

THE TREE OF CURSILLO - MAINTAINING ITS CLEAR AND SIMPLE PROFILE

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The Screwdriver Effect

According to Wikipedia, a typical and common screwdriver “is a tool for driving screws.” The purpose of the screwdriver at its origin was to drive screws into or out of objects. And the purpose of the screwdriver today remains the same, that is, to drive screws into or out of objects. Everybody knows the purpose and proper use of a screwdriver. But even though most of us know this, there are many of us who have used screwdrivers to do other things besides driving screws.

Although, the screwdriver was designed for a specific purpose, some people use it for prying open cans, poking holes through various materials, chiseling, digging holes in the dirt to plant seeds, scraping surfaces, and many other uses. As long as people continue to use the screwdriver in this manner, the tip will become distorted through wear and tear and will no longer be useful for its intended purpose. However, if the tool is used as designed, you can rest assured it will accomplish the task or purpose for which it was intended. The same concept applies to Cursillo, that is, we are called to implement or apply its essence, strategy, mentality, methodology, and its Foundational Charism in its entirety so that its intended purpose can become a reality.

In some cases, since the Movement began, Cursillo has been reshaped, adapted, modified, etc. to some extent. But the purpose of the Cursillo Movement continues to remain the same as it was at its origin. But, like a screwdriver, people have deviated over the years from the purpose of the Cursillo Movement, and have used the Movement for other purposes in addition to its intended purpose.

As Cursillo leaders today, in the year 2010, we continue to study the Foundational Charism of Cursillos of Christianity, therefore, it is our responsibility to be faithful and trustworthy stewards of the gift of Cursillo and ensure that the Movement does not deviate from its divine purpose. Because if we allow such deviations on our watch, the danger is that in the years to come the Movement will look just like the screwdriver that no longer serves its intended purpose and future generations, our replacements, won't know or be able to carry out the intended purpose of Cursillo. Our responsibility is to pass on what the Founder passed on to us – the true Foundational Charism of Cursillo.

The Foundational Charism of the Cursillo Movement

When we speak about the intended purpose of the Cursillo Movement, we are reminded of the Foundational Charism of the Movement. A Charism is an extraordinary gift of the Holy Spirit given to a believer for the good of the entire Church. We know that the Foundational Charism of the Cursillos in Christianity was given to the person of Eduardo Bonnín – not for Eduardo – but for the entire Church. It is a Charism that encourages people to encounter Christ in the normality of their life without abandoning the place where God has placed them by discovering a Christ who is alive, normal, personal and close to us and to the people in our environments.

Eduardo's final illness prevented him from finishing his "Spiritual Testament". Therefore, it is open-ended. Each Cursillista is called to be the conclusion, by living the Foundational Charism. We are not called to update, distort, nor make our personal adaptations to the Charism, but to be faithful stewards of this gift. By the way, the book, My Spiritual Testament is available for purchase on the National Cursillo Center website.

Eduardo included a chapter in My Spiritual Testament titled, Warning to Seafarers. "The reason for this warning to seafarers – [is] so that they may be faithful to the goal the Cursillos are after and for which they were devised, designed, prayed for and structured – [the reason for the warning] is that it has been proven that from their inception in 1944, more than a few times – I wish to believe with good intention – they have been skimmed, deactivated, abducted or nipped in the bud of their nature and effectiveness, undoubtedly by people of goodwill and perhaps even believing that in so doing they were making a gift to God and to Cursillo. However, there are serious reasons to believe that many interpretations, changes, restructuring, updates and reductions have been made with the desire to use the Cursillo. At times this has even been done with the aim of taking their cut, with a wish for being in the limelight of something they assume can help them to excel in the pious market which is normally so lacking in originality and creativity."

Furthermore, in Chapter VI of My Spiritual Testament, Eduardo writes: "If we compare the Cursillo Movement to a tree, we are happy to see that it has grown, because an 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 a Christmas tree and have been hanging lights and decorations - their favorite brilliant ideas - and have gradually been spoiling its clear and simple profile."

