



# The Cursillo<sup>®</sup> Movement

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## TRANSCENDENCE

*Source: Presented by Rev. Modesto Lewis Pérez at the National Cursillo Encounter held at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio - July 21, 2012*

I believe that we must begin this talk by defining the word used in its title: **transcendence**. Obviously, it is not a term we are accustomed to using in Cursillos! Yet, since the time of Aristotle, the notion of *transcendence* has been used often in *philosophy, metaphysics, theology, religion* and in many other fields.

In its original meaning, *to transcend* (from the Latin "**transcendere**") meant to climb; to ascend; to cross over. Later on, the term **transcendent** was used to describe anything that extends or lies beyond the limits of *ordinary* human experience. And, in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, the **transcendent** is that which lies beyond what our faculty of knowledge can legitimately know. In other words, it refers to that which goes beyond the realm of human experience - beyond physical reality in time and space - and therefore *unknowable* and *undiscoverable* by the use of human reason.

Whatever familiarity or understanding we have with the term, the whole notion of **transcendence** probably strikes many here as a philosophical and theological concept that is a bit too lofty or abstract for a Cursillo Encounter... In fact, the concept might appear to be entirely foreign to the Cursillo experience or to our "*Fourth Day*." Yet, nothing could be farther from the truth.

Certainly, **transcendence** is not the first thing that comes to mind when we recall the atmosphere of normality and friendship we experience in a Cursillo weekend. The environment there and in our *Fourth Day* (if we are true to the *charism*) is at the same time ordinary and truly human. It is characterized by the warmth and sincerity of those who, with genuine conviction - standing on the dais of their lives - joyfully proclaim the *Good News* of God's love to others. They share this *greatest of all possible good news* with men and women who often think themselves far-away or somewhat alienated from Christ and from His Church.

The fact is, many of us arrived on that fateful Thursday evening, feeling unloved, unlovable or unworthy of love. And, frightening as it was for some of us, we were invited to stand naked before ourselves and before our God. We were asked to put aside all our false pretenses and fears and to remove all our masks. *Because, to encounter God just as He is, it is necessary to come before Him just as we are.*

Many Cursillistas can share the inexpressible joy they felt at meeting the Lord - often for the first time - NOT as a wholly *transcendent, distant, indifferent, harsh* or *condemning* God. Instead, they speak of encountering a loving and forgiving Christ that is *alive*, that is *normal* and palpably *near*.

**How then, is "*transcendence*" a fundamental aspect of the *charism* of Cursillos?** I would affirm that *divine* and *human transcendence* are at the heart of "*living what is fundamental to being a Christian*"! In effect, we have been called and we have received the gift of God's Spirit so that we may *transcend* our fallen human nature and be *transformed* into the likeness of Christ in the ordinary and concrete reality of our daily lives. So that, in the here and now of our existence, we may be *perfect, just as our heavenly Father is perfect.* (Matthew 5:48)

The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, beginning with the Book of *Genesis*, without a doubt present God as a totally transcendent Being, in the sense that He is wholly other - distinct from His creation, and independent of it. As St. Paul puts it in his first letter to Timothy, God is "*the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, and whom no human being has seen or can see.*" (cf. 1 Timothy 6:16)

Yet, Paul also affirms that this wholly transcendent God is *immanent* - that is, God manifests Himself and is involved in human history and in the lives of every human being. Thus, St. Paul also declares that the all-powerful and Holy God, "*who made the world and all that is in it, the Lord of heaven and earth.., is not far from any one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'...*" (cf. Acts 17:21-28) Similarly, the psalmist sings:

*When you hide your face [Lord], they panic.  
Take away their breath,  
they perish and return to the dust.  
Send forth your spirit, they are created  
and you renew the face of the earth.<sup>1</sup>*

The Father's presence and nature becomes manifest primarily through the *Incarnation* of the Son, the second person of the Most Holy Trinity: *Jesus Christ - true God and true Man.* About Him Saint John bears witness at the beginning of his Gospel:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1) And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*

Yet, it is in Christ's *Resurrection* that God most fully manifests His presence and His plan for us. Although the bodily resurrection of Christ is historically attested to by his disciples, it remains at the very heart of the mystery of faith as the most significant *transcendent intervention* of God himself in creation and in history. Through faith in Christ's Resurrection, God not only manifests Himself, He reveals both His love for us and our own destiny.<sup>2</sup> *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.* (John 3:16)

Christ, "*the first-born from the dead*" (Col 1:18), therefore, is the principle of our own resurrection. It is so, in this present life, by the justification of our souls; for, as St. Paul says: "*We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as*

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 104: 29-30

<sup>2</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), nos. 647 and 648; cf. also, Rom 1:3-4 and Acts 2:24

*Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.*" (cf. Rom 6:4; cf. also ). And, in the world to come, we too will share in Christ's Resurrection by the new life God will impart to our mortal bodies: Because, as St. Paul teaches, *"If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you."* (cf.: Rom 8:11)<sup>3</sup> The resurrection, then, is the total fulfillment our human potential.

**Christ in us IS the "Hope of Glory".** (Colossians 1:27)

St. Paul, in refuting those who denied the reality and the importance of our share in Christ's resurrection, went so far as to say: *If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty is our preaching; empty, too, your faith.* (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:13-19)

Yet, our faith is not a belief in eternal life as a promised reward, given to us like some sort of "good conduct" medal. Our redemption, we know, is a totally unmerited gift of God's grace. A life of faith is a life lived in God's grace. The "newness of life" of which St. Paul speaks is a life that integrates divine and human *transcendence* in a real and dynamic way into every aspect, every event and circumstance of our daily lives. Saint Paul tells the Christian community of Colossae: *whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* (Colossians 3:17)<sup>4</sup>

In other words, the quality of my relationships; my values; my deliberations; my choices; my decisions; my words; my actions and reactions, all are informed by this fundamental truth: *God loves me.* And, they become the consequence of a profound personal conviction that, in Christ, God has offered me His life and His friendship. All I can do is respond generously in love and thanksgiving to Him who loved me first. For, the measure of the perfection we are called to is measured precisely by how we love.<sup>5</sup>

**God is love;** and, *God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8) What is even more amazing is that the love God has for us is not generic; it is intimately personal and unique. St. Augustine once said, *"God loves each of us as if there were only one of us."*

The book of Genesis teaches that *"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them"* (Gn 1: 27) But, as Saint Teresa Benedict of the Cross (Edith Stein) made clear, God's image in us is *transparent* only when we respond in freedom to Him. She said, *"In order to be an image of God, the spirit must turn to what is eternal, hold it in spirit, keep it in memory, and by loving it, embrace it in the will."* Authentic freedom is indeed a vital sign of the divine image within the human person. (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 17) In Jesus Christ we see the ultimate expression and goal of human freedom. But, authentic freedom is possible only when we *"turn to what is eternal;"* when we reach for the *transcendent*, when we seek

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<sup>3</sup> Cf., CCC, no. 658. Cf. also, John 6:40: *For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him [on] the last day.*

<sup>4</sup> Cf. also, 1 Corinthians 10:31: *So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.*

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Matthew 5:43-48; cf. also, 1 John 4:10, 19

God and abide in His love. Because, it is *"for freedom [that] Christ has set us free."* (Gal 5:1)

Pope Benedict XVI adds that it is precisely because God is love and man and woman are made in God's image that we can understand the human person's deepest identity, the human vocation to love. Benedict declared: *Human beings are made for love; their lives are completely fulfilled only if they are lived in love.*<sup>6</sup> That is why Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who was intimately familiar with the depth of human suffering, poverty and misery in this world, was able to state that, *"the hunger for love is much more difficult to remove than the hunger for bread."*

Indeed, we continue to hunger for love and for happiness; and, our lives have no meaning, no purpose and no direction until we discover God's love. At the same time, *"God's love,"* as Eduardo Bonnín once wrote, *"allows us to see everything" including ourselves and others, "through God's eyes and, consequently, in a more optimistic, joyful and positive way."*<sup>7</sup> This, truer vision of ourselves, of God and of others, Eduardo said, helps men and women to transcend the reality of their everyday lives and reach their full potential as human beings and as Christians.<sup>8</sup> To paraphrase Eduardo, *the more fully human we become, the holier we are; and, the holier we become the more fully human we are.*

In other words, we are called to a lifelong process of *transcendent* growth in our humanity that is realized only when we seek with our whole hearts our vocation to love and holiness. We are called to enter into a *Christian apprenticeship*, as Eduardo put it, which does not end until we arrive at our *Fifth Day*. And, with the help of God's Grace, it is in this very process of living what is *fundamental to being a Christian* that we become a living, breathing joyful *Good News* that makes Christ present and alive for the men and women of our day.<sup>9</sup>

Cursillos, indeed Christianity itself, invites men and women to make a radical choice for God and for the human person. There is only one commandment in which the law and all the prophets depend: love of God and love of neighbor as yourself.<sup>10</sup> Again, Saint Teresa Benedict of the Cross (Edith Stein) writes: *"Our neighbor's spiritual need transcends every commandment. Everything else we do is a means to an end. But love is an end already, since God is love."*

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<sup>6</sup> Message given by Pope Benedict XVI to the participants of the *10th International Forum for Youth* held at Rocca di Papa, Italy. Written from the Vatican, on 20 March 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Eduardo Bonnín Aguiló, *Esencia y Finalidad (Essence and Purpose)*. Documentos: © Fundación Eduardo Bonnín Aguiló (FEBA)

