



# National Cursillo Movement

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## The Person

Source: 1st Conversations of Cala Figuera, Eduardo Bonnín Aguiló Foundation (FEBA)<sup>1</sup>.

The revised translation of this book describes *Days of reflection on the Founding Charism of the Cursillo held in “The Porciúncula” in Palma de Mallorca, on the 50th Anniversary of the First Cursillo Weekend held in Cala Figuera in Santanyi, on the Island of Mallorca, Spain in August 1944.*

The term “person” is undoubtedly one of the essential components, if not the prime concept of the foundational thinking of the Cursillos movement.

As today we are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the first Cursillo, our joy is meaningful only if the Movement, which was born then, has helped more than half a million people to realize the value and meaning of not only being simply an individual or just another human being, but of being a “person”.

It is almost unnecessary to point out that in these conversations we don’t intend to practice theology but to share a mere lay reflection. For this perhaps, it is convenient to indicate from the beginning that we always refer to the expression, a person, as meaning a human being and we are not entering into the scholastic or theological difference between a human or divine being. Although without doubt, when thoughts are impregnated by faith, we cannot lose the image and similarity, and at the same time the OTHERNESS of a principle which draws us substantially to the ultimate.

From this perspective, it is extremely revealing to notice how in the secular thought the identification of man, of the human being, has marked an evident progression towards our concept of person. Without doubt we can begin from the classical Greek concept of man as a rational animal. We point out that our actual thoughts do not reject this classic definition in the least. We delight in a person as a living person, united with the rest of nature in an authentic osmosis which today is referred to as ecological awareness; that one is an animal, responding to stimuli and inherited instincts which are basically good, and directed essentially to the continuity of life and of the species and the attainment of well-being. This continues to fit in impeccably with what we understand to be a human being. Many times, we Christians tend to despise a little those who are not Christians and we should focus on understanding all the density of truth and art in something that, after all, is God’s work.

From here and in the profound message from the Cursillos, the attitude of “angelism” is clearly rejected. Those who pretend that a human population consists of persons who sublimely or ascetically have overcome their instincts this way, and who in no way can

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.feba.info>

enjoy the delights of everyday life, the desire to eat well, physical contact or exercise that we share with the animal kingdom, and are only capable of enjoying spiritual delights. The Spirit also delights in what is small and in the everyday.

We can consider these persons as admirable but not human and, therefore, not persons in the context to which we refer. What is more, we categorically state that with an angelic and purely spiritual version of life and faith, men and women of the twentieth century will never experience the full and true sense of our witness.

In the same way that the animal dimension of a person makes us reject the angel-like attitudes, it also distances us from certain sacrificial attitudes, which have a tendency to dominate and basically destroy the instincts and traits which unite us with the rest of nature. Although our perspective of thinking and our conviction leads us to greatly value both the maturation and the increased knowledge of reality that pain and having suffered brings about, (In the presentation of group members we had witnessing from people who had lost a son, who had undergone open-heart surgery: we think that, if properly cultivated, the pain that you suffer in life makes you grow and produces more knowledge), nobody should seek in our point of view and in the context of our values, any sort of masochism or self-destruction, because it would be in vain. The Christ of our faith was killed without one of his words expressing exultation of self-destruction or suicide.

Unfortunately, Christians have often been soaked in that spirit that places Christianity in the path of bitterness, in the valley of tears. We have always said that those young men, who in 1944 began what is now a reality (Cursillos) perhaps they accomplished only one thing, i.e. to remove Christianity from the path of bitterness and place it on the highway of joy and there, in this radical change, is where we understand that Cursillos can and will continue to make sense. We do not live Christianity as a religion of suffering, we can suffer as we can enjoy because all we do is to accept the reality that we also believe is the will of God.

