

Evangelization through Conversion

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As Gail was sharing with us, when we attended the Second World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities at the Vatican, it was a real eye opening experience, for all the movements that were present. The Pontifical Council for the Laity asked that we all go back to our own roots and discern the mentality of our own founder, so that we could understand and evangelize effectible within our own Charism, and, in unity with the rest of the Charisms.

And at this World Congress, I came to realize the great treasure that our Catholic Church has in all the different Charisms. It became very clear, that the Cursillo Movement was not the only Charism that could cure all the illnesses of the world. Every Charism, being a gift from the Holy Spirit, is an answer to the signs and needs of our times. I also understood how important and essential each and every one of the individual Charism are, and they way we need to complement each other, to materialize the answers of the Holy Spirit, to bring everyone a little bit closer to the love and Friendship of God.

With this in mind, I also need to tell you that this whole presentation is based on a presentation that our Founder and good friend Eduardo Bonnin Aguilo gave at the Canadian National Encounter in 1992. And I feel the need to mention this fact, because most of what I know about the Foundational Charism of Cursillos in Christianity came to me from Eduardo himself, and I just couldn't find a better way to talk about this subject, in relationship to the Foundational Charism. So is truly and honor for me, to be able to give this same talk, 20 years later.

Having said that, and in order to keep it simple and stay in the right path, I would like to start with the definition of those two words; "Evangelization" and "Conversion".

According to the Dictionary, "Evangelization" means "to preach the gospel, to convert to Christianity". And "Conversion" means, "a change in which one adopts a new religion". Therefore, I will attempt to talk about preaching the Good News, through the conversion of a person that has adopted a new way to see his Christianity.

Now, when we relate this preaching and conversion to the methodology of the Foundational Charism, we need to add our "environments". Now we can complete the dictionary definition by saying, preaching the Good News to initiate a conversion to Christianity in our "environments". And in order to fully understand this relationship, we need to understand what is meant by "Environment" in Cursillo's terminology. Because in Cursillos in Christianity, "environment", only means the Square Meter that surrounds us the 24 hours of each day of our entire life. That is to say, any place during those 24 hours of each day, wherever we have an inter-relationship with anybody; any where we are.

It is common sense, that when a person accepts and adopts that change of Mentality about his Christianity, as the Dictionary states, he becomes "The Good News". When he BECOMES "The Good News", he automatically evangelizes any environment in which he comes in contact with. Who we are, how we live and act every day of our life, is the basis for this type of evangelization.

Pope John Paul II said at III World Ultreya in Rome, on July 29, 2000: "Evangelize the environments of the third Christian millennium: this is the challenge to Cursillos in Christianity".

So, when we speak of "EVANGELIZATION", in the context of the Cursillo, we do not only mean "preaching" or "spreading" the Good News, but rather, "Becoming the Good News; as Eduardo would say, "to succeed in making the person "BECOME" the GOOD NEWS.... that joyful Good News that Christ is alive in and among His people today, just as He was 2000 years ago".

St. Francis puts it in a similar way, "let's go out and "evangelize", and if it's necessary, we'll talk". Becoming the Good News, becoming the Gospel, is the kerigmatic way that the Cursillo's methodology, attempts to evangelize the "Environments"

This was the vision and mission of the Cursillo from the very beginning. To find the best possible method to bring about the conversion of a person — 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 children of God.

1. CURSILLO, A CHANNEL TO CONVERSION

Cursillo has always strived to create this channel to Conversion. Eduardo said that, at the very beginning, they were convinced that the average man was very much aware of, and living fairly close to the Gospel values, but at the same time, were and consider themselves to be, far removed from Christ and any personal identification with Him. **And it was from this**, that their original conviction was born, **that need to find a way to help each person identify, in a personal way, the Christ of the Gospel and the Gospel of Christ**. This would then be the key, to allowing and motivating each person, to attain their fullest potential.

With this mentality, they began to create the brief, yet intense method that could succeed in accomplishing this goal, or, at least, initiate the process. Because Conversion is not an EVENT that suddenly happens, but rather a PROCESS, that unfolds little by little through a series of stages that comprise a SEARCHING, a MEETING and then a series of steps through which that "meeting" makes itself concrete, resulting in an everlasting and ever deepening PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP 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.

What a simple and beautiful thing!...

Every time I review Eduardo's writings, I ask myself, How can anyone doubt, that all this came from the Holy Spirit?... How can anyone doubt, that Eduardo was the recipient of this beautiful gift!...

But anyway, let's continue!

2. CONVERSION, A MEETING RATHER THAN A CHANGE

In Cursillo, we believe that the key to making this joyful Good News accessible to the average person, is to make them aware that their search for happiness, friendship and love, can be attained in the three essential encounters; with One's SELF, with CHRIST, and with OTHERS. Making them aware that CONVERTING ONESELF, is simply to discover the true meaning of life, and our role in it, as children of God. And of course this does not mean, becoming a “different” person, but rather, a “PLAN” to become a fully alive person!!!

