

EVANGELIZATION THROUGH CONVERSION

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When we speak of “EVANGELIZATION” in the context of the Cursillo, we do not only mean it, or even mostly mean it, in the sense of simply passing on or spreading the Gospel’s Good News, but rather to succeed in making the person “BECOME” the GOOD NEWS, that joyful good news that Christ is alive in and amongst His people today just as surely as He was 2000 years ago.

This in essence was the vision and mission of the Cursillo from the beginning. To find the best possible method of bringing about this conversion — of moving a person from where they are to where they could be; from human to fully human; from alive to fully alive in recognition, acknowledgement and acceptance of their true identity and dignity as beloved children of God.

1. CURSILLO, A CHANNEL TO CONVERSION

We were convinced then, as now, that the average man of today is very much aware of, and living fairly close to, the Gospel values, yet at the same time are, and consider themselves to be, far removed from Christ and any personal identification with Him. It is from this that our original conviction sprang, that if we could find the way to help each person identify in a personal, relational way with the Christ of the Gospel and the Gospel of Christ, this would be the key to allowing and motivating each person to attain their fullest potential.

When we started to champion our belief that our brief, yet intense, method could succeed in accomplishing this goal, or, at least, initiate the process, by making the candidate realize that what they were seeking was exactly what Christ was offering, the same old sceptics (usually the scholars from Sion and the leading lights of the world) used to tell us, as they still do, that we were “out-of-our-minds” if we thought that three days were enough to convert the distant ones.

Our only reply, then, as now, was to rely on two tactics. The first was to repeat what a Cursillista said on one of the early weekends in response to the same issue. “As if the Holy Spirit needed three days to work wonders. He has two days, twenty-three hours, fifty-nine minutes and fifty-nine seconds more than He needs, which is actually the time we need to become aware that He really is talking to us. This is the way in which the Gospel’s common sense became evident.” The second was to explain it evangelically, again with common sense, by quoting that brilliant expression of Guardini’s when he says, “A Christian is not something that you are but something you are becoming.”

Conversion, in fact, is not an EVENT that suddenly happens but rather a PROCESS that unfolds through a series of stages that comprise a SEARCHING, a MEETING and then a series of steps through which the “meeting” makes itself concrete resulting in everlasting and ever deepening PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS that in Cursillo we call PIETY, as it relates to our relationship with God, and FRIENDSHIP, as it relates to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

2. CONVERSION, A MEETING RATHER THAN A CHANGE

While one could certainly bring about an understanding of this process by deep theological teachings, we believe that the key to making this joyful Good News accessible to the average man is to make them aware that their long search for happiness, friendship and love makes the

three essential encounters with SELF, with CHRIST, and OTHERS easier, that is to say, makes it attractive and attainable.

Whenever one speaks of conversion however, (and at this time I would suggest that converting oneself is simply to discover the true meaning of life, and our role in it as beloved children of God) we have to deal with the notion that conversion means CHANGE, in a negative and onerous way.

St Paul describes the theological core of the conversion — or “metanoia” as a sequence that includes both the death of the “old man” and the birth of the “new man” —, (which is a resurrection, in Christ and with Christ). While this is all true, the use of such a vivid analogy stirs all kinds of notions, depending on; the reader and his time and place in history.

In times of war and famine or under totalitarian regimes and other forms of “domination of man by man” people have seen Paul’s analogy at the core of their environments and clearly understood that conversion must, of necessity, entail a dramatic departure, a radical change or revolution in man’s being, thinking, and behaving.

At other times, unfortunately less frequent in our history, when our societal sense of life, liberty and human dignity is somewhat more attuned to the Gospel values — conversion has been regarded more as a “deathless” resurrection, or a planning of one’s own realities. At these times, one is aware of the fact that the “New Man” is but the same “Old Man”, yet transformed and complete because he knows in whom he has placed his trust.

One of the great paradoxes of our times is that while the innumerable wars, famines and disasters suffered, and being suffered by so many, keep us aware of DEATH, at the same time, the advances in technology and health care conspire to create a world and a modern man that is also full of hope, ever young and an out-and-out supporter of life.

Because of this natural enculturation of our faith and the paradox of our times, only a few chosen ones, it seems, have been able to grasp the duality — the polarity — of St. Paul’s image of conversion in its full richness.

Nonetheless, it is still possible today for a person to get a glimpse of that “something” that can radically move him away from “everything” he dislikes and usher him joyfully into everything he really likes, without the negative or pejorative concept that DEATH can evoke. This “something” turns out to be a “SOMEBODY” — CHRIST—, who through friendship and the ongoing relationship He wants to have with us, makes it possible for us to have a true meeting with that same SOMEBODY who IS, and is also IN, “oneself” and the “others”.

