

The Essence and Purpose of Cursillo

Introduction

Eduardo Bonnín Aguiló was, as he himself said, an “Apprentice Christian”, who dedicated his life to the proclamation of God’s love, valuing people, and going beyond friendship. Eduardo devoted his entire life to Cursillos. Therefore, the basis of his thinking and the development of the mentality, essence, purpose and the method of Cursillos is what we can call Eduardo's tripod: Christ, person and friendship.

The Essence of Cursillo

Essence is the nature of a thing. It is something that does not change because it is permanent. The essence of Cursillo is Christ, the person and friendship. These are the three principles that guided Eduardo’s life. Therefore, we should strive to reach a unity of purpose and understanding that Christ (theology), the person (psychology) and friendship is what should guide our lives and the Cursillo Movement in all places.

Christ

Christ came to us so that we could discover our identity, to illuminate our ability and possibilities and to help us recognize our limitations. In other words, Christ came to us so that we could start feeling and considering ourselves a person.

“Sometimes I believe that, perhaps with the best of intentions, we mistakenly believe that Christ became a man and entered history to save the world. I do not think this was His idea — I humbly confess —, I believe He became flesh and came to earth to save man, so that man could be happy through his faith in Him”. (Eduardo Bonnín)

The Christ we proclaim today is identical to the one we have always been proclaiming since the Cursillo Movement began in 1944. And this Christ is none other than the Christ of the Gospel and the Church; that is, Christ who is **alive, normal and near** to us that we have always tried to embody, express and witness to with conviction and enthusiasm at our Cursillos.

Alive, because we experience Him in ourselves and in the others. To the extent we consider Him our purpose and orientation, all of life, ours and the life of others gradually begins to make sense.

Normal, because He accompanies us in the normality of life, in the ordinary things of everyday life, in our family, in our workplace, in our daily bread, etc. We can turn to Him in our most difficult times, but also in times of joy and happiness, which He certainly wants to share with us.

Near, because He has become one of us and has come to participate in our human condition, and because we can't help but marvel at the joyful reality that, through grace, Christ is not just with us or near us, but in our inner most being.

The Person

What does it mean to be a person? What is considered most profound of our being is our essence, the core of our being, of our existence, of our identity, of our singularity, our will, our sense of life, where our hopes and our fears exist, where we encounter ourselves just as we really are, where we encounter Christ and where everything is lived.

To know oneself as a person can only come through sincerity and authenticity with ourselves. Only through sincerity will we know where we came from, where we are now, and where we are going.

We see the person as a being for love. There are many people who feel alienated from the Gospel because we, Christians, have not managed to convey to them — through friendship — that the love they are seeking is, thanks to Christ, within their reach, within themselves and in their brothers and sisters.

The person is the reflection, the expression, and the splendor of God's specific plan for the human being. Being a person is a reality always open to becoming more of a person and a better person.

The concepts that Cursillo offers, are focused on helping the person discover their own worth, because of what they are and for their capacity to love and to be loved; certainly not because of their power, their knowledge, or their possessions.

Cursillos in Christianity is a Movement, that by means of its own method, attempts, from within the Church, to ensure that the reality of being Christian comes alive in the singularity, originality, and creativity of each person. Therefore, in Cursillo the person is the focus of our concern.

Friendship

Friendship is foundational in Cursillo. Each phase of Cursillo facilitates encounters that generate friendship, that generate a desire to be friends or to become better friends.

Friendship is the human and evangelical form of communication among people. Friendship is the way God relates with people, and it is the best way possible for a person to relate both with God and with others.

If friendship is to be a true friendship, it has to be without conditions. Historically, it has been said in Cursillo that the tree of friendship cannot be planted or grown in expectation of its fruits or its shadow (in which to shelter from the summer sun), but for the joy that

more trees exist, for the joy of knowing they exist, for the pleasure of their company, because their mere presence creates closeness. What matters is the friend, not what they have or what they know or what they can do.

The essence and purpose of Cursillo, can only be understood and appreciated in a climate of true friendship. It is sad to hear that some people try to learn from studying, what can only be understood through loving.

Cursillo reveals to us the best news - that God loves us, transmitted through the best means - friendship, addressed to the best part of ourselves - our capacity to be a person.

Jesus is our best friend. We were created to be friends with Christ. Therefore, it is important to know Christ as a friend, my friend, your friend. The friend who never leaves me, the friend who accepts me as I am. The friend who does not demand, but rather invites. When we feel his love and his friendship, we naturally respond to his love and mercy. And to live this reality in my interior generates a joy because it makes me feel free and I realize I cannot live without him. In Romans 8:38 we read: "I am convinced that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ".

The Purpose of Cursillo

Things are better understood when we understand the essence and purpose.

"The Cursillo Movement is a movement in the Church, but not for the Church, but rather for 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". (Signs of Hope, Interview with Eduardo Bonnín)

All religions, in one way or another, manifest what man has done to approach God. The Christian Religion - that of Christ – consists of the reality of what God has done to approach man.