In the classic concept, man is an animal but is distinct from the other animals by being rational, for having the capacity of thought and conscience. Once again, we reaffirm the classic dimension of man in a personalized perspective. Those who understand their faith as a mere obedience to dogmatic assumptions and their ethics as a list of tariffs approved by some superior authority which should be put into practice, in no way incarnate the kind of human being which the Cursillo is targeting. To think, to reason, is to risk making a mistake; it is the right of a human being to make mistakes, which John XXIII talks about. It is an essential element of being a human being. And we say it with no rationalist excesses, because we are aware that the limited information and the conditioned education that the human being receives make us to not trust in our ability to reason as the only access key to truth and happiness.

Only those who reason over their lives, over their faith, will have the delight of knowing that their convictions are really theirs. If we also share and compare our reflections, our doubts and our certainties with other people, we will reach a clear understanding of our search, even after the most essential encounters.

One of the funniest thing about being a Christian is that it is a continuous chain of encounters that generate the need for further searches, we are continuously finding things at all hours every day, in all people and places and these encounters drive us to find new quests and new encounters. That's how the person works as understood by Cursillo.

We believe, and we believe in order to be able to think better. Our belief helps us think, it does not deprive us of thinking. It is valuable to mention at this point, Chesterton's phrase which says, "When you enter a church you should take off your hat but not your head."

In the same classical concept but without abdicating the basic concept of man as a rational animal, Aristotle would add a component which we also retain as essential to identifying man as a social or political animal. The human being exercises their basic condition, their animal instinct and their rationality, in a communal or social environment with others. A true human life doesn't exist, and therefore nor a true person, if man doesn't adequately develop his vital connection with other human beings. From here we fully reject the individual postures, despite its renewed prestige, in sociology of the masses. The 'me' will only find itself and realize fulfilment in the 'you' which receives us and which projects us towards a future, as in the play between mirror and light, and this "me" will acquire its dimension only in the peace of the happiness possible only if it manages to integrate itself within an "ourselves": in a plural coexistence as individuals, not as part of a mass-society.

The concept of person, which is in the essence and in the Foundational Charism of Cursillo, rejects individualism, the same way it rejected angelism and sacrificial masochism. From here our essential conviction on how to live and to be saved "in a cluster" lies in the certainty that you only live fulfilment within that which you share with others.

For the same reason our thinking is very far from individualism or a collective of persons. To live / coexist means free participation, active, creative and especially reactive, of every person in the group. Perhaps one of the things found in the thinking of Eduardo that has brought more light to my life, is that where we can see what a man is really like is much more in their reactions than in their actions; how a man reacts to a success, to a failure, to an unexpected encounter with another person, this shows us as we truly are, much more clearly than the action: we will do this and we do it, no, this reaction that catches us unexpectedly and puts us in a certain unforeseen situation at a given moment, that's when we tend to demonstrate and bear witness to what we really are.

Trends or uncritical obedience – arising from an absorbent leadership or from alleged theocratic reasons – often tend to create a type of person who lacks individuality but who feels important and transcendent because of their association with the group and the values which are attributed to it. So, our declaration of what a human being is rejects these ideas of any human collective.

It is common today to meet with people who think they are not very important, but they

believe it is ever so important to belong to a group, whether of social class, work, hobby, nationality, etc. And for this reason, they feel they are very important.

This transference of the “being a person” to the group does not befit our concept of personhood either.

Perhaps the foundational assertion that the Cursillo was born mainly with the purpose of being a Movement and not an Organization can explain – like no other piece of information or text can – the reason why the foundational thinking (or Foundational Charism) rejects any form of collective standardization and the transference of personal risks and values (which make sense only if referred to an individual person) to a collective or a group of people.

Cursillo is neither an organization nor a body to nurture other organizations. In the Postcursillo the person feel themselves wrapped in friendship, but isolated and unique. Each one must be himself or herself and the other Cursillistas can neither do “it” for him/her, nor will other Cursillistas be able to give value to whatever he/she does, each one must find their own way. We need to earn our place and our being as a person every day.