Dangers and Deviations and the Tree of Cursillo

Fr. Frank Salmani gives a direct caution against tampering with the Cursillo Movement in his book, Whom Shall I Send, Discerning the Will of God. He points out that the Founder was led by the Holy Spirit and that the Cursillo Movement is God's gift to us - the Church. Fr. Salmani writes: "To tamper with its essence is to interfere with the work of the Spirit. 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 the mission of the Church."

The question is why would people – Cursillo leaders – want to tamper with the purpose and essence of Cursillo and consequently create dangers and deviations in the Cursillo Movement?

The reality is that some Cursillo leaders have at times been misinformed and sometimes not informed at all concerning the finality or purpose of Cursillos in Christianity. Another fundamental concern is that Cursillo leaders make little effort to study the charism – its origins, roots, purpose, essence, mentality, strategy, methodology, etc. – and therefore, sometimes with good intentions, engage in recreating the wheel as it were with their individual originality, and sometimes with misinformation that other diocesan Movements pass on in the name of Cursillo.

This disconnect from studying and understanding the Charism of Cursillo can cause a Diocesan Movement to isolate themselves from the larger Cursillo community known as the National Cursillo Movement and from the intended purpose of Cursillo. This lack of understanding creates a mindset or mentality that will foster changing or modifying the end product.

Fr. Frank Salmani writes in his book, *Whom Shall I Send, Discerning the Will of God*: “It seems that the temptation in the Cursillo Movement is to make the Movement into our image and likeness. [Some might say] “Wouldn’t it be nice if we did this, like in this [other] movement or tried this exercise on a Cursillo weekend?” Soon [Fr. Salmani points out], we are no longer a movement with our own method, but a hodgepodge of several methods and expressions that add up to nothing! In the process of adding and subtracting, we have lost our identity!”

All Cursillo leaders are responsible for stripping away those Christmas lights and decorations that Eduardo mentions in his *Spiritual Testament* that have been spoiling the clear and simple profile of the Movement. We want every person who experiences Cursillo to attribute their conversion to God’s grace, not to an agape, paranda, serenade, washing of the feet, a special dinner, letter, greeting card, etc.

The role of the Diocesan Secretariat, Regional Secretariat, and National Secretariat is to assist the Diocesan Movement in ensuring that its Cursillo leadership does not deviate from Cursillos’ divine purpose. The following highlights the deviations so that you can recognize them and begin to resolve them at the local Diocesan Movement.

Overview of Deviations

Inflation

Inflation occurs in the living Christian community when a great number of individuals are willing to be true Christians, but there are a limited number of individuals who have the capacity to show others the way. This simply means there are a few strong leaders who have a good understanding that can mentor and lead. It has frequently happened in the Cursillo Movement that we give more attention to what triggers the Cursillo weekend than to the ongoing friendship with Christ and others in the Postcursillo.

As a result of some of the weakness of the structure, we end up not fully understanding the Movement for lack of leadership or we end up applying the Movement in such a way that Cursillos do not continue to attract others. The initial encounter with Christ is given much importance but the progressive friendship with him is not stressed.

Here are some remedies or ideas concerning Inflation:

- To assess the capacity of incorporating new Cursillistas into the authentic Cursillo Movement within our communities before having Cursillo weekends.
- Assure that the new Cursillistas are quickly integrated into an active community that knows the Cursillo Movement.

- Do not hold another Cursillo weekend until the new Cursillistas from the previous weekend are integrated into Group Reunion where they accepted.
- At the Clausura, the job of the team members has just begun.
- We should take care to identify potential new leaders to serve the community thereby avoiding professionalism in the Cursillo Movement and a lack of essential leadership.

Specialization

The second danger or deviation is specialization; meaning focusing on special groups. Specialization occurs when we decide to target a specific field in the Church. There have been many youth groups, Cursillos for prisoners, and ecumenical groups, etc. that are considered an off-shoot of Cursillo. “The Cursillo will always strive for heterogeneity, both in the leadership team and in the group of people making the Cursillo. This heterogeneity is the logical consequence of the immediate purpose of the Movement, which is the living out of what is fundamental for being a Christian — a calling that all people have in common. Everyone is called to become incorporated into the community of the one Church.” “We should not have separate Cursillos for different categories of people, such as teenagers, university professors, soldiers, blue-collar workers, and so forth. The heterogeneity of the Cursillo is a clear manifestation of the unity in plurality of the Church.” (Fundamental Ideas)

Having said the above, it is worth mentioning that the Cursillo Movement does not allow mixed Cursillos. Cursillos for men are for men and Cursillos for women are for women. This criterion existed from the beginning and continues today. Mixed Cursillos would result in unnecessary distractions to the candidates that can interfere with the opportunity to experience the three essential encounters on the weekend. The same distractions can occur when a candidate makes a weekend with a family member or an employee with their supervisor, etc. In terms of the youth, they are very much encouraged to be part of any Cursillo weekend. The Cursillo helps every person to realize their potential and to realize how much God loves them.

