

LEADERSHIP IN THE CURSILLO MOVEMENT

Source: National Cursillo Center Mailing – August 2009

As many of us were spiritually and emotionally elated after attending our 19th National Cursillo Encounter in San Bernardino, and our exuberant World Ultreya in Anaheim Convention Center, in California, USA, we have felt greatly enlightened in our Cursillo Movement and our morale has been uplifted with much enthusiasm and gratitude to the Holy Spirit with His wonderful gift of our Cursillo Movement to the Church through Eduardo Bonnín's foundational charism.

Even though feeling excited and optimistic about our Cursillo Movement, we need to stop, once in a while, in order to look back on our Fourth Day journey and evaluate the steps we take towards the mission of our Movement and of the Church. There is always a need of encouragement as well as room for improvement. The small participation of the current diocesan and regional Cursillo leaders at our annual National Encounters shows little commitment in our Cursillo leadership. We should be honest enough to admit that there is a serious shortage of knowledgeable and committed leaders, who are eager to join the School of Leaders, to serve on the Diocesan Secretariats, and on the Regional Service Teams. Some leaders, therefore, can hardly find their replacements. We do not feel pessimistic about this situation, but on the contrary, we should confidently face this challenge and prayerfully work for the changes!

The most practical and straightforward book about the Cursillo leadership is “Whom Shall I Send?” by Father Frank S. Salmani. This book is very helpful for Cursillo leaders, already translated into Spanish and Vietnamese. The present and prospective Cursillo leaders would benefit greatly if they read and studied it carefully and thoroughly before they make up their minds whether or not to serve the Movement in any capacity at any levels. This learning material is indispensable to the formation of Cursillo leaders and is strongly recommended for study in our School of Leaders. The book has nineteen chapters with specific topics supported by references of the Holy Scripture Readings, and each chapter is followed by Chapter Summary and Questions for Reflection/Discussion. Please check it out at our National Cursillo[®] Center, Tel. # 214-339-6321 or www.natl-cursillo.org

The Cursillo Leaders and Their Responsibilities

Discerning the Lord's Call

In the meditation “The Selection of the Twelve”, Magnificat July 8, 2009, Father André Louf, O.C.S.O., wrote: “Jesus called to him those he himself wanted. The selection, accordingly, does not come from the side of those called; it proceeds in the first place from Jesus himself. It is he who wants them or does not want them, an expression which clearly indicates that in this selection Jesus enjoys supreme freedom. A person was simply selected because Jesus preferred him, without any further motives. At the moment of selection what matters is not what these people are. He simply prefers them because he loves them, each one individually. Nothing other than Jesus' love and preference explains this selection.”

Fr. Frank S. Salmani in the Epilogue of his book stated that if we decide our particular calling is to the Cursillo Movement as a Cursillo leader, we must understand that this calling, like any calling from God is a vocation – it is not something we choose. The Lord chooses us. Accepting that call means making a commitment to God and His work. It involves directing our will to all that God wants. It means that we must be responsible stewards, sharing our time, talent and treasure with the world. If we accept the task of being a Cursillo leader, it also implies that this should be our primary apostolate. Not everyone is called to do everything. We are not called to do everything, but whatever challenge we do accept should be given our undivided attention.

Jesus' command to his followers "Go and make disciples of all nations!" encouraged them to go out and not only spread the Good News, but to literally recruit others to continue to spread the message, to find other disciples, "students" of the Gospel that would continue the work of the first apostles. Jesus does not ask everyone to embrace the same call. He calls all to accept the Gospel, and by baptism, to be disciples, students of Jesus Christ, but He calls certain people to be leaders to help others accept the call. Some are called to lead others. They are Cursillistas who are willing to walk an extra mile for Jesus, to serve on the Secretariat, in the Pre-Cursillo, on the Cursillo Weekend, on the Post-Cursillo as Ultreya leaders and in the School of Leaders. They believe that the Cursillo is a gift of God given to them, and they must share the fruits of this gift with the world. This new life they share in Christ cannot be kept to themselves. They have an obligation to give glory and praise to God for all He has shared with them. According to Fr. Salmani's advice, as Cursillo leaders, we can renew our communities by offering our time, talent and treasures to help further the Kingdom of God. The basis of stewardship lies in the idea of the covenant. God has promised that He would be with us at all times and provide for all our needs. In a spirit of gratitude, we have a moral obligation to give back to God something in return. If we examine the principles of stewardship, we will easily see how the call to be leaders and the call to be good stewards are one and the same.