In spite of this, there are still a great many who insist on speaking about CONVERSION as a radical change and as a DEATH that is more in tune with the Old Testament — “Repent”!! than there are those who smile with the conviction that flows from the New Testament words, “Seek and you will find”.

Many times have we said that it would be absurd for a “luxury” car dealer to try to sell one of his cars by stressing the high price rather than the pleasure of its conveniences, advantages and benefits. He would certainly fail his marketing exam!

By the same token however, we Christians have very often confused value and price by absurdly attempting to make the distant ones want to come closer to us by stressing only what they will lose, or have to give up, by doing so.

In truth, conversion does generate change, a radical change of Faith, or at least how we understand and apply our faith, but not necessarily a radical change of our values and behaviour. It has much more to do with our planning to become “more” of a fully alive person than it has with us becoming “another” or “different” person.

3. STAGES OF THE CONVERSION PROCESS

The method known as “Cursillos in Christianity” was built on the basis of this simple conviction and approaches the conversion of the person in three distinct phases, which we call; PRECURSILLO, CURSILLO and POSTCURSILLO.

In the PRECURSILLO phase we try to identify, befriend and then help the person who is “searching” for that “something” that he identifies as his happiness, or fulfilment or his ideal and that we know is really that “somebody” — Christ. In doing so, we broaden and accelerate his search and direct it towards those three essential encounters.

By doing so we endeavour to make his previous unrest, which is so often repressed, suppressed and silenced, become the very motivating force for his new found enthusiasm for a sound, upright, sincere and hopeful conversion.

During the Cursillo itself, we attempt to crystallize this unrest and searching through the three essential encounters, or meetings, first of the person with himself; with Christ and with the others, and with the Grace of God we almost always manage to do so.

In spite of this success, we should not think that this person is now a “Christian” and that the job is done. All we can say and feel is that the person has initiated the conversion process, nothing more, but also and more importantly, nothing less. When done correctly and simply, according to the authentic method, the three days instill a hunger and identifies the method he can use to feed this ever growing hunger, a convergence process really with Christ, himself and others that, of necessity, is ongoing and relational, founded on and sustained in friendship throughout his 4th Day (that we call POSTCURSILLO) and which lasts all the days of his life. This then means that while we can say in a very general sense that on the “weekend” the person converted himself to Christ, we know that it is during the adventure of his 4th Day that he will come to perfect this conversion and have the chance to become a Christian — to become CHRIST, in theological terms.

At this time, I would like to share with you a very useful simile given by Father Juan Capo many years ago in response to a Cursillista’s question on what ‘metanoia’ meant.

“Metanoia” he said, “is like turning a sock inside out. In truth it is the same sock with the same colour, the same darning and the same holes.”

All of the Post Cursillo is built around this simple truth, by taking into consideration the unique and personal identity of the individual and recognizing that it is necessary and right that the individual (...the sock...) remains essentially himself.

In truth, Cursillo is, with God's blessing, one of the few ways that makes possible the conversion of the distant ones, (the prodigals) to Christ, while allowing them to remain who they are and where they are. Often when we are in the dark, especially the dark of our own shadow, all that is required is for us to re-orient ourselves. Not to travel, but to turn and suddenly see that the light is abundant.

Sadly, the "elder brothers" or "faithful sons" will always be tempted to change the; ways, style, values and even the environments, of the converts, in a misguided attempt to make them "fit" by adopting the traditional behaviour of the "Men of Church".

In fact, there are many who would prefer a world full of "people of church" but in Cursillo, we prefer a "Church of people" who are fully alive and active Christians in the very core of the world where each strikes their own note, in freedom, creativity and with the constancy that God's Grace always makes possible.

I am often amused that while we all sing so heartily the De Colores which speaks of the beauty of the different colours, how often the misguided leaders demand either by their words, but mostly through their actions, that what they really want is for everyone to be one colour — their colour, and to arrive there by one way, — their way!

4. POST-CURSILLO, ESSENTIAL STAGE OF THE CONVERSION PROCESS

It is for this reason that the Postcursillo is designed to facilitate the nurturing of those three essential encounters with Christ that took place on the Cursillo so that they grow and develop into true friendship — friendship of the individual with himself, with Christ, (PIETY) and with the others, (his brothers and sisters)

Methodologically speaking, there is no doubt that the key to this process of friendship building is the last encounter — friendship with the others. Here we mean not only the "others" that encompass "all" but especially the friendship with those who are intimately involved in our conversion process, those in our permanent group reunion and ULTREYA.

5. FRIENDSHIP, THE KEY TO THE POSTCURSILLO

We hold as axiomatic two basic truths about the human condition; one is that nobody can truly "find" themselves except through the simultaneous "relating to" and "comparing of" oneself with "others". Secondly, and more importantly, we hold that no-one can maintain a basic and cheerful acceptance of self and at the same time be driven by an overwhelming sense and demanding need for self-improvement and personal perfection, which is the peculiar consequence of true friendship, unless he is able to see himself reflected at one and the same time both with his friend's "strengths" and his friend's "weaknesses".

