

## THE FOUNDATIONAL CHARISM

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**by**

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Before talking about the Foundational Charism of the Cursillo Movement, we need to define what a Charism is.

According to the Pastoral Directory Verbo Divino, (Divine Word 1988)', the Greek term Charism, means gift, present, and is tantamount to Grace, endowment, also to calling, vocation.

Practically it means functions and activities.

Charisms are therefore, the effects of Gods' Spirit on a particular believer.

A Charism can never be demanded or exacted by any person, neither can it be foreseen or anticipated in any way by the Official organs of the Church. Nor can they be procured through the reception of the Sacraments.

In its proper and relevant meaning, a Charism can be defined as a continuous and concrete vocation (it comprises time and eternity) which operates within the Christian community, forming it and building it up in a permanent way.

The Charism is at the service of our fellow creatures through our love. The definition in the dictionary goes on to say. *"Since its forms are unforeseeable, the Charism has to be discovered and accepted again and again, in ways which are always new and this calls for a delicate discernment and attentiveness to the Spirit within the Community of the Church."*

'Diccionario abreviado de Pastoral, Dirigido por Caslano Floristan y Juan Jose Tamayo. Estella (Navara) Editorial Verbo Divino, 1988. Art. Carisma par. J.M. Castello. P.64-65

Theology says that a Charism is a gift that God gives to whomsoever He wants, but is not meant for the person who gets it, but rather for the welfare of the whole Community and the Church.

A Charism has certain elements and these are that it is:

- A gift of God
- To real men or women
- For people and the Church

Therefore, there is no speck of doubt that the Cursillo Movement has its own operative Charism, because it is a gift from the Holy Spirit to His Church.

Through a group of lay-men, from the beginning of the Movement in Mallorca in 1944, the Cursillo has been accomplishing the process whereby many, many people have been able to rediscover themselves, God, through Christ and their brothers and sisters.

A Charism that, with time, became recognized by the Hierarchy. gift to real men and women.

In order to get a better understanding of our Charism it is necessary to state precisely the human circumstances of its birth.

It was to a specific Group of young laymen, real people, in a particular place and time, who after much prayer, study, and deep reflection came up with the structure of the “Cursillos in Christianity Movement” and set it in motion.

Although there is no doubt that it is a gift from God, the Cursillos had their beginnings and what we could call human gestation.

In order to be able to understand better its true process we could call to mind that sentence of Ellermeier which says, ‘any historical phenomenon can only be properly grasped when light is shed on its beginnings’.

The beginning of the beginning, what we could call the first stage, consisted of a perceptive and experienced restlessness caused by the understandable confusion in the aftermath of almost two consecutive wars, the Spanish civil war and the second World War.

People were praying at that time, for many people were seriously concerned, and they asked themselves; “What is going to happen?”

But one (Eduardo Bonnini first, and then many others) thought, can something be done in addition to praying?”.

And so by getting together, praying, thinking, thinking and researching, praying and praying again, it happened that an address given by Pope Pius XI to parish priests and Easter preachers in Rome on 6th Feb. 1940 attracted the attention of first, that one (Eduardo Bonnini) and later others.

This talk made a tremendous impact on us. Among other things the Pope was telling us, to be very observant and to assess the situation by making a clear and detailed topographical picture, street by street, to recognise that there existed on one hand faithful people, mainly the dedicated

members, potential members of Catholic Action. On the other hand the groups of people who had moved away from Christian life.

“These are also sheep that belong to the parish, stray sheep. You are guardians responsible for these sheep, and I would even say, mainly for these”.

The reading of this address given by the HOLY FATHER motivated us to carry out a thorough and deep study of the scenario and atmosphere in a more serious and systematic way and to put it on paper in a very concrete way.

The outcome was a text which already at that time, 1940, we named “**STUDY OF THE ENVIRONMENT**”. We tried to determine the way to reach that ENVIRONMENT, how to make that Environment into a Christian one.

In these days we also carried out a survey which we called ‘The good ones’, in which, with an unconstrained irony typical of our young years, we came to the conclusion that the leaven we could immediately count upon was not the most appropriate for our task.

In that state of affairs, in 1941, the top council for the young people in CATHOLIC ACTION had been motivated by its National Chairman, Manuel Apazici to gather in Santiago de Compostela 100,000 young men and women who lived in GOD’S grace.

All this was a response to the Encyclical “Passion for Life”, on the situation of the Catholic Church under the German Reich, in which the Pope said that the world needed to be able to count on Christendom, which through solid Christian values could become an example and guide to the world.

A commission of young people went to Rome to promise the Holy Father that they, the young people of Catholic Action, would strive and endeavour for Spain to supply that Christianity which the Pope longed for.

With this aim and taking advantage of Christmas and Easter holidays, they travelled to different dioceses and gave short courses (workshops) that lasted for a week and were called ‘Advanced courses for pilgrims’, when given for a whole diocese or ‘Courses for leaders of pilgrims’, if given to a parish only.

