic sense, of course).

The message that we thought, and still think has to be communicated, is synthesized and summarized by certain ideas which concerned us at the beginning and which still concern us today. These ideas were formulated as follows:

"Some men, with the help of science and financial support have been able to go from the exterior of man to the surface of the moon. We are trying to achieve something that is immensely more difficult, i.e. to go from the exterior of man to his innermost being, in order to learn to understand ourselves and to move towards other people, so that we may become more aware of the wonder of our life, to learn to live in harmony and love our fellow men and to share with them the challenge and adventure of becoming a true person".

We have attempted this by constructing a circumstance that would facilitate communication with as many as possible.



Giving a simple exposition of the central realities of being a Christian, expressed live and in person by persons who, because they were attempting seriously and joyfully to live them deeply, would naturally infect them by making them evident in their lives.

Taking care that the number of attendees would be no more than 35 in order to achieve a personalized communication.

Inviting people to the Cursillo from different walks of life, in order to gather a heterogeneous group, formed by people who were completely different in all senses, levels and rankings.

Choosing an isolated place, in order to maintain some distance from the daily routine and to favor a profound and serious reflection.

Communicating from life experience – personal, commonplace, close, alive and pleasantly contagious.

Keeping it brief – three days.

Explaining in a manner that is appealing and attractive and only what is fundamental.

Limiting ourselves to explaining ‘what’ but never the ‘how’. This is because when someone who is able to understand the ‘what’ is told the ‘how’ this makes the world less beautiful because they are deprived the originality of a personal creative contribution.

Always aiming at their singularity, originality and the personal and concrete creativity of every one. This is not for their role as a married person, single, youth, adult, etc.

It is extremely advisable and more than advisable it is necessary rather, that young people should attend the weekends for men or women, for there to be youth for adults and adults for youth. For a father to talk with a son who is not his can ease and smoothen the path for understanding his own. This same thing happens to the son as he deals with his parents.

The important thing is that we look for young people who have a personality and we should not set up any age barrier, which always complicates things.

Cursillos for men must be attended by men only and Cursillos for women only by women. Also, the Leaders for Cursillos for men have to be men with women Leaders for women’s Cursillos. It is a fact that when dealing with members of the opposite sex, appearance plays a big role and the aim in Cursillo should be truth and sincerity.

Facilitating a personal encounter with self so that they can discover their qualities or assets first, with the aim that they learn to be thankful for them because this is the best way for them to come to then accept their limitations.

Facilitating a personal encounter with Christ, alive and real, close and friendly. Christ from the Gospel, a person to person, deep and sincere encounter which is the prerequisite to becoming His friend and sensing that one is becoming His friend and sometimes even experiencing the fact of actually being His friend.



It is about man's freedom, when he becomes aware and decides to realize it in his life, does not feel alone, but rather meets the spirit of God.

Simplifying the way so that the fact that God in Christ loves them sinks deep into their heart and becomes a personal conviction that will prompt them to what is a true Christian life and as a consequence to true Joy.

Changing the point of view and the road commonly traveled of price (how much is it worth?, What will it cost me?, What use is it to me?, so often applied, even to people) in order to learn the fascinating road of appreciating, because price so often devalues and prostitutes.

Seeking that the personal reaction that tends to initiate the dynamics and trajectory of the process of conversion produced by the Good News that God loves him bring personal benefit to their true BEING a Christian in the very place where God has 'planted' them in the world, and not tangling their life with apostolic "offers" that only complicate rather than liberate.

In Cursillo the intention is that the person get to know himself a little better and discover God and his brothers, but not an abstract and distant God but the personal God who is our friend. This is why we have defined Him since the beginning stages as "the living personal Being full of enthusiastic hope for you, who desires good and therefore your good and who is omnipotent".

So that when the three days of the Cursillo are over, it will be clear to him that what is important and urgent is to BE CHRISTIAN IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH, starting with himself and from then on, so that he can discover the meaning of his life.

That they know the Cursillo can be prolonged indefinitely and has been said, is an opportunity to encounter oneself, Christ and others so it can turn into friendship. To this avail they can count upon a few concrete means: Group Reunion (life as reality shared in friendship) and the Ultreya (the circumstance that makes it possible for the best in everyone to reach as many as possible.)

To make the minimal organization necessary at the service of what normally is understood as common sense so that everything will be swift and clear and at the pace required by the message protecting it from brilliant improvised or makeshift "improvements".

The tree of the Cursillo Movement has its roots in the restlessness described above, and its trunk is formed by the convergence of aspirations joined together by unity of the message.

4. RECOGNIZED BY HIERARCHY

Finally, about recognition by the Hierarchy: The group of founders, formed of lay people only, because of the demands of the part they played for the reasons that have already been thoroughly explained, were immensely happy when the news arrived that Dr. Juan Hervas had been appointed by the Holy See as Co-Adjutor Bishop for Mallorca, with a right to succession. Along with the founders there was a number of priests at that time, who understood them and trusted and helped them put on a few Cursillos, and who were also delighted with the appointment of Dr. Hervas.



