

## **THE ESSENTIAL, IMPORTANT AND ACCIDENTAL ELEMENTS IN THE CURSILLO MOVEMENT - BY EDUARDO BONNÍN**

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I have been asked to speak on what is essential, what is important, and what is accidental in the Cursillo Movement. With this purpose in mind, I believe that what must be done is to clearly delineate that which is essential to the Movement, because that which is important and accidental will naturally flow from this, provided we all use a little bit of common sense.

That which is essential defines the very nature of a thing. It is that which is permanent and changeless within it. This is the element which we must seek to define within the Cursillo Movement.

Perhaps there are many things within the Cursillo Movement which could be changed without disturbing its essence. Thus we could conceive, perhaps, of someone who would design Cursillo which would last only two days, or one which might be expanded to five days. In so doing, they might not tamper with the essential element, but undoubtedly they would destroy the simplicity, the unity, and the clarity of the message in the process of changing it.

The Cursillo is designed as a direct channel which should move people from where they are to where they ought to be. It might be compared to a very beautiful and wide new expressway, which would enable an ordinary man to reach his destiny without too much difficulty. Naturally, it would be foolish to expect such a beautiful expressway to always pass near our homes, for our own convenience.

When we speak of a Cursillo, as you well know, we are speaking of a group of persons who come together for three days to share friendship, personal contact, and joy. It is here that we must bring into focus and clearly delineate the purpose of the Movement. The question which presents itself is: Just what is it that these people wish to achieve, and how do they propose to achieve it? The Cursillo proposes, and with the grace of God, achieves for the individual understanding, conviction, a living experience, and a warm personal sharing, i.e. *convivencia*, of all that is basic to living Christianity.

Now, what is it that is basic to Christianity? That precisely which is basic to Christianity is the love of God, the love of neighbor, and the love of the world. But all of this is realized within an even greater reality - the fact that God loves us, that he seeks us, and that he is waiting for us. If we take these truths as our point of departure, we then have what is really basic, the essential nucleus.

The Cursillo Movement holds this priceless treasure in reserve, as it were, as a backing for the paper money that is issued during the three day weekend. Everyone is well aware that paper money must have a gold reserve. Our gold reserve is the living conviction that the love of God, the love of neighbor, and the love of the world is indeed possible to us precisely because God loves us. This is the ABC of living Christianity. To be ignorant

of this would be like being a person who has vast knowledge of many things but is unable to read and write.

The purpose of the Cursillo is to stimulate hunger for God through awareness of these truths. Within the Church we possess many things to satisfy hunger, but few to create it. What we propose is to draw persons to become profoundly and authentically Christian without ceasing to be what they are by making them keenly aware of the great truth that God loves them. This is what is important.

When I love someone, I am certain of my love within me. But if someone tells me he loves me, I must take it on faith. I must take his word for it. Faith overcomes all. When I love someone, I can prove it to myself. I can point to this, that, or another thing I have done to prove my love. And the recollection of this is sufficient to establish the presence of my love. But when we are loved, we must believe that we are loved.

We do not intend to remove anyone from his world, but we simply wish him to remain there and be a witness to Christ. For example, in most cities of any size, we generally find a zoo which contains a tiger, a lion, an elephant, etc. that were removed from the jungle, their natural habitat. Little by little they ceased to be jungle animals. We do not intend to build a zoo; we intend to baptize the jungle. Let a man be what he is, wherever he is but authentically Christian. Sometimes, you know, we do with Christians what they do with cod fish - we cut off their heads and try to press them into a package. The Cursillo is the art of catching the whole fish, whole and entire, with its head, its scales and its fins.

The Cursillo is an unfolding of everything that is Christian.

A man of his own mind, one capable of conviction and decision, projects his values, his life-style, and his spirit through word and example in friendship. When a person of such quality comes into contact with other persons who are likewise capable of their own conviction and decisions, and who possess their own proper life-style, spirit, and values, this contact evokes, by way of reflection, a new consciousness which reassesses and restructures their values so that they can come to share the same life. They become integrated into this way of life by understanding it well, by appreciating it, by living it out - sustained by prayer, meditation and action.

Within the Cursillo, we are aware that there must be a group of leaders, priests and laymen, (not too many now, just enough,) who are dedicated to the service of those who come to make the Cursillo. These must be well coordinated, and the candidates must be open to them. It is not proper to have more than 35 candidates. A larger number becomes difficult to manage.