Their aim was to raise the interest of young people to make the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

Expressions like ‘we need Saints for Santiago’ and ‘To make the pilgrimage means nothing, to make the pilgrimage with faith means clearing the way’, became very popular in those days.

(Eduardo states “When the first Advanced course for pilgrims took place in Mallorca I did not want to go in spite of the fact that I had been invited. Furthermore I did not belong to Catholic Action at that time and the way their leaders were and behaved did not move me to join them.)

When, in the following year, the second of these short courses took place, the diocesan Chairman of the Association was very insistent that I should attend which I did. I could observe in those young people a style and attitude that convinced me or won me over.

Subsequently when some time later they held another course in Mallorca they asked me to take part, which I also did. I asked them to include the text that we had prepared, Study of Environments and other things which obviously belonged elsewhere for they had a different view and approach than the rest of things in the [Catholic Action] courses.

I could not help being concerned with what would happen after the great Pilgrimage and together with some others, we asked ourselves, 'after Santiago, What?'

From these courses, we got the idea that if we wanted to be listened to and our message to sink deep in those to whom we wanted to communicate our ideas, it could be accomplished by living it with those we wanted to carry with us and not just by giving them lectures and explanations.

Our ideas were different to the ideas of the previously mentioned courses which, as I have already said, were on another level and had a specific aim. The way the Cursillos were carried out could be done in the same way but the goals were different.

We had to gather them in an isolated place and form small groups in order to facilitate dialogue between them.

Apart from this idea we took from courses the names of some of the talks. We could not do everything new, we had to set our pace to find a rhythm in what needed to be done while we were trying to find the way to enliven them and shorten their duration.

We knew that the Pilgrim courses lasted too long and this was determined. We thought that three days would be an ideal length and if we included Saturday and Sunday in these three days then things would become very simple since it was rather easy to get one day *off*, Friday.

If we started our Cursillo on a Thursday night, it would be more feasible to gather a group of people over the weekend. In this way we were making things simpler to get the message through to many more people.

However, what we were most interested in was to study thoroughly the ideas that formed and synthesised the message, in order to be in a position to communicate it to as many people as possible in an lively, whole, non-complicated, feasible and attractive way.

By mulling it over, praying for it, studying it and praying again, the gestation, birth and development of the Cursillo Movement took place.

In the beginning they were called simply CURSILLOS but afterwards somebody, not us, called them Cursillo. of Conquest which was done to distinguish them from the various short courses that were given in those days; courses for school masters, sergeants etc. although we Founders

did not like the new name at all.

A prayer that we used to pray at the opening of the meetings or when decisions of the deliberations made it advisable, gives an idea of the atmosphere presiding in those meetings.

At this time I had become a member of Catholic Action, but did not like apathetic routine and the pious bias that we had to give to our activities so that they would not appear out of tune.

The rhythm and goal were different. We always had in mind the Distant Ones, [The Faraway].

In order to avoid conflict with Catholic Action, we felt that we should keep at a necessary distance to be able to observe things from a different perspective. Always we had the idea of improving Catholic Action; we were not against it but we were distinct from it.

We read passionately and eagerly all the Christian writers who were fashionable in these days. Hugo Raher, Carl Rohner, Romano Guardini, Cardinal Mercier, Tristan Amoroso, Jacques LeClerc, Father Pius etc.

For this purpose we would gather together to study as faithfully and as deeply as possible, the doctrine that we wanted to pass on to other people and in particular the circumstances of the person for whom the message was intended. We did this in a personalised way.

The first thing we did was study together the Environment and I contributed to this study all the material I had been working on long before.

In order to be able to study everything in detail, we tried to understand people and their behaviour and in our imaginations we grouped people together in ways that went from the true, authentic, practical Christians who think and act in a Catholic way, to the intellectual or theoretical atheists.

We also devised imaginary filing cards drawn from the realities of everyday life, such as, the young soldier, who obeys his superiors, when he is in front of them, because he cannot help it but who quibbles and mumbles behind their back because he has had enough.

A few anecdotes of that time can shed much light on the intention of our attitude. For instance we said that Cursillos had to be heterogeneous and bring together people from all walks of life; those who were close to the Church and Distant Ones, rich and poor, educated and ignorant people, yuppies and workers, students, blue collar workers, etc, etc.

The personal style of our Lay life and the renewed strength of the ever renewed message of the Gospel that propelled us forward, would collide with the narrow minded and bigoted mentality of the great part of the Mallorcan society of those days, even with the mentality of the conservative Clerical sector.

All this brought about a series of tensions that are still there today, though in a latent or embryonic form, between priests and Cursillos in the diocese where they were born.

It all stems from priests not being able or willing to understand the true part or role of the Lay people in the mission of the Church or their lack of appreciation or valuing the legitimate autonomy of the