All of us are called to embrace our Fourth Day fully, but some are called to do the special work of the Cursillo Movement. Not everyone will be called to the School of Leaders. We can never water down the principles of the Cursillo or the School of Leaders out of fear that it will not be for everyone. So how do we discern where God wants us to be? The answer is simple – through prayer.

Ongoing Conversion and Learning

Ongoing conversion is essential for the Cursillo. Our life of Piety, Study and Action is essential to our living out our Fourth Day. Without this three-fold dimension of the Christian life, the Christian life is lacking. Group Reunion and Ultreya are also essential for Cursillistas because these help to sustain and support their three-fold life in Christ. Part of this ongoing conversion is a continual commitment to service, to each other and to the work of the Cursillo, which is the work of Christ and His Church.

Fr. Salmani concluded his Chapter on Prayer as “Communion” with God: Our work is a call from God and the ongoing work will feed ongoing prayer that will help in our progressive conversion. Work and prayer are interwoven just as the vertical (God) and horizontal (others) dimension of our spiritual life are interwoven. If we accept the call as a Cursillo leader, prayer and study will be the fuel for the work of the Movement. It is not enough to be filled spiritually. We need Christians who are leaders not because they are spiritually advanced, but leaders who are willing to set standards for Christian service to the Cursillo, the Church and the world.

In addition to their ongoing conversion through their constant communion with God, Cursillo leaders seek to learn more and delve more deeply into the mystery of Christ. Further, if we believe that the Cursillo is the best method to Christianize the world, we have to know as much about it as possible. A “little” knowledge is a dangerous thing. What we need is ongoing formation. Annual National Cursillo[®] Encounters, Regional gatherings in the Spring and in the Fall each year and a variety of leadership workshops, Cursillo de Cursillos, for example, made available at the diocesan and regional levels are good opportunities for the present and future Cursillo leaders to increase their knowledge about our Movement in order to serve their Cursillistas effectively. I have heard this stern but impressive statement of some leaders: “It is better for the Cursillo Movement to remain dormant than to be run by unknowledgeable and uncommitted leaders.”

Promoting the Foundational Charism and Authenticity of the Cursillo Movement

Mr. Eduardo Bonnín Aguiló himself, in his most recently published book entitled “My Spiritual Testament”, 2009, wrote about the true authorship of the Cursillo: “Whenever I have been asked who was the author of everything about Cursillo I have said categorically that it was the Holy Spirit, but when they asked me who made up the structure, who collected the anecdotes, who structured the lay Rollos, who devised the Group Reunion and the Ultreya, so as to avoid lying I have had to say that it was me”.

The Cursillo Movement is God’s gift to us and to the Church. The Spirit gave us this Movement with its method. We have no right to tamper with it. The Cursillo did not invent what is fundamental to being Christian. We are simply carrying on the mission of Christ, which is now the mission of the Church.

Fr. Salmani reminds us that the mentality of the Cursillo deals with those elements that are essential to the Cursillo, those things that distinguish the Cursillo from other movements within the Church and give the Cursillo its unique identity. I feel that we have added ideas and adaptations that are not in line with the foundational charism. This is evident by Mr. Bonnín’s quotation from his book ‘My Spiritual Testament’: “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 with 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 the Cursillos for the Christmas tree and have been hanging lights and decorations (their favorite ideas) and have gradually been spoiling its clear and simple process.....” He continues with yet more adaptations that have been added to

Cursillo as he quotes, “There are other oddities occurring on the last day before the closing ceremony: in some places a special meal is prepared which they call “agape”. Elsewhere a handful of letters are delivered to each of the new Cursillistas from senders unknown to him or her, in which he or she is congratulated on having had the experience of a Cursillo Weekend. These letters have been written at the suggestion of the leaders in order to encourage the new Cursillistas. Upon receiving them, of course, they can be nothing but surprised, which distracts them to the point of having them pay more attention to the letters than to the clausura.” And he points out yet another addition: “At the end of the Weekend, the leaders wash the feet of the new Cursillistas.....” All these quotes are taken from Mr. Bonnín’s book under the chapter title “About Weaknesses of the Cursillos”.

First and foremost is God’s love for us. Without this God of love, there is no Cursillo. Without our friendship with Jesus and others, there is no authentic Christian life. The Cursillo without virtuous friendship is certainly NOT authentic Cursillo. St. Thomas Aquinas, in his ‘Summa Theologica’, gave this sweeping assertion on why a person needs friends, “For in order that man may do well, whether in the works of the active life, or in those of the contemplative life, he needs the fellowship of friends” (Epilogue: Friendship: The Art of Happiness, by John Cuddeback, 2003).