Greek thought transferred its essential concepts to the classical Roman area, which penetrated the inherent aspects of development of the same rights of normal, ordinary living. From there a person is legally defined as a being subject to rights.

Therefore, the Roman conception adds an element which was perhaps poorly underlined by the Greek thought formerly mentioned. The human being, a rational and social animal, has in himself potentialities and rights which must necessarily be respected by everyone else, whether they be equal or they consider themselves to be superior. The existence of freedom of initiative and singularity, which is demanded of man, would serve for nothing if everyone else didn’t allow these to develop.

This additional element constitutes one of the essential elements afforded a person in the thinking of the Cursillo, for its consideration and evaluation is such that in itself, it generates respect and a good measure of admiration.

We can see in the other the image and likeness. God made man in His image and likeness and we men are always insisting in seeing only the similarity, that in fact turns out to be dissimilarity. Because in practice, in the form of the specific action of each one, we little resemble God. But always, whether or not there is similarity between what God wants and what we do, there is the image of God in our lives and that’s what we need to learn to see and admire in the other, the image of God. Let us not look for the likeness, it will be there in due time, let us look for God’s image that beats in everyone and so we will learn to respect the person simply for the fact of being a person.

This advance pointed out in the Roman classics will tragically be intermittently projected in history in a line that came to be accepted during the Enlightenment and the French

Revolution and up until the Declaration of the United Nations in San Francisco and until 'Peace on Earth', ('Pacem in Terris' John XXIII), to identify man's constitutional right and to proclaim the universal, inalienable and inviolable character of those human rights.

From the Foundational thinking of the Cursillo, we reaffirm this concept of man as essentially deserving respect and as a human being with rights before other human beings. We also reaffirm that no attitude either cooperative or manipulative is acceptable to the Foundational Charism. It is necessary to also reaffirm that the internal assurance that these rights are possessed, is more decisive than the external respect which goes with it. In the catacombs, it is possible to be a person, one hundred percent, but one who is fully a person never wishes to be in the catacombs but to live united, freely, and openly.

In the history of Cursillo we have to be self-critical, for many times there has been an attitude of manipulation which was not in accord with the Foundational Charism. There have also been times when we have been living in the catacombs and surrounded by incomprehension and we have managed to make the grade and act like "a person". Looking back into the history of Cursillo we must do self-criticism because many times there have been manipulative attitudes that do not conform to the Foundational Charism. There have been also times when we have been in the catacombs and have lacked understanding.

Within medieval Scholastic thinking, the Greek ideology is revived in a confessional and often apologetic context. I wanted to stay with the ideology that Spinoza profited so greatly. For him, as for us, man is a being of transcendence and is significant in the measure that he embodies now, in this world and in this life, his desire and hope for his life and his world being transformed. In the human being, a natural faith beats in unison with all that is real and which necessarily, impels him beyond his time and space.

If we forget the significant dimension of a human being we reduce man to merely an aspect of consumption and production who can be amused, used and exhausted but without the possibility of being a happy and fulfilled person.

When we see that, on behalf of the Gospel, somebody determines not to transmit a clear message but a way of life, or even a concrete culture or a certain politic, we know that it is far from the creative direction of Cursillo whose purpose is to project man, from where he is to his real possibilities of transcendence which are definable and infinite and that he or she is the only one who, together with others, will know how to bloom. It is not fair to say that the Cursillo disposes people to the best thing and yet we will already tell him what he must do. To become a being of consequence, it is essential that the idea is born from inside each person.

For this same reason, when the Pharisees dismiss human beings, who are from outside their culture or who don't come from the proper environment, they consider them unable to discover and to project an authentic encounter with the One who is all, we affirm that it lacks faith in the human being, which was essential in the Foundational Cursillo. They do not believe in man as a being of consequence although they believe in an eternal life. This is

usually the key as to why many people in our church do not reach a belief in the Cursillo.