Although the Cursillo Movement in those days had already been conceived, structured and underway, the appointment of Dr. Hervas as Coadjutor Bishop in 1946 and then Bishop in residence in 1947, gave it a support, impetus and strength that was almost unprecedented. When the group of priests and lay people felt that the bishop was really listening and supporting them, they lived and experienced historical days with him and near him full of fervor and, thanks to the bishop's enthusiastic cooperation and support the Movement had a great influence as being of the Church. It had not occurred to anyone to number the Cursillos. It was once they received official recognition that we began numbering them.

It was then, not before, that a few priests and two or three religious officially joined, we could say, the initial group of laymen in response to a request from those lay people to the Bishop.

Dr. [Bishop] Hervas himself appointed Fr. Sebastian Gaya as Counsellor and then later when Fr. Juan Capo returned from Rome, the Bishop appointed him as Vice-Counsellor.

SUMMARIZING AND EMPHASIZING

I think that the Charism of the Cursillo Movement has been sufficiently explained here since it has the four elements that theologians consider necessary to be considered as such.

The tree of the Cursillos can only grow and expand only if it remains faithful to its identity, if it deepens its roots and does not separate from its trunk.

Occasional grafts to the tree of Cursillos – sometimes stemming from a marked tendency for protagonism – almost always complicate things.

Having said that, we need to have a sufficiently broad-minded view in order to be able to make sense of the embryonic ideas and attitudes that form – at all times – the fascinating and fertile world of its beginnings.

It is obvious that the organizations that have been created to preserve the identity of the Cursillo Movement, are the ones that will have to discern that it is not about uprooting cutting at the roots in order to 'clericalize' Cursillos and use them for a greater comfort of the 'good ones' or for the service of an inter-ecclesial sector of their interest. On the contrary, it has to be directed towards the world and preferentially, though not exclusively, toward the 'far away'.

The cursillos, also, should not become like chameleons and change their style and their disposition, in order to follow the latest trends in vogue. Let us not forget that wanting always to be in tune with the latest trends almost always means being off tune altogether.

Neither should we try and neutralize Cursillos with the false pretense of continuously placing them in tune to the signs of the times. But rather analyze them, seek deeply and study the foundational charism in the light of the signs of the times. And if possible, in the light of today's signs and those yet to come. This is something completely different from perpetually wanting to outrageously graft into the Cursillo Movement, day in and day out, indiscriminately, everything that the Holy Father says in his countless speeches and everything that is agreed on, at the more or less important meetings of the higher ups that have been held at the world level. A few examples suffice:



Changing the name of the rollos and by doing so making them less understandable to the ‘far away’, without even knowing why the founders gave them their particular name.

Trying to channel the generosity of the Cursillistas, in an imperialistic way as it were, indicating concrete ways of doing things, without having been asked etc.

Updates, provided they are not the result of personal interpretations, or at times “national” interpretations, will prove efficacious only if they do not stray from the simplicity of the Our Father or the perennial freshness of the Beatitudes.

This is our way of understanding fidelity to the “Foundational Charism” and the way to always remain open to the signs of the times.

CLARIFYING THE CONFUSION THAT IS UNDERSTOOD BY SPECIFYING THE ORIGINAL INTENTION

The Cursillos in Christianity were not thought up, structured or prayed for, to evangelize the world, but man.

The Cursillo Movement was not born as an answer from the Church to the world, but as one way to communicate to man that God loves him.

We know of no adaptation which has responded to the intention of making its purpose clearer, more precise, simpler, more efficacious or more understandable.

In order to be able to grasp what the Cursillo Movement attempts to achieve and will surely achieve, by the grace of God, provided it is not distorted, it is necessary to start from the following basic facts:

Man does not change, since his creation he is substantially the same: He flees from his fears and runs towards his aspirations. His constant awareness of this alternative is what substantially makes him a man: the ability to move from being an individual to a person, and feeling frustration when he goes against or deviates from his personal path which then signals and orients him towards his concrete and specific fulfillment, which is to feel he is loved and to be able to love.

The challenges that the world presents to the man of today have the same root as always: the absence of God in the mind and in the heart of man.

This is why the solution is always the same: the solution is Christ and His Grace, which is the only thing that can mean to his life.

The Cursillo Movement, when it does not deviate from its original Charism, attempts to connect Christians who are trying to live their evangelical faith in spirit and in truth, with those who are living a life without a living Christ that gives it life, who are looking outwardly due to the demands of life and don’t have time to think about themselves and those around them.



The Cursillo Movement, when it is not distorted, is a space and an instrument for man to encounter himself and become aware of his existence and the existence of others, so that he approach them with the enthusiasm and mutually communicate by listening to one another, by talking to one another, to get to know, understand, respect and value one another, and learn to love each other. At the same time, the Cursillo achieves this in a normal and natural way it also offers concrete means so that the encounter gradually transforms into friendship.

This is what the Cursillo Movement can offer the man of today and that is why he discovers that his life has meaning.

The heart of the matter is that we understand once and for all, that we realize, not the others, but ourselves, that no matter how much the world changes, man is always the same and the solution will always be the same.

The only thing that we can spread is the faith that we have that Christ loves us. If we do not have it we cannot ferment anything: not attitudes, not environments, not structures...instead of fermenting we will foment, as we almost always do, and we will go on criticizing indefinitely those we call the bad ones, categorizing their wickedness and lamenting the condition of the world.

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