We are called to a life of authenticity. Without authenticity, everything we say or do is a sham. We must believe what we live and live what we believe. If we do not walk the talk, then we pay lip service to Christ and the purpose of the Cursillo. If we say that the Cursillo is our primary apostolate, then it must be primary. It cannot be simply a hobby when it fits into our busy schedule. Whatever we commit to Christ should be given all of our efforts.

The Temptations Faced by Cursillo Leaders

The example of humility Jesus shows us (washing the apostles’ feet) is a reminder that the first thing a leader must do is get rid of all ambition and the lust for power. When we speak of being a leader for Christ, the issue is not one of control, but of service, responsibility and accountability.

As Christian leaders and as Cursillo leaders, we must be concerned about upholding what is right and not be concerned with keeping our position intact. Christian leaders need to make the tough decisions, even when they are not popular. Within the Cursillo Movement, Lay Directors, Spiritual Advisors, Secretariat members are called to stand on the truth, whether it is popular or not, whether it threatens their ‘job security’ or not.

True disciples of Jesus must understand that they are not indispensable. Christianity, the Church, the Cursillo Movement do not rise or fall based on their leaders’ performance. All too often leaders are ineffective because they spend more time focusing on the power and authority they either have or seek than they do concentrating on doing the job at hand. All Cursillistas have an important role to bring the world to Christ, regardless what their official ‘title’ might be or not be.

Too many Cursillistas focus more on the Weekend than on doing the work of evangelization. Yet, a Cursillista could be doing great work for the Movement without ever having to be on the Weekend team. The purpose of being a Cursillo leader is not to be on the Weekend team, but to lead other Cursillistas in their task to continue the apostolic mission begun by Jesus and the Twelve. One of the reasons our Pre-Cursillo and Post-Cursillo is often weak is because all our energy is put on the Weekend. The Weekend is only one part of the job, and in the broader scheme of things, the Weekend is the least important part of the Cursillo – it is simply a means to get people from the Pre-Cursillo to the Post-Cursillo.

In our consumerist society we have become obsessed with the need to see results in everything we do. It is a great temptation to get discouraged because things are not moving fast enough or we see no visible results. In our apostolic work we want to give up because we have so many failures. The only thing that is essential in this regard is that we do our work for Christ, whether or not we see noticeable results.

Related to the issue of successes and failures is the concern over numbers. We are concerned about filling Weekends, the size of our School of Leaders, the number of people attending Ultreya. Again numbers are incidental. In a School of Leaders it is better to have ten leaders committed to the work of the Cursillo than a School of thirty people, with the same ten still carrying the load. Bodies are not all important. Bodies without commitment accomplishes nothing. The purpose of Ultreya is not to fill halls with Cursillistas, but make Ultreya available.

If we are called to do God's work it should make no difference who is in authority. The apostolate is still the apostolate, regardless of the Lay Director or Spiritual Advisor, the Secretariat or anyone else. On Weekends we want to put our 'friends' on the team with us, whether or not they have an authentic witness. Our vocation is given to us by Christ through baptism, not by some individual leader. All of us are called to be servants of Christ, no matter what position of authority we have or do not have. Finally, Father Salmani reminds us that no one person is so essential that the community cannot survive without him or her. This is a familiar malady that we all know from parish experience. People follow a certain priest and after he is transferred, there is a new 'clique' with the new priest. This is why communities do not stay strong. No one person is so invaluable that everything we do rests on that one person's presence.

Conclusion

Father Henri J. M. Nouwen, in his book "In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership", shared his vision about a new Christian leadership as follows: "Beneath all the great accomplishments of our time there is a deep current of despair. While efficiency and control are the great aspirations of our society, the loneliness, isolation, lack of friendship and intimacy, broken relationships, boredom, feelings of emptiness and depression, and a deep sense of uselessness fill the hearts of millions of people in our success-oriented world. ... It is here that the need for a new Christian leadership becomes

clear. The leaders of the future will be those who dare to claim their irrelevance in the contemporary world as a divine vocation that allows them to enter into a deep solidarity with the anguish underlying all the glitter of success, and to bring the light of Jesus there.” This reminds me of this anonymous saying, “We shall have to repent in this generation, not so much for the evil deeds of the wicked people, but for the appalling silence of the good people.” St. Paul, the Patron of our Cursillo Movement, reassured all Christian leaders in his second letter to the Corinthians, “I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor.12:7-10).