Without this essential and balanced level of friendship, we easily become either paralysed by self-recrimination and self-accusation or then, by the isolation and denial of self-exoneration and self-justification that are all too familiar and cyclical realities in this day and age.

This natural longing for personal growth and development occurs best when it is nurtured in an atmosphere of true friendship rather than the typical adversarial, competitive, and anonymous world of mere acquaintances and strangers.

These two essential aspects of growth that we call self-acceptance and personal development are not sufficient to propel man to his true and full potential however. For this to happen, there needs to be a third element that completes, defines and orients one's life.

When friendship develops between two people who share the conviction that Christ, who dwells in both of them, gives meaning to their lives, past, present and future, then a new dimension is attained that is transcendent — resulting in an active, conscious and growing perception of their integration with and in Christ, which becomes a natural and inevitable part of their self-identity.

At this juncture, we do not wish to debate whether or not this third and essential element of the friendship, (or PIETY, as we speak of it in Cursillo), can only stem from Christian life and only between Christians, (which we doubt). Instead and what we do assert from the conviction of our daily reality as Christians, is that when friendship is born, lived and nurtured between Christians — this third and crucial dimension — the active integration into the WHOLE — does occur, or if you like, the Kingdom of God is revealed, even if only but a fragment.

It is this reality that allows man to find, assert, and orient the direction of his life — not only is he himself “essential” but he also comes to know who he truly is in relation to other things and other people.

He realizes both his true identity as a child of God (Christ) in the family of God and the humble dignity that ensues from this cosmic and transcendent reality, compels and propels him on his journey of conversion and reinforces his courage to “stay-the-course”.

There is still more!

From this understanding of his true identity, the person who is on the journey comes to realize that his life is no mere accident of history that needs to be corrected. Instead he realizes that he is the only one who can, in truth, influence his particular and unique place in all the environments he finds himself in. Furthermore, and because this conversion is normal and natural, his influence is neither contrived, nor forced, but occurs in an almost effortless manner that is normal, natural and harmonious. This is not to say this person we want to become and to help others to become in their own right and uniqueness, will not have problems and not make mistakes. Quite the contrary, he usually will encounter more problems and difficulties than the average man because his inner freedom is seen as a challenge by many and provokes them to try and tame him; his growth and joy arouses jealousies in some, a desire to use his energy and enthusiasm in others, and in others still, an outright resistance to his influence, etc.

In spite of these difficulties our man, operating from his convictions, sees all these problems as the raw materials from which he continues to build, develop and grow. He tolerates his errors or downfalls likewise — because he knows that he is always a child of God and like all children, will stumble and fall from time to time. In addition, and because he shares his life with his friends who share his conviction and meaning of life, he knows that they, who he no doubt loves and admires, are also not free from problems and errors.

This, in a nutshell, is how and why the Postcursillo methodology was developed right from the very beginning but that for some reason always seems to be ignored or forgotten in the various proclamations and justifications that attempt to explain or vindicate the Movement and its method.

Thankfully though, many nonetheless, do try to live it.

6. FACILITATING FRIENDSHIP

Forming and building friendships lies at the heart of the Cursillo method.

Every aspect of the Pre and Post-Cursillo, as well as Cursillos themselves, affords opportunity for the new convert and those who are already in the process, to make friends and be friends to one another. While it is true that the weekends themselves often do facilitate the forming of friendships, it is really the exposure of the candidates to the larger community at the Mañanitas and the community “walk-in” at the Clausura that gets the candidates thinking in terms of the possibilities for friendship and gives them a foretaste of what lies ahead. This foretaste, coupled with the support of their sponsors and the invitation by the team for them to attend the Ultreya, moves the process forward in a most effective way.

It is in the “witnessing” environment of the Ultreya however, where those who have just started their conversion process can meet and develop true friendships with other, likeminded people already on the journey. This is why we have always rejected any attempt to turn the Ultreya into a “collective” or “public” event that cuts out or undermines the Group reunion aspect that defines Ultreya just as we have always rejected any attempt to suggest that these opening Group Reunions should always be made up of the same people.

It is essential to the Cursillo method that the Ultreya remains primarily a kind of meeting place where individuals can get to make new acquaintances, to make and be friends — and develop friendships of the type that will drive, strengthen, direct and sustain the conversion process and all its unsuspected blessings.

7. PERMANENT GROUP REUNIONS

We know that whenever friendships are formed there are two basic types. The first is the one-on-one, or bilateral, type and the other, is group friendship.