The Cursillo Movement consists of: proclaiming the best news of the best reality: that God in Christ, loves us; communicated by the best means: which is friendship; towards the best of each one: which is, being a person.

This is the focus from which the essentials of Cursillo and the purpose we are trying to accomplish can be understood; which is to learn to live life in light of this truth. We want to embrace and share God's love through friendship in our reality and in the normality of our lives.

The purpose of Cursillo is to communicate the Good News of God's love to the person, preferentially, but not exclusively to the person who is far and away from Christ and his

Church. The knowledge, conviction, and the experience of the purpose of Cursillo makes possible the living and sharing of what is fundamental to being Christian.

Every person is offered the possibility of living what is fundamental to being Christian in their life and in their environments. The consequence of this living is a sharing of their lives with others through friendship and thus transforming the environments in light of the Gospel. Cursillo facilitates a new life (Christian) for the person, that results from the encounter with self, with Christ, and with others and that develops in the experience of what is fundamentally Christian.

What is Fundamental to Being Christian

So, what is fundamental to being Christian? It is not a doctrine we need to know, but a reality we must live in connection with life itself. The Gospel is not simply about opting for virtue, but rather, to sincerely strive to exercise the virtue of opting for Christ and the person.

God in Christ loves us! God loves you and loves me. To be Christian, more than anything else, is to feel loved by God and to live in awe of that love since allowing oneself to be loved by God is what is most authentically Christian.

The internal reality of God's love that is generated in the person can become infectious when it is truly understood, believed, lived and shared to its fullness. When we know and believe that God loves us, we begin to encounter God as He is (God is Love), and therefore, encounter Him as we are.

However, to understand and experience this reality (God loves us), means to move from the commandment to love God to the Good News that God loves us!

What is fundamental to being Christian lies in:

- Living a life in Christ – Because Christ is the essence, the foundation and expression of the personal love of God.
- Living a life in Grace – Because Grace is the gift of God in Christ that is offered to each person fully so that they may live in communion with Him.
- Living a life of Faith – Because Faith is the person's response to God revealed in Christ and the existential yes of the person to God.
- Living a life as Church – Because as Church, we are the Mystical Body of Christ, where we encounter Christ and in Christ the Father.
- Living the Sacraments – God encounters us in the Sacraments. Each sacrament reveals the double dimension constituting human existence. The vertical dimension is communion or friendship with God and the horizontal dimension is communion or friendship with our brothers and sisters.

Living and sharing what is fundamental to being Christian is about sharing it in friendship, because Christian living is shared living. This supposes we are:

- Living the triple encounter: with self, with Christ, and with others.
- Living the process of a conscious, constantly growing and shared conversion.
- Living an experience that develops around:
 - Friendship with Christ through prayer,
 - A community of brothers and sisters,
 - An apostolic responsibility since this is the consequence of being Christian.

So, what are the consequences when we do not have a good understanding of the essence and purpose of Cursillo and when we stop living and sharing what is fundamental to being Christian? What will happen is that the holy simplicity of what is indented in Cursillo becomes complicated and living what is fundamental becomes a burden. In other words, we will be tempted to adapt, manipulate or distort the truth and simplicity of the essence, purpose and method of Cursillo.

Here is a quote from Eduardo's Spiritual Testament where he expresses concern:

"If we compare the Cursillo Movement to a tree, we are happy to see that it has grown, because the evangelical seed sown in many hearts and cultivated through prayer, has given its fruit. But it also hurts us to see that in some places, no doubt with the best of intentions, they have taken the tree of Cursillo for a Christmas tree and have been hanging lights and decorations and have gradually spoiled its clear and simple profile".

People argue that the purpose and the method need to be updated. They forget that the evil in men has always had the same roots: selfishness, ambition or pride. People also forget that the solution is and has always been the same: The living Christ and His grace.

Some people have used Cursillo to recruit enthusiastic and generous people to serve in a particular area such as their favorite apostolate, social or charitable organizations, not taking the freedom of the person into account but only their usefulness.

Cursillo is not about making leaders to be workers in the parish ministries, where they are used as lectors, to sing in⁵ the choir, to teach catechesis or be bookkeepers in the parish, nor to increase the religious vocations or visit the sick, visit prisoners, etc.

No one is saying that all the groups or ministries just mentioned are not good, or that they should not be done. No, not at all, what is meant is that this type of work or action is not part of the genuine and original purpose of Cursillo.

Yes, there are Cursillistas who visit the prison, visit those in the hospital, there are those who teach catechesis, those who help in parish ministries, but this is not the orientation or

purpose of Cursillo. These Cursillistas do it because they want to and because they can. However, those Cursillistas who don't do any of these tasks are never considered less Christian.