In the three-day Cursillo, these three Encounters cannot fully take place unless there is a complete openness environment, where the person feels the freedom to completely open his heart and soul, and discover the greatness of his being. This is the reason why Eduardo Bonnín always opposed the Mixed Cursillos (men and women in the same weekend). Eduardo constantly repeated that men and women are physically and psychologically different, and have many different ways to express and open themselves to different realities. And together in the same Cursillo, is very difficult to create the complete openness environment for this aperture to take place. I personally asked Fr. Sebastian Gaya, when he was at the rest home in Mallorca Spain about the Mixed Cursillos, because a lot of people credit him with starting them in Madrid Spain, and his response was, **and I have it recorded**, "Mixed Cursillos are good, but not as good as men and women cursillos".

When we experience this complete openness environment and the friendship that is created, we discover that Christ exists, that He IS, and that He is also IN “oneself” and the others.

3. STAGES OF THE CONVERSION PROCESS

The method of “Cursillos in Christianity”, was created 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 help the person who is “searching” for that “**something**” that they identify as happiness or fulfillment, which we can easily translate to “**somebody**”-- **Jesus Christ**. We expand and accelerate their search and direct it towards those three essential encounters. (Self, Christ and others). And by doing this, we make their previous unrest, become the very motivating force, for their new found enthusiasm, for a sincere and hopeful conversion.

During the Cursillo 3-day weekend, the methodology of the Foundational Charism attempts to crystallize this unrest, searching through the three essential encounters of the person with their own self; with Christ and with others, and with the Grace of God, it's almost always achieved.

However, just because someone has lived a Cursillo weekend, it doesn't mean that the person is now a "Christian" and the job is done. All we can say is that the person, has INITIATED the conversion process. When this is done correctly and simply, according to the authentic method, the three days instills a hunger and identifies the METHOD, a person can use to feed this ever growing hunger. It is a conversion process with Christ, with one self and others that is founded on, and sustained in friendship throughout one's life, throughout his 4th Day which we call Postcursillo

So, while a person may convert oneself to Christ ON the weekend, we know very well that it is during our 4th day journey that we come to PERFECT this Conversion, and have a chance to BECOME a Christian, to become like Christ, in theological terms.

Many years ago, our dear Theologian Father Juan Capo explained this 'Metanoia' this way; "is like turning a sock inside out. And the truth is, that it's still the same sock with the same color, smell and the same holes." We are still the same sock, with a different mentality which brings a new meaning to our life.

All of the Postcursillo, 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 the right thing to do, that the individual (like the sock) remains essentially himself.

This way, with God's grace, the Cursillo is one of the few ways that makes possible the conversion of the distant ones 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.

Eduardo always said that POST-CURSILLO was and still is, the 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 one self, with Christ and with our other brothers and sisters.

In the Cursillo Method, the key to this process of friendship building is the last encounter — friendship with the others. And more especially, the friendship with those who are INTIMATELY involved in our conversion process – those in our Permanent Group Reunion and ULTREYA.

Friendship is the KEY to the Post Cursillo and our ongoing conversion process.

As human beings, we have a natural addiction for personal growth and development, just look at all the self development books that we have out in the world. Someone is making a ton of money on these! But we know, that this its best nurtured in an atmosphere of true friendship with others – where we reflect on our friend's strengths and weaknesses, and compare them to our own. However, self-acceptance and personal development, are not enough to move a person to reach their full potential.

For this to happen, there needs to be a third element

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 a conscious and growing awareness of Christ IN us, and WITH us; AND this becomes a natural part of their self-identity.

When friendship is lived and nurtured between Christians — in this third dimension of TRANSCENDENCE— the Kingdom of God is revealed! (even if only but a fragment). In fact, Transcendence was one of the topics at the III conversations of Cala Figuera that was held in Mallorca (the birth place of Eduardo) in May of last year.

And it's because when a person realizes their true IDENTITY as a Child of God, that they are part of God's family, the dignity that comes from this TRANSCENDENT reality – moves us on our journey of CONVERSION, and gives us the courage, to “stay on course”.

This reality allows a person to find the direction of his life. And when a person understands his true identity as a child of God, there is a realization that the journey you are on is unique and only you can influence any particular environment in which you have been placed. And yes, there are problems and difficulties, but we can now see those problems and difficulties, as a way to grow, as an opportunity to grow!

Eduardo says that this was the **how and why of the Postcursillo methodology**, from the very beginning.

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

Every aspect of the Pre Cursillo, 3-day Cursillo and Post-Cursillo, allows for us to make friends and be friends to one another.