Being both a Movement and a method, Cursillo — (the Post-Cursillo anyway) neither ignores nor underestimates the value of the one-on-one friendships. We do however recognize the dangers inherent in this type of friendship, at least as it relates to sustaining the conversion process. When limited to one-on-one friendships it is altogether too easy, either from a lack of perspective, or mutual inertia etc; to get side tracked.

For these reasons we stress the need for group friendships — shared through a Permanent GROUP REUNION, usually of between three and six persons. While undoubtedly within the group there will be pairs of individuals who will have more in common with each other, we consider this reality not only inevitable but also very positive. In these cases, the “one-on-one” friendships are nonetheless framed within the context of the larger group, thus providing all the advantages of both while minimizing their respective down sides or risks.

8. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GROUP REUNION:

a) PLURALITY

Because of their size (i.e. 3-6) very seldom will the similarities and affinities of the members be such as to fall into the dead end that can result from inertia, self-absorption and simple mutual admiration that can so easily effect “one-on-one” friendships. On the other hand, what can, and

does easily occur is that one of the members dominates the group through the excessive use (or misuse) of his leadership which results in a TEAM comprised of a leader and his followers with all the associated consequences that can easily defeat the purpose and value of this essential tool of the conversion process.

We believe that this threat is neutralized when the group is fully integrated into a properly functioning ULTREYA which serves, at one and the same time, both as the source for group members and as a centre of experiential or “on-the-job” training as it were, to ensure the wholesomeness, the openness, equality and vitality of the groups which have already formed.

Before we continue to look at the role of the Ultreya within the conversion process, which in fact constitutes and encompasses, the entire Postcursillo, we need to stress the key role of the regular weekly or permanent group reunion in the Postcursillo.

b) NO HIDDEN AGENDA

In Cursillo, the group does not gather to DO ... but to BE... It does not aspire that its members have the same opinion, on any subject, nor does it seek people from the same walks of life, or with similar feelings or reactions to anything that happens and it especially, does NOT seek to have them undertake any actions or projects, together.

The aim and purpose of the Group is nothing more, (but also nothing less), than to allow the “friends” who comprise the Group, to relive or share together, on a weekly basis, what they have each lived separately in their own environments throughout that week. The intent is not that they live together but simply share what is being lived.

This simple fact is often overlooked making way for “internal leadership” and “common projects” and “missions” to occur as well as imposed or selected reflections used for discussion, meditation, etc. all of which go against the fundamental purposes and intent of the Cursillo method, which has now come to be known as the Founding Vision.

Because every member of the Group is in fact in the process of becoming Christian it is normal and natural for them to want to incarnate the joyful mystery of the Communion of Saints and become part of the Mystical Body of Christ on a normal, natural, practical and realistic scale.

These transcendent truths make it clear that the key to this process is the coming together of the “different” individuals each with their own gifts, and uniqueness freely shared and accepted — the “De Colores” that enriches the Group and makes the whole, greater than the sum of its parts.

When you add to the fact that they are all, not only in the conversion process, but “friends”, then their individual yet shared evangelical experiences make the entire process, real, attractive, joyful, efficient and easier if not downright easy.

c) RESPECT AND DIGNITY

This is why it is essential that when one of the members is sharing their experiences or plans, the attitude of the others must never be dogmatic, instructional or argumentative. Never an, “I don’t agree” or “You are wrong”, but always an evangelical and friendly response, if any at all, such as, “I think that if it were me...etc.”

But note, that we are NOT talking about mere words or vocabulary here but ATTITUDE, since we know full well that there are some who even though they speak bluntly, can do so in a normal and natural way that does not offend, while others may use soft and gentle words and yet still demean the one while asserting themselves over the others.

Respect in the sense of the Cursillo Group methodology is really nothing more than the living out of our faith and growing conviction that we are truly children of God and therefore brothers and sisters in Christ. In that we are ever growing in this faith and conviction and therefore ever “becoming”, it will be easier for some, (perhaps those who have journeyed longer but by no means, necessarily, those) than for others, to recognize the Christ in the other and therefore afford them the RESPECT AND DIGNITY they deserve. Because of this and until it is fully integrated in our beings we need to follow the simple guidelines or Group etiquette that urges us to refrain from judging or commenting on the shared experiences of our Group mates, but rather to accept their experiences and join them with our own rather than use “ours” to undermine “theirs”.

From the sharing of our everyday experiences, it always becomes clear that no matter our position, age or status in life, we are all “students” within this conversion process and not the “master”, who is always and ONLY the LORD.

As it is, Cursillistas will always have “hierarchies” to contend with in virtually every aspect of their daily lives and do not need another one to contend with here. The Group Reunion should always be a haven of equality, respect and dignity, patterned on Gospel values and lived in friendship.