“As for the recruitment of Cursillistas, especially those who recently lived their Cursillo, by certain parish priests, in order to incorporate them into diverse tasks or specific areas of the parochial apostolate such as catechism, social justice, visiting the sick or other ministries; I consider that such requirements, will not constitute an advance of being Christian for the Cursillista. Especially, when the administration of such new ecclesiastic responsibilities will take away time from his basic Christian action in daily life, which is to give witness of Christ in the place where God has placed him”. (Intervention by Eduardo Bonnín at the Pontifical Council for the Laity Meeting, Rome, 2006)

Often it seems that when someone discovers that God loves them during the Three-Day Cursillo, the leaders make them feel responsible for all the evil in the world and make them pay the price by telling them what they have to do to fix everything that is wrong. The leaders forget that Christ calls the person “to be” Christian before “doing” Christian things. In other words. “to be” an Apostle before “doing” the apostolate.

Cursillo is not intended to satisfy the hunger for God but to create a hunger for Him. We are to be happy and joyful, but never satisfied. Let us believe in the Holy Spirit and in the person. Cursillo seeks that the freedom of the person encounters the Spirit of God and after this he can do whatever he believes is best in life.

Life makes sense when we want what we actually do. Not when we do what we want or when we do what we are told. And this is only possible when our decisions flow from a genuine personal conviction.

When we implement the genuine purpose of Cursillo, no one is offended, and everything is revitalized, however, Cursillo is not to revitalize anything in particular, Cursillo is to give life to life itself, to our day-to-day living.

Saint Pope John Paul II reminded us: “The most important task for Christians is not so much to improve the world, as to improve oneself.” One should realize that when improving oneself, the world also improves.

It is important for everyone to understand that Christ did not come to save the world but to save the people in the world.

Cursillo was born more than 70 years ago. A young man, Eduardo, could not understand the life of a society that called itself Catholic but, didn't act as Christians. What he witnessed was Catholic practices in the parishes, but not people who were friends or

brothers and sisters in their homes.

He discovered that his companions in the military, when out on leave, apparently had a very good time, but when talking to them privately and confidentially, he found out that the joy they expressed was in fact sorrow and loneliness. He considered these the faraway. He and some of his friends began planning on how to take the Good News of God's love to these people.

Cursillo is a movement that seeks to leaven the environments with a Christian mentality and spirit. When the Gospel is introduced into the living context of human existence; we call this giving a strong backbone to Christianity.

Movements provide personal support for the proclamation of a truth or idea. Cursillo, through the Grace of God, is on its way to achieving this. Cursillo provides the means and support to communicate the Good News of God's love through those who decide to share it through friendship.

In Cursillo we are called to generate friendship, to create a world of friends wherever we are. It is possible to create a climate of friendship in our own environment, and through that friendship the Good News becomes real and attractive to the person. This is what we call evangelization of environments, one person at a time.

As we move towards this aim, we form a movement, gathering people with the same mentality, and together we move, we think, we live, and we decide to carry out this purpose through the method of friendship.

Therefore, the Three-Day Cursillo is a method to witness to Christ and an offer of friendship.

The Group Reunion is a group of friends that meet to share at a personal level and in that way their own life becomes a life in Christ.

The Ultreya is the place where people re-encounter Christ and re-encounter friends.

A Leader is one who is grateful of the love and friendship of Christ and one who acts according to the method to make friends and make them friends of Christ.

The Secretariat is a group of friends that put the method into practice and look after the purpose which is Christ.

The School of Leaders is a group of friends loyal to the purpose and method and who organize themselves so that Christ can be shared with as many people as possible.

In Conclusion

The essence of Cursillo is **Christ, the person and friendship**.

The purpose of Cursillo is to communicate the Good News of God's love to the person, preferentially, but not exclusively to the person who is far and away from Christ and his Church. The knowledge, conviction, and the experience of the purpose of Cursillo makes possible the living and sharing of what is fundamental to being Christian.

Simply stated, without friendship there is no Cursillo. You can have everything organized. The Three-Day Cursillos can be made, Group Reunions and Ultreyas can be held, School of Leaders and Secretariat meetings can be held; however, if there is no friendship there is no Cursillo. And . . . if there is no friendship everything has been a lie!

My brothers and sisters, I leave you with this final quote from Eduardo's Spiritual Testament:

"The Cursillo Movement gives the Cursillistas a true, lively and attractive vision of the living Christ of the Gospel who, once resurrected, renews all things, and that through His grace lived consciously, He turns us into a new person equipped to live in the world valuing what He values".

"Connected with the divine force at work in the sacraments, the Cursillista gradually discovers that if he contributes his enthusiasm, his dedication and his spirit of charity, living in grace, he realizes that, in spite of all the ups and downs, adventures and misadventures of life, the most important thing in life is life itself. The fact of being alive, will drive him to be grateful and come to the realization that life is beautiful, people are important, and life is worth living".

Cursillistas, God in Christ loves you and I do too!

De Colores!