And since POST CURSILLO is the essential stage of the CONVERSION PROCESS, I would like to include some aspects of the Group Reunion and the Ultreya, that will keep our conversion process ongoing:

First of all, regarding our Friendship or Permanent Group Reunions, there are five essential elements that I would like to point out:

1. Number of members. Group reunions are best if they are from 3-6 members. With any more or less it is too easy to get side-tracked. We can easily lose perspective and it will not sustain the CONVERSION process.

2. No Hidden Agenda. We are not in our Group Reunion to DO, but rather to BE. We have heard some group reunions that share projects together – work at a soup kitchen, take clothes to orphanages or do fund raisers for many causes, amongst many other things. The Group Reunion is not for that. The aim and purpose of the Group is to share, on a WEEKLY basis, what is being lived. Every member of the group is in the process of BECOMING Christian.

3. Respect and Dignity. We are on a journey of “BECOMING”. And there are etiquettes to grouping in which we would refrain from making comments on our friends shared experiences, but instead, just accept their experiences. We cannot interrupt or interject, as this interferes with a person’s train of thought; and we cannot say, “I don’t agree”, or “You are wrong”. In this journey, it becomes clear that we are all “students”, within this conversion process, and the only “master”, is our LORD.

4. Stability. It is essential for the group reunion to remain connected to an ULTREYA, for the stability and ongoing CONVERSION of all the members. If the members lose their conviction and commitment to continue journeying in that group, they can easily transition to another group in an Ultreya. Furthermore, the Ultreya is the Gran Fiesta where we can meet our friends, create more friends and have the opportunity to increase our circle of Friendship.

5. Freedom. Cursillo only asks us to walk in the company of friends and share the burdens and blessings of the journey. Each person is able to choose the direction most suitable to them. And, also find the means of knowledge and the activities necessary, to maintain the motivation that will sustain their personal conversion. By making them a true “SEEKER”. THE PERSON IS ALWAYS FREE TO CHOOSE.

Now let's take a look at 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 their Group Reunion: to share what one is living. They DO NOT GO there, to acquire knowledge NOR to receive instructions.

Its purpose is not educational or organizational, and it is not Controlled or orchestrated, like wanting to form groups with only doctors, officers, young people or any other segregated group. The aim is to simply provide the opportunity for each person to share their experiences so as to sustain and motivate the pilgrim mentality of CONVERSION. And by its design, it needs to be “spontaneous” in order to SUSTAIN CONVERSION!

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

When we ADD things, the focus shifts away from the CONVERSION PROCESS, in a way, almost unnoticeable at first, but eventually changing the entire focus from that of BEING and BECOMING Christian, to that of DOING Christian things. Once the Ultreya stops being an instrument of CONVERSION — it will inevitably lose members.

An Ultreya needs to be faithful to the mission and prevent this shift of focus. The whole Movement DEPENDS on this focus. So much so, that it is essential that the Ultreya be coordinated and supported by the School of Leaders. Eduardo always said that the primary and essential role of the School of Leaders, is to SUPPORT the Ultreya.

We are talking about a method to become fully human, through a lifelong process of CONVERSION. It is the ever DEEPENING AWARENESS of our true identity as living Children of God, in the growing imitation of Christ, until we become the “Christ” that “Christ is counting on us” to become.

In the beginning, I stated that Cursillo is for evangelizing our environments through the conversion process of each person.

How does a person, influence his environment?

Evangelizing our environment in Cursillo, means that as laity, we are called to live out and witness to, our ONGOING CONVERSION in the marketplace, at home, in the parish or any other environment in which you have an inter-relationship in the reality of our normal lives, during the 24 hours of each day, the 365 days of the year. Every second of our life where the Lord has placed us.

And, If we are to contribute to the overall well being of this Mystical Body of Christ, for which we are a part, then our first and most important mission, is to become the BEST CELL possible, in that body that we are part of.

It is not about “leavening” the structures, Cursillo is rooted in the desire to actually transform HISTORY, by leavening the interpersonal friendships, within any given circumstance and environment.

It is said that one can never really understand man, but only “man and his circumstance”.

And that is because the person is never really separated from the circumstances of his life. Therefore, when Cursillo speaks of the “environment” it wants to change, it does NOT mean the structure, the organizations, the climate or culture of any particular circumstance of life, but the circumstance ITSELF and the PERSON within it.

Eduardo felt that “people”, make and shape history and therefore, by transforming the “person”, history will be transformed from the inside out, thus transforming every environment and all of life’s circumstances.

By cultivating and nurturing FRIENDSHIP, within all of life's circumstances or environments, we create the vertebrae and the leavening that is needed to move the Precursillo of today, to the Postcursillo of tomorrow, when all things shall be restored to Chris, and the Kingdom of God that is already among us, will be revealed THROUGH FRIENDSHIP and LOVE, in all of its glory.

I will now end with a quote from our friend Eduardo Bonnin Aguilo:

“We do not pretend to have any recipes to change the history of the past, but we do have the necessary CONVICTION, DESIRE, AND PERSISTENCE, 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”.”

Thank you,

Juan Ruiz