When lived thus, even the times when exchanges of opinion or advice do occur, the exchanges are tempered by the friendship and especially the respect, admiration and love felt for one another so that offence is hard to be taken for while we may condemn the sin we do not condemn the sinner. By the same token, the abundant friendship that is in truth a growing LOVE, makes asking for, and granting, authentic forgiveness, a natural result.

d) STABILITY

In that the permanent Group Reunions are the basis of the Cursillo, and so as to insure this inner climate of friendship, and the dignity, respect and freedom that flows from it and that is essential to the ongoing conversion process of all the members, we consider it essential that every Group Reunion remains connected to a genuine ULTREYA and that each member takes personal responsibility for this stability and orientation. The need for stability within this Christian group of friends is no different than the call or desire for stability within any other group of friends or one-on-one relationships, for that matter. On the one hand it conspires to avoid the communication problems or other difficulties that can otherwise result in the disbanding of the group or shift of its focus and purpose into that of a social group, and on the other hand, if it does occur, for whatever reasons, that one (or all) of the members really have lost the conviction and commitment to continue journeying in that group, the transition to another or new group can take place without trauma or fear of isolation and once again it is the ULTREYA that makes it possible to link up with new friends or a new group.

e) FREEDOM

Contrary to the classical and almost subconscious idea among “lifelong Catholics” that the “distant ones” who have started their conversion process MUST be educated both intellectually

and theologically AND that it is necessary to organize their “evangelization” activities, Cursillo holds a different view. What is essential is to make the conversion process an: easy, conscious and growing one. Under these circumstances they quite naturally adapt their minds and will do what is right, but the key to this is neither their intelligence nor their will, but rather their SOULS which hunger for God and all that is right and which dwells in the very core of their being, closer to their hearts than anything else, but far and away more than mere feelings. In order to keep Christian life constant and growing in this topsy-turvy world in which we live and to prevent it from being impossibly burdensome to the person trying to live it, the Cursillo adds to the “LOVE and do as you please” of Saint Augustine, “and share it with your friends, who are Christians as well”. What we, and you, will find, is that what you like will more and more turn into what the LORD wants of you.

If we do not believe in man — in the person — we cannot believe in Cursillo, but if we do believe in Cursillo, then an attitude towards the person who has just started his conversion process AND towards the one who has been in this conversion process for decades, must be no other than that of Christ who, after resurrecting Lazarus and noticing the over concerns of his friends and family intent on helping him, but actually hindering him, says simply, “Unbind him and let him go”.

Surrounded by so many who wish to “help us” by first telling us; where to go, how to get there, who to go with and at what speed, and then insisting on our need to study physiology and finally “rhythmic liturgical gymnastics” in order to walk properly — Cursillo, which is simple, deep and effective, advises us only to walk in the company of friends and share the burdens and blessings of the journey.

By this we simply mean that Cursillo’s only aim is to be a decisive and effective aid to the conversion process which, as already mentioned, centres around the three encounters and ongoing friendship with; oneself, with Christ and with others — not only during the “three days” but throughout the Postcursillo.

Surely, we could have concluded that what the person will need following his Cursillo is an organized program of studies and directed activities, perhaps even some form of protection in both his private and public life. Instead we believe that what is really essential is that he lives in friendship with his brethren. Through this friendship and the sharing of his journey with the others who are themselves in the conversion process of “becoming Christian”, he will be able to choose the pace and direction most suitable to him as well as find the means of knowledge and the activities necessary to maintain the evangelical motivation that will sustain his personal conversion by making him a true “SEEKER”. It will also prevent him from falling prey to the “elder brother/faithful son” trap of believing they are already converted, thereby losing sight of the primary mission (i.e. converting oneself) and will begin to covet the rewards more than the work, or the work more than the love which motivates it.

Our experience shows us that “knowing” and ACTING (or serving) do not necessarily imply, or lead to, “LOVING”. However, we do hold that LOVING does lead to knowing and acting (or serving). There is no better way to facilitate LOVE in this day and age than by combining the love of human friendships with the transcendence of God’s love; manifested in, and fostered by, friends who are also in the process of, and committed to, becoming Christians.

9. REUNION OF GROUP REUNIONS – THE ULTREYA

Precisely because permanent Group Reunions always run the risk of turning into mutual admiration societies or self-centred and self-focused groups or then groups under the direction and control of someone who manages or manipulates it, either from within or without, they should always be part of the universality and diversity afforded by the ULTREYA.

The Ultreya is the gathering of the Groups or the Reunion of the Group Reunions. The Groups and their members participate in it for the same reasons they go to the permanent Group Reunions: to share what everybody and every Group lives. They DO NOT GO there to acquire knowledge NOR to receive instructions.

If the purpose of the Ultreya were to be an educational or organizational one, it would not have the “universal” aspect that so clearly characterizes and defines it.