People tend not to believe especially in the Postcursillo. Perhaps they tend to believe in the Cursillo (three-day weekend) because they can see the fruits but they do not believe in the Postcursillo, they think the Postcursillo must be just for a few select and highly trained people, but we start from a very different point of view: This has to be for everyone who wishes to become a person.

In the past historic development of this principle of consequence, and then in its contemporary phase, we encounter its anguished translation characteristic of an epoch that yearns for certainties when the existentialism of KIERKEGAARD and SARTRE identified the human being as “a being of death”. Effectively, if only future physical death is a certainty, one justifies the anguish of a being destined to Nothing or describes the human being as a useless passion, and this is a precise proof that if there is no dimensional significance to a human being, personally felt, there is no meaning to life.

In the face of anguish as a radical search of man feeling his way for transcendence, we agree with MARCEL and LAVELLE defining man as a being for hope rather than a being for death. This would be today, here and now, the projection of the conception of a person as a being of Transcendence, and it’s not about a hope in the afterlife but in Life, in capital letters, for it transcends time and place but it is already accessible here and now.

It occurs to us that those who have never tuned in to anguish or at least to uneasiness, will not succeed later in capturing the waves of hope and consequence. This is why the Cursillo values, as the first essential point in a person that we approach, the beginning of uneasiness which turns him/her into a “searching” human being.

Neither a human being satisfied with himself nor a desperate human being is the direct or immediate target of our foundational message. It is necessary to cover, entirely, what we call a Precursillo so that there will be an opening in the person for the Being which makes them a person; neither he who is so full of himself that he seeks nothing because he already has everything, nor he who is so empty, so distressed, that he is unable to recognize the rays of light wherever they are.

For this very reason, our concept of a person is very far removed from those who state that they have hope and believe in consequence but have not internalized these concepts and therefore do not keep the principle of uneasiness, and the dynamic of their life as a search, alive day after day. An installed staunch Christian, certain of his concrete unyielding general attitude, is diametrically opposed to the process of becoming a person, which we believe is the prior condition to becoming a Christian.

The other dogmatic attitudes or those satisfied with themselves, seem equally distant to us; or those who don’t participate or even wear the label of Christian but believe they have found something definite that doesn’t, however, prompt them to a greater search for themselves or to a re-creation in a circle of human beings.

Also, when HOBBS stated that “man is a wolf for man”, he didn’t forget to point this statement out in the context of a search for consequence, for fulfilment, as being essential in a human being. For him, every man wants everything and for this reason will not give up fighting with other men, who in turn and in order to achieve this, do the same. HOBBS also added something which has been repeated and commented on much less often than the wolf phrase, which is that only in dialogue, in discussing, and in agreement, do we reach the necessary harmony in man.

This difficult possibility of harmony and plural realization in HOBBS’S human being brings us to a vision which will be constant in some way in the distinct concepts of man in the modern age: man is seen as a conditioned person.

From the good savage and the difficult citizen of the social pact of ROUSSEAU, to the dissection of the imperatives which condition man in KANT, and to the dimension of man as an historic being and therefore always in tension between the opposites of HEGEL. All this brings us to the identification of a human being as a conditioned person, which has seldom been expressed with such accuracy as in the well-known definition by ORTEGA Y GASSET – I am what I am and my circumstances –.

Precisely and for this reason the Foundational Cursillo also assumed this circumstantial condition of a human being which is articulated in the essence of surroundings and environment. Everything in the Precursillo and in the Cursillo itself and in the Postcursillo period, tends to create the right environment in which every individual finds it easier to search and attain an encounter with oneself, with Christ and with others, and to deepen them without the positive conditioning of those environments in which the person is eclipsed: the circumstances, on the contrary, are at the service of the ‘I’.