Organization or Hierarchy

The third deviation to consider is more regarding organization or hierarchy. This will exist when the spirit is sacrificed to the letter of the law or the method when leaders are not being authentic due to position and structure. Cursillo is a movement and not an organization or a structure. It maintains a minimal coordination in order to facilitate the practical. The Secretariat does not have authority over the Cursillos, but exists to serve the Movement. The Secretariat is also charged with maintaining the authenticity of the Movement. In the Cursillo Movement, the person must be free to discover his or her place in the community.

Another attitude that comes forward from time to time is the criticism that the Cursillo Movement has been around for a long time and needs to modernize. Perhaps that perspective has not taken into consideration the fact that the Cursillo Movement is grounded in the Foundational Charism, in truth, and the discernment and wisdom of authentic leaders. If the Cursillo Movement is effective today, it is because it is faithful

to the truth and at the same time current. Many times the Founder has said the heart of the person is always the same, therefore, the solution is always the same; the solution is Christ and his grace.

Here are some remedies or ideas concerning Organization or Hierarchy:

- We must safeguard the authentic identity of the method in the Movement because it is essential.
- In regards to the essentials of the Movement, we must adhere to those and work at removing the accidentals – the decorations on the tree – from our Movement.
- All Cursillo leaders, which includes members of the Secretariat and School of Leaders, are called to study and embrace the Charism of the Cursillo Movement in order to improve the effectiveness of the Movement in their respective dioceses.
- What will Cursillo look like when you hand it on to the Cursillistas who will replace you?

Professional Cursillista Mindset or Cursillism

This next deviation, Cursillism, has three aspects. The first aspect refers to the over evaluation of the reality of the Cursillo Movement and undervaluation of the other realities in the Church. Sometimes there can be sense of competition with other movements in the Church. This leads to seeing Cursillo as an end in itself. The reality is that there are many organizations and lay movements in the Church. And Cursillo is only one avenue by which to introduce the person to Christ. Let's face it, many people who have been involved in other Catholic organizations or lay movements experience a life-changing experience of the unconditional love of God for them personally in Cursillo. Therefore, some people would believe that every human being must live a Cursillo weekend, and why no other organization or movement can compare to Cursillo. However, this overvaluation of Cursillo is a deviation from the Foundational Charism. The second aspect of Cursillism is that it puts more emphasis on technique and style than to the message and experience of Cursillo and therefore, gives absolute value to the incidentals. An example of this is the rollista changing to a coat and tie and making a dramatic entrance and therefore, giving the impression that getting up to speak is a momentous occasion. Another example is the cooks going on strike at some point of the weekend and therefore, making it very distracting to the candidates and the progress of the weekend. The third aspect of Cursillism is to give more attention to the weekends, better known as weekenditis, and less to the Postcursillo.

Parochialism

The fifth deviation is referred to as parochialism. Cursillo is not and never was intended to be a parish-based ministry. Cursillistas will serve Christ and his Church in the place where he has placed them – the idea of bloom where you are planted. Cursillo tries to Christianize our world keeping all the relationships already established with other people in their environments in order to give them a Christian meaning. These relationships are not always in their own immediate neighborhood. From this we can stress the necessity of the apostolate in one's own environment. Sometimes, Cursillistas may naturally be doing something within their parish environment and that would be part of their

normality. However, it is not the purpose of Cursillo to provide leaders for parish ministry. The fact that Cursillistas involve themselves in parish ministry is a natural consequence of having experienced Cursillo and discovering that God in Christ loves them.