If that were the case (i.e. educational and organizational) it is clear that we would be better off dividing up into groups from similar professions, or environments or other defining characteristics. Instead and consistent with what we have maintained from the very beginning of Cursillo, the aim is to simply provide the opportunity for each and everyone to share their experiences so as to sustain and motivate the pilgrim mentality of conversion. As such the larger and broader the structural base of the Ultreya is, the more effective and efficient it becomes.

Because of this, we categorically reject the notion of controlling and orchestrating the Ultreya Group Reunions since orchestrating and controlling have no place in something, which by design must be “spontaneous” if it is to sustain conversion!

We often complain as Catholics of today, about the rise of sects and cults among everyday people and especially the young, but we forget that in large part, it is because we lack the baptismal simplicity, (the enthusiasm for what is simple — because it is everlasting —) and the cheerful wonder of the Good News that GOD LOVES US — that many people are driven to seek outside the established Church, what they were absolutely entitled to have found within it since it is an essential part of Christ’s heritage and thus our inheritance as children of God.

This is not to say that we wish the Ultreyas to possess the “hard sell” atmosphere of the sects, or that they be focused on cultivating “Feelings” but in no way should they stifle the sharing of what is actually being felt or the overflowing Joy of those who are aware that they are beloved Children of God.

Unfortunately, there are those who insist on making Ultreya the venue of studies or of co-ordinated activities in “addition” to being the place where experiences are shared.

When this happens, and despite their noble goals and objectives, the focus shifts away from the conversion process in a way almost imperceptible at first by even the faithful pilgrims, until the entire focus has changed from that of BEING and BECOMING Christian to that of DOING Christian things. It is to prevent this very shift that Ultreya must be faithful to the mission. The whole Movement depends on it being so. Once the Ultreya ceases to be this instrument of conversion and turns into venues for those who believe they know better or are better than the others — they inevitably lose members and end up simply, as we like to say with irony, the place where “the most saintly”, “the most stupid”, and those who attended “the most recent” Cursillo, gather.

In short, the genuine ULTREYA is one of the few places and occasions where the person who is in the process of conversion can really see that he can be the BEST without being BETTER than the others.

This unique and evangelical sensation can only be attained by those who are becoming fully human, fully alive Christians.

Unfortunately, this does not occur frequently, since even those who talk about how wonderful it is to be “fully human” usually can’t contain or hide their “pride” or elitist satisfaction on being, besides an educated or committed person, fully human, as though that meant a “better person”.

Many of those who spur us on to become Christians can hardly conceal how highly they regard themselves because in addition to being baptised they are members of “this” work or “that” movement or charitable organization or then that they have been able to study and know what we simple, everyday garden variety Christians are ignorant of, and thus their satisfaction with BEING BETTER “THAN” keeps them from the joy of simply BEING BETTER.

Hence our obstinate insistence that the Ultreya should show and prove, through its method and proper atmosphere that while a human can always become more fully human, more fully alive and a better Christian, we can never become more than what we truly are, CHILDREN OF GOD.

This is why we assert that the Pope is more important for being a son of God, than he is for being the son of God’s Vicar.

10. ULTREYA’S SUPPORTING STRUCTURES – SCHOOL OF LEADERS AND SECRETARIAT

To avoid this vital and essential character of the Ultreya from turning into mere fireworks, into a show rather than an abode, it is essential that it be supported and strengthened by a School of Leaders.

Probably because of a certain desire for “elitism,” there is a tendency to consider the Cursillo School of Leaders as a “destination” or “point of arrival”, instead of what it truly is, a “point of departure.”

This then leads to selective participation instead of making it open, as it should be, to all who wish to participate in the environment of Cursillo and who are already “living” Ultreya and therefore Group Reunion.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that the primary and essential role of the School of Leaders is to support the Ultreya in their area. Then, and in quite a secondary way, to train Cursillo team leaders and to organize and staff the secretariats and provide the Palanca etc: that every Cursillo demands.

Additionally, the School of Leaders, being the gathering of those Cursillistas who are interested in the Movement itself and the perfecting of the method, is the place where intra-movement relations between other geographical locations as well as the inter-movement relations between the Cursillo and other Christian movements or those whose focus is the development of man’s full potential, as children of God, is formed, strengthened and maintained.

There is a final purpose of the School of Leaders and that is to be “nuclei of reflection” on what Cursillo is and what it can or should be, in every aspect of the method i.e. Precursillo, Cursillo, and Postcursillo.

Any other aim or goal that the School of Leaders takes on, even if it is as praise-worthy as studying and promoting the Vatican documents, adult catechetics, filling pastoral necessities, or promoting specific evangelical projects, etc., is not a proper one for the school of leaders.