Everyone within the Cursillo must live the complete experience - everyone, everything - prayer, study and action, shared during meals, discussion, chapel, recreation. This sharing brings about an encounter with himself, with Christ, and with his neighbor. Later these three encounters must be given their proper place within the perspective of action.

The most important thing about the Cursillo itself is that it be a solid chunk of reality and not a conglomeration of unreal and imaginary things. It must be natural, authentic, and without exaggeration. It must be a true encounter of persons. It must be true to life, true to the Gospel, and everyone must be open to each other. The environment must be one of frankness, cordiality, and joyfulness. The personal contact must be sincere, with depth and understanding. And when we speak of faithfulness to the Gospel we mean that everyone must have a concept of Christ that is faithful and dynamic. God, Christ, is not a static concept. He furnishes us with the light through which we are enabled to solve our own problems.

The total focus must be centered on the person. Only within this frame of reference can we properly evaluate all ideology and methodology. When we place greater emphasis on the ideas and the method, and withdraw our attention from the person, we always end up in a big mess. When we overemphasize slogans and verbal rituals, instead of fostering true brotherhood, we often end up with victims, i.e., those who conquer and those who are conquered among the group. We must treat persons who, as we have indicated, are capable of conviction and decision, and who possess capacity for free choice and great initiative, with respect for their individual personalities. Whenever we forget the importance of the person, rather than fostering his freedom, we might actually end up restricting him still further. Instead of promoting his development, we might be complicating it.

The most profound desire of the human heart is to find meaning in life. This desire obviously finds fulfillment when one lives, conscious that he loves God, his neighbor, and the world and is loved by God. Man goes from belief to love. Every man endeavors to flee from his fears and complexes to his aspirations. Thus is the life pattern of every man. That on which a man sets value and towards which he aspires, is where we must meet him.

It has been said, and it is true, that the Cursillo has several phases. The leaders, rather than concentrate on the various phases of the Cursillo as a whole, must be primarily concerned with the process which the candidates are undergoing. We are accustomed to speak of the state of grace. It would be more proper to speak of the process of grace which is initiated in each person. In terminology which might not sound entirely Christian, one could say that we propose to prod a person out of his present position by a constant bombardment of positive realities.

Being Christians, we are fully aware that there are two stages in our faith, conversion, i.e., *kerygma*, and knowledge, i.e. *catechesis*. To proclaim what is basic to Christianity, conversion, to evoke an encounter with God and to motivate an effective living out of the same, is *kerygma*. Catechesis is making explicit all that is implied in what is basic to Christianity. The faith of conversion contains all that is essential to the faith. Catechesis is not a perfecting of the faith but simply its explanation.

Recalling for a moment the words of the Gospel, we find that the centurion had a complete faith. Christ praised his faith and remarked that he had not found a faith so great

in all of Israel. The good thief on the cross also possessed this great faith – “Lord, remember me when you enter into your kingdom.” Both had faith, the fundamental element of faith: openness to God.

The rich young man in the Gospel, on the other hand, had a tremendous catechesis. But he did not have the faith of conversion, i.e. the faith of self-surrender. He had a lot of know how, he knew many ways to be a Christian, and he had even fulfilled the commandments. But he did not have this openness, total self-surrender.

The Cursillo Movement - and this has been a source of much confusion - is directed towards the first, to bring about conversion. At times, when undue emphasis is placed on the duration of the rollos, when an attempt is made to explain everything in the three days, we create confusion. We create the impression that this is a form of catechesis. And it cannot be catechesis because there simply is not enough time. Rather, it is simply a matter of producing that great impact which leads to conversion. Thus, these excessively long rollos - sometimes unbearable - the attempt to explain the entire system of sacramental theology in the rollo on the Sacraments, is an abuse. No one can stand this.

From the very first moment, the Cursillo must be orientated toward that which is positive in the person and in the community. Sometimes, in that first meditation, the example of the movie is used to convince one that he is evil, rather than to convince him that he is, in reality, unhappy. At the same time, we should not foster his self-assurance, but we should stimulate questioning. If we leave him in his self-assurance, he is susceptible to pride, while if he is left in a questioning mood, he is prone to continue seeking the answers.