Clergy is More Important than the Laity Mindset

The sixth deviation to be avoided is the Clergy is More Important than the Laity Mindset. The Cursillo Movement is distinctly a lay movement, although it is very important that the clergy and laity work side-by-side – each with their distinct roles to enable the tree of Cursillo to bear much fruit for the Lord. It also keeps the Movement solid and strong in a relationship with the Church and its mission. Difficulties can arise when clergy interfere with lay functions and/or when the laity interferes with the role of the Spiritual Advisor. Difficulties also arise when the laity refuses to take responsibility for their role and expect the clergy to make the decisions and when the laity is admired for acting as clergy and vice-versa. These are some indicators of not respecting each others' roles. The difficulty now becomes roles vs. relationships. The best remedy for avoiding the Clergy is More Important than the Laity Mindset is to keep the roles distinct and complementary. Friendship, love, and charity in these relationships can be extremely important when it comes to respecting the role of the laity and clergy.

Being Too Secular Attitude

The seventh deviation to avoid is the being too secular attitude, which is just the opposite of viewing the clergy as more important than laity mindset. Here, the figure and function of the ministerial priest is avoided or undervalued. In some cases, the laity may try to assume the functions of the clergy. Or, there may be an overemphasis placed on Cursillo as a purely lay Movement, ignoring the vital relationship Cursillo has with the Church.

Although many dioceses have highly educated Cursillistas, lay people, who have degrees in theology and/or special training in lay ecclesial ministry including spiritual direction, these Cursillistas will need to serve in the capacity of the laity and not as a Spiritual Directors or Advisors within the Cursillo Movement. In Cursillo, only priests, deacons, and vowed religious can serve as Spiritual Advisors. This decision made by the National Secretariat was revisited during the July 2010 Secretariat meeting and their decision regarding this topic remains unchanged.

Angelism

The eighth deviation may sound familiar – it is known as Angelism. Just like we learned on the three-day weekend, Angelism happens when we focus all our attention on the spiritual aspects of Cursillo while lacking the passion and commitment to take the good news, the love of God, and the presence of Christ into our family, neighborhood, workplace, and social environments.

Temporalism

The ninth deviation is the opposite of Angelism – it is Temporalism. In this view, we do things our own way. We plan our evangelizing actions according to our views and preferences. We become preoccupied in sending people to take refuge in angelism or to get swallowed up in temporalism. The reality of angelism and temporalism causes a

great disconnect between the Cursillo and Postcursillo and between faith, and life. The remedy or solution is that in each one of the phases; Precursillo, Cursillo, and Postcursillo, in Group Reunion and in School of Leaders, we must always remind ourselves to be faithful to our own unique and specific vocation as laity in the world.

Cursillo Weekends

The tenth and final area involves common deviations on the three-day Cursillo weekend itself.

- The first is emphasizing the accidentals and ignoring or devaluing the essentials. The Cursillo is to be carried out with simplicity and normality.
- To put all the emphasis on the rollos instead of realizing that they are just one part of the many important parts of the weekend.
- To change the Cursillo weekends according to our own criteria, that is, to suite our own purposes rather than presenting authentic weekends. For example, allowing the Fourth Day community to interrupt the Cursillo, allowing non-Catholics to be candidates on the weekends, and allowing the laity to carry out the role of the Spiritual Advisor.
- Going out of our way to focus on creating situations on the three-day weekend which are planned solely to elicit emotional reactions from the candidates. There will be natural emotions expressed on an authentic weekend without throwing in things like mañanitas by the fourth-day community.
- Another deviation to avoid is the idea that we need to strip candidates of their freedom for three days by filling every minute of every hour with activities and extra things to do. This interferes with the normality of the weekend and breaks the environment that is being created each day in the most natural manner. It becomes distracting and creates a lack of rest for the candidates and team alike.

The remedy or solution to the deviations on the weekend is to remember that God has entrusted the candidates into our hands for three days, therefore, it is our duty to deliver only what is essentially Christian and only what is considered to be an authentic Cursillo weekend. The team for the weekend, selected from a School of Leaders, must be ready to deliver the truth and then stand back and allow God's grace to work in each of the candidates. If every Cursillo leader is willing to implement a solution for every deviation in Cursillo, then and only then, can we restore the tree of Cursillo which has proven to bear much fruit in the person and in the environments where they exist.

De Colores!