The key to its success is that to the greatest extent possible, the leaders should seek through dialogue, to be of one mind, to provide a balanced focus on PRECURSILLO, WEEKEND and POSTCURSILLO, and to do so in a way that is authentic, (lived) and shared at a level and depth that is understandable and suitable for everybody, neither speaking over people’s heads nor suggesting or extolling practices that are beyond the means and abilities of the many.

To accommodate all this and to facilitate the mechanics of the Movement, the School of Leaders should select from its ranks, those leaders it deems capable of performing the various tasks to make up the group known as the secretariat. This group, equal in status to those of Precursillo, Cursillo and Postcursillo, and who must always take their direction from the collective will and discernment of the School (and the Holy Spirit), look after the material needs and organization of the Movement, that while the least important of the tasks, are as essential and as necessary as the most precious ones.

This structure that we have described as being suitable for a diocese, is equally suitable for an archdiocese, an Episcopal Conference, as well as the international jurisdiction of the successor to Peter.

11. SUMMARY

What we have outlined here is the most simple, effective and universal method we know of to provoke, instill and nurture the men and women of today to become fully human through a lifelong process of conversion (or Christianizing), that is the ever deepening awareness of their true identity as living Children of God, in the growing imitation of Christ, until they become the “Christ” that “Christ is counting on us” to become.

This process or method has come to be called “Cursillos de Cristiandad”, a name that is in my opinion, neither apt nor realistic in the Spanish context of the words, where it means literally; “short courses or seminars in Christianity” which captures neither the essence of what it truly is, and is somewhat presumptuous and unrealistic of what it does. This is surely not a problem in non-Spanish speaking countries where the name Cursillo is used more as a “trade mark” which can be defined in more apt terms.

The method therefore, is more a psychotherapy of conversion — understanding conversion not as an event that takes place at a point in time, but rather a process, and not through the manipulation of people by “human therapists” (us) but by and through the deepening relationships they have with the true THERAPIST — GOD in the fullness of the TRINITY, supported by friends who encourage the systematic exteriorization of the inner Christ in each of us through the best evagelic and evangelizing method we know of, FRIENDSHIP.

The message our method heralds however, goes far beyond a desire to simply make people aware that they are Children of God, but that we are all members of the family of God (including

those we do not yet consider as making up the “US” which we aspire to, but whom we believe we can reach through friendship) living in the Kingdom of God that we hope to reveal through our love of one another.

12. INFLUENCING THE WORLD THROUGH OUR ENVIRONMENTS

Of all the basic dimensions of the conversion process, we will now focus on the one which is perhaps the most difficult to grasp and the most often misunderstood and used: the influence of the Cursillista in his environment.

While it is true that many people state that the Cursillo is about “evangelizing” and its focus and method is to evangelize through the witness of authentic witness, in our natural environments — this has, perhaps, not been clearly explained.

When we state that Cursillistas need to focus their evangelizing activities within their environments, we mean that except in very special cases, the person who has embarked on, re-committed to, or re-affirmed, their conversion process in a Cursillo, is called to focus their evangelical influence in the same areas of activity, or environments, which they were in before they attended the Cursillo. By this we mean: their families, their workplaces, their clubs or associations, their social groupings and leisure time activities etc. and NOT towards other “new” environments, “from out of the blue”, just because they are now “Christian” and feel thus compelled, or then encouraged, to “EVANGELIZE” there.

When we speak of “Environmental Evangelism” as being a defining characteristic of the Cursillo we mean simply, that as laity we are called, or at least understand our calling to be, the living out and witnessing of our ongoing conversion in the marketplace, the home, the parish, or the shop floors of our normal, lay lives, exactly where the Lord has placed us, and not in the “green house” of the institutional Church per se. Similarly, we do not even want the Cursillistas to become overgenerous in their dedication to the Cursillo Movement itself if this would hinder them from their primary mission of influencing, through friendship and witness, all the natural environments in which they live out their lives.

This is not, at all, to say that Cursillistas may not or should not, be active in the life of their parishes but rather that they should not see such parish activities as the “preferred” or “more important” focus. Right from the very beginning we were aware that if not careful, we risk allowing a form of affected piety we call “Cursillism” to pervade the Movement, especially if we allow ourselves to get caught up in the “pride of place” that easily comes when one is placed “front and centre”, and that can obscure the “journey” with the notion of having already “arrived”.

A priest, not connected with Cursillo, once expressed his surprise at our position by pointing out that as far as he knew, Cursillo was the first and only Movement in the Church that “warned” its “faithful ones” about the risk of being too faithful to it. He understood our point of view when we together reflected on the warning to the Apostles, that we should not belong to Peter or to Paul or to Apollo, but to Jesus Christ.