Sometimes evidence enslaves, self-assurance inflates, and hope keeps us awake and spurs us on. Our purpose is to build that which is fundamentally Christian on that which is fundamentally human, namely, hope.

The explanation and the precise understanding of what is essential will place what is important and accidental in proper focus. That must be considered important which most adequately brings about the realization of what is essential - whatever circumstances demand so that what is essential may be achieved. That which is accidental is that which may be freely added or subtracted without damage to the essential and the important.

As an overview, we would now like to give a few ideas on the Precursillo, the Cursillo, and the Postcursillo. Our greatest concern is the selection of candidates. We must remember that selection has scriptural foundation. Our failures can always be traced to weakness in the Precursillo. Before he makes the Cursillo, we must know his life-style and his attitudes. This is made easier if the candidate has come through contact with the Cursillo community.

There is a lot of common sense in the Precursillo that we must always bear in mind. We seek individuals with personality. What we mean by this can perhaps best be brought out by comparing a person with strong personality to a locomotive that is pulling a number of

cars. When such a person is brought into a religious atmosphere without the cars, he ceases to be a locomotive. If we want to assure that an individual with a strong personality retain his strength of personality, he must bring with him into the Cursillo, at the same time or as soon as possible, those individuals over whom he exerts influence, so that they may give him confidence in his role as a leader. Otherwise, he who is a locomotive for the world would not be a locomotive for God. What is important in the Precursillo is to be attentive to the moving of the spirit, rather than to rely solely on experience and routine.

History is but a record of mistakes. We must not be satisfied with past successes and feel that things are being done well. There is always room for improvement. When speaking of the Precursillo, the Cursillo, and the Postcursillo, we must remember that old saying which says that when it comes to questions of health, only what is best is good enough.

The most important thing with regards to the Cursillo is that everything be true to life and authentic. Here, it is not merely a question of saying things, but of living them. Here one does not theorize, one shares himself, emerged in the nucleus of Christianity - the love of God, the love of neighbor, and the love of the world - which finds expression in the idealism, the commitment, and the spirit of charity both of the leaders and of those who will be led by them. This means to live in and by faith, hope, and love.

In regards to the Postcursillo, that which we must achieve is the living out in their daily life all that the candidates have lived and experienced in the Cursillo. There is a variety of means to attain this goal, but none of them should overshadow the value of life itself. A good Group Reunion and a good Ultreya cannot be measured by the number of people who attend or by the spirit which prevails there, for this is very easy to obtain. Rather, their quality should be assessed by the degree to which these individuals live out their entire life by the spirit which all this presupposes. Participation in Group Reunion must not be brought about through assignment or imposition, but it must be the product of a spontaneous free choice of those involved. With regard to the Ultreya, let it be an emersion of the individual and his group in the preoccupations and concerns of all the other persons and groups who participate in the Ultreya.

The School of Leaders is not established to produce apostolic professionals, but persons who live the life they should and who can serve as living witnesses to the rest.

The Secretariats at all levels must never become control towers which issue commands, but they must be persons who humbly put themselves at the service of others, becoming aware of their problems and seek solutions with them.

With the core ideas I have sketched above concerning what is essential, it is easy, using a bit of common sense, to see its relationship to all sections of the Cursillo Movement - to the Precursillo, the Cursillo, the Postcursillo, the Group Reunions, Ultreyas, School of Leaders and Secretariats, and in relation to other movements. The important thing is for every person to be aware of his full potential. What is of ultimate importance is that the resurrection of Christ be realized in each person, and that we do not complicate this

resurrection but facilitate it. The shortest and surest route to attain this is by following the norms which have been established, always bearing in mind that norms are only a means.

The most important element is, of course, the spirit which permeates everything in the Movement, and that this spirit be filled with all the great ideas which are most timely and effective today. We must always bear in mind that, that which is the greatest importance is that Christ come alive in each person, and that we do not possess all the solutions, but Christ himself is the solution.

Thus we will become aware, as the Holy Father has said, that the cause of man is not lost, that great ideas will never be extinguished, that unity of the world will be achieved, that the dignity of the human person will be recognized, that social injustice will be eliminated, that neither selfishness nor ignorance will impede the establishment of a truly human order because, as Pope Paul VI said, Christ has risen in everyone.