<sup>8</sup> Eduardo Bonnín and Francisco (Chisco) Forteza, *Evangelización por medio de la Conversión (Evangelization Through Conversion)*. Documentos: © Fundación Eduardo Bonnín Aguiló (FEBA)

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Mathew 22:34-40; cf. also Galatians 5:14

To love is to give ourselves as total gift, in service to others in imitation of Christ who *did not come to be served but to serve* (Matthew 20:28). Love is where we find our true vocation as human beings and as Christians. If we learn nothing else in this life but learn how to love, we will have achieved true wisdom. Jesus alone is *the wisdom of God* - as well as our *righteousness, our sanctification and our redemption*.<sup>11</sup> And, Jesus tells us: *whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.* (John 14:21-22) Consequently, *"whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.* (1 John 4:8)

Learning how to love must be the *transcendent* goal and purpose of our life. At the Last Supper, after he had washed their feet, Jesus said to his disciples: *I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.* To be truly rooted and grounded in love<sup>12</sup> is to reach beyond our *self*, to transcend our own wants and needs for the sake of the other. When we do so, we discover that we are not less and do not have less, but that we have become more fully ourselves and have grown immeasurably *rich* in the Lord. Because, true wealth and greatness is not measured by success as the world sees it; nor by the possession of many things; nor by celebrity or fame or power or any other passing thing upon which we might fix our hopes of finding happiness, but by how much we have loved. We are called to empty ourselves and humbly regard the needs and interests of others as more important than our own. Having the same attitude as Christ who, *though he was in the form of God*, humbled himself and became the slave and servant of all.<sup>13</sup>

This *transcendence* IS NOT some emotionally ill or needy attitude that springs from our lack of self-worth or self-acceptance and the consequent need to please; nor can it arise from a failure to recognize our personal value and dignity as a human being. That kind of love and service is counterfeit! Rather, true love and service finds its source in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving; in a healthy, heartfelt and generous desire to love others as Christ has loved us, in the fulfillment of his commandment.<sup>14</sup> We are called to share in the Cross of Christ - a cross borne by love - that we might also share in his resurrection. Mother Theresa once said, that we needed to *love until it hurts*. But, she adds: *"I have found the paradox, that if you love until it hurts, there can be no more hurt, only more love."*

But, as I hinted earlier, in Cursillos we are reminded that the one great commandment of love requires that we start with ourselves. We cannot hope to come to know and love God and others if we do not start with self knowledge and acceptance.<sup>15</sup> In the very first Rollo on Friday morning (*Ideal*), we are reminded that unlike other creatures we are free, and that our freedom sets before us *transcendent* possibilities as well as great dangers. We cannot abdicate our freedom, nor our intelligence nor our reason and still hope to be truly human - truly a person.

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:30

<sup>12</sup> John 13:34; cf. also Ephesians 3:17

<sup>13</sup> Philippians 2:2-8

<sup>14</sup> Cf. John 15:9-17; cf. also: Matthew 5:43-48; John 14:21-24; 1 John 4: 7-8

<sup>15</sup> Cf., First Cursillo Meditation (Thursday evening): *"Know Yourself"*

According to the renowned German theologian, Johannes Baptist Metz, *"Becoming a human being involves something more than conception and birth. It is a mandate and a mission, a command and a decision. We each have an open-ended relationship to ourselves."* We are not beings that are *simply there*, *"ready-made."* The other creatures of this planet have no *future horizon*; they simply are what they are. We, on the other hand, through the exercise of our freedom, must fully become what we truly are - a human being. That is the law of our Being. Eduardo Bonnín put it far more colorfully: *The human person is a process of processes that processes itself - a reality, of realities that are being realized.*

This inescapable truth of our Being makes authentic freedom possible. The Lord himself has promised us: *"If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* (cf. Jn 8:39).

Metz argues that our *"yes"* to our humanity, *"this 'yes' to our self"*, contained in Jesus' one commandment of love, may be regarded as the *"categorical imperative"* of the Christian faith: *You shall lovingly accept the humanity entrusted to you! You shall be obedient to your destiny! You shall not continually try to escape it! You shall be true to yourself! You shall embrace yourself!"*<sup>16</sup>

To live both the challenge and the promise of the resurrection, as I said earlier, is to let that reality influence and shape every aspect of our daily lives. To do so in faithful obedience to our call to love, allows us to discern that beyond the circumstances and trials of our daily lives, we are essentially *transcendent* beings. And so, the words of St. Theresa of Avila can still reassure us:

Let nothing disturb you,  
Let nothing frighten you,

All Things pass away,  
God never changes.

Patience obtains all...  
Nothing is wanting to him who  
Possesses God

God alone suffices.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf., Johannes Baptist Metz, *"Poverty of Spirit"*, Paulist Press (1998), pp. 3-5