At the risk of mixing metaphors and in the interest of making this point clear, it is helpful perhaps, to view the Kingdom of God and the Mystical Body of Christ as one and the same. Keeping with the simile of a body, we know that the best way for a body to be healthy and to grow is for each and every cell in that body to be the best and healthiest cell it can be. Cells in

the body all have different places and different specialized functions according to divine plan, yet each cell has the single mission of being the best and healthiest it can be. Only illness can result if skin cells choose to be brain cells or liver cells choose to become bone cells etc.

Similarly, each of us has been placed in our unique environments, also by divine plan, or at least by divine assent. If we are to contribute to the overall well being of this Mystical Body of Christ, then our first and most important mission is to become the best cell in that body that we can become.

In doing so, and to the extent that we are successful, we also can, will, and should influence the cells around us to do likewise. We may try, of course, to influence those cells far removed from us, but this is always best left to a physician trained and skilled in such interventions.

To borrow, and paraphrase from the modern environmental movements of a more literal kind, we may and even should “think globally” but are more effective when we “act locally”, (very locally — ourselves!)

Even if we are all clear in our understanding of the need to send the Cursillista, who is in the process of conversion, back to his or her original “environments” or the “every day world” of his or her every day life, there remains some confusion as to the real meaning, within the Cursillo, of the terms; environment, fermentation and Christian vertebration.

To be clear, we need to grasp the difference between an “environment” and a “structure.”

There are those who hold that if Cursillo could “convert” the bosses who hold the power in various human “structures” or “organizations”, then the structure or organization itself will be converted. Instead we hold that the key to converting the structures lies in converting those within it who have the most “friendship” relations, which naturally provides the maximum opportunities for influence. These may be, but are not usually, the bosses or the elite of the structures.

Another confusion is when “environment” is mistaken for “atmosphere” or “climate,” which couldn’t be farther from the truth. Notwithstanding this, we frequently hear that Cursillistas should be a kind of “Cheerleader” in their environments to enliven or excite the people there or to stifle or silence legitimate tensions or then, to make people forget or suppress the legitimate grievances which may exist, which is to deny the truth.

Nothing, which goes against truth, is concordant with Cursillo.

If we take this false notion of evangelization, as being “cheerleading”, to its logical conclusion we end up with one of four scenarios that are all antithetical to what we really mean by the term, often used in our literature, i.e. Christian leavening and vertebration of environments”, as the goal of our evangelizing.

In the first scenario, we create a kind of magical situation where people do not acknowledge or face up to the real problems or tensions or grievances they face. Instead we arrive at the twisted logic that says “the poor” should be grateful for being healthy and the “sick” grateful for not having to work, and so on, until we reach the point where everyone is supposed to ignore life’s legitimate shortcomings and grievances and opt instead for a total denial of reality.

The second scenario results in a sublimation of life's reality whereby those who suffer sorrow or injustice etc. are made to think that what is important is sacrifice for the sake of sacrifice and in the name of country, social class, a better place in heaven or other unverifiable justification.

In the third, we create a "for show" society in which everyone is permitted to live as they want in private, so long as in public, they have the good manners to "act" according to whatever supposed "gospels" are considered appropriate at the moment.

In the last scenario, but definitely not the least, we end up with a society where we stop even worrying about the fact that our external behaviors are not in the least sincere, or felt, resulting in a society of "hypocrisy" and a supposedly "NEW CHRISTIAN APPROACH" where "appearances" substitute for "being" and "doing" substitutes for "living".

In contrast to these false notions of "leavening" the environments, Cursillo is rooted in the desire to actually transform HISTORY, which is the collective consequence of people's interactions, by leavening the interpersonal friendships within any given circumstance and environment.

One of the sharpest thinkers of this century, Ortega y Gasset, asserted that; one can never really understand man, — the human being — but only "man and his circumstance (or man in the context of his environment).

The person is never really separable from the circumstances of his life. Therefore, when Cursillo speaks of the "environment" it wants to change, it does NOT mean the structure, or organizations, the climate or culture of any particular circumstance of life, but the circumstance itself and the people within it.

We believe that "people" make and shape history and therefore, by transforming "people", history will be transformed from the inside out, thus transforming every environment and all of life's circumstances.

By cultivating and nurturing true interpersonal relationships, and the warmest of them all is FRIENDSHIP, within all of life's circumstances or environments, we create the vertebrae and the ferment, or leavening, that is needed to move the Precursillo of today, to (when the Lord wishes and we have been able to make possible by our own conversions) the Postcursillo of tomorrow, when all things shall be restored to Christ and the Kingdom of God that is already amongst us will be revealed through friendship and love in all of its glory.

We do not pretend to have any recipes to change the history of the past, but we do have the necessary conviction, desire, and steadfastness, to shape the History of today and tomorrow into a history of friendship, a history of love and thus give truth to the greatest commandment of all, "To love the Lord your God, with your whole heart, your whole mind and your whole soul, and your neighbor as yourself".