Also, in its external dimension, the Cursillo could not be any other way for reasons of consistency. It is based on the idea of environment. If the environment, the circumstances, conditions a man, he too, should transform his environments and his circumstances. In reality, this is the only way that can really help others, and from here the projection of man into the real design of the authentic Foundational Cursillo rejects the classic models of: ‘apostolate’, doing good works, saving souls, or the empowerment of the institutional Church; but opts innovatively for the fermentation of the environments.

At this point we feel we should now make known the lay thinking extracted from the Foundational Charism of the Cursillo on what a human being is, and how it outlines what the Cursillo intends as a culmination and fulfilment of these human beings, which is the continuation of the process of becoming a real person.

The human being, as a rational and social animal subject to rights and to the reality of consequence and condition, is capable of loving, and only through love feels happy and fulfilled. More than from knowledgeable thought of wise men, this assurance stems from our experience as human beings, even before our evangelical vision of reality.

When a man discovers something worthy of being loved in another person, which in

itself is as essential as loving oneself, he is on the threshold of being a Christian.

A person is therefore one who knows that he/she is capable of loving and worthy of being loved apart from the complex tapestry and psychology of insecurity with which false Christian education has rewarded us. A person is someone who knows he/she is limited, conditioned and is part of a WHOLE but, nevertheless, she also knows s/he is an integral part of this WHOLE and is completely at ITS height and value and is capable of reaching this fulfilment and happiness on a human scale. They also know that they only skirt and reach happiness if they manage to transmit their capacity for loving extensively so that the people around them really feel treated as human beings; that is, treated as someone who is valuable for what they are and not for what they have, for what they know, or for what they appear to be. This is one of the essential keys in the Foundational thinking of the Cursillo around the concept of a person. We have always emphasized the essential distinction between what a man is and what he has managed to make other men believe he is.

In a world of consumption and appearances, as that which during centuries of moral judging, of simulation, of rituals and penal codes, a human being is worth as much as they appear to be. University and professional titles are more sought after than the anchor of knowledge which experience and common sense gives us; riches and status symbols weigh much more than enjoying what one has, and possessing an authentic capacity for communication; conduct, the past, fame and a good image are valued higher than feeling, disposition and sincerity.

From here, the authentic revelation of concepts which the Cursillo establishes are centered in the fact that a human being, that which someone has named a true man of the street, discovers that he is valuable for what he is, for his capacity to love and not for what he and others, up to this moment, have valued in him for: his power, his knowledge and what he has. From this dimension to the evangelical connection we could say that there is only one step, but in fact there is no step; what is needed for the meeting to take place is the falling away of the veil of false prejudices, and the access to the vision that not only he but everyone else form part of the ultimate, and so feel happy because they love and feel restless for a greater love.

As with all the great words, the concept of love needs, at many different times and stages of life, a concrete identification, and this culmination of love in ordinary life is essentially friendship. Therefore, we reaffirm with delight that a person is he/she who confronts life from the perspective of friendship, who offers their friendship not only to those with whom they ordinarily share life, but also with those with whom they occasionally share moments and episodes. We can still recall that old writing – one of the first times of Cursillo –, that said that we had to be able to discover, in the occasional encounter with a brother/sister, the mark or trait of God in him/her and that God is entrusting to our generosity at the time of the meeting.

During these few days, we will have occasion to penetrate the concepts of love and friendship, radically joined to those of freedom which therefore figure as the most essential in our concept of a human being. If finally, we conclude these First Conversations



of Cala Figuera being better friends than we are now, we will have advanced along the road to being a person and therefore in the way, the truth and the life of Christian persons.

If we only manage to reflect together or intend to show the value of our characters to our advantage, we will be in the antipodes of what the Foundational Cursillo originally wanted to make possible in 1944.

Let's try and be people, be a little more animal and less segregated, as up until now, to be a little more rational, more sociable, more conscious of our dignity and our rights, a little more eager for consequence and fulfilment, more aware of our conditions and limits, but above all to be more capable of loving, capable of loving more and to demonstrate it in a climate of the reality of a real progressive and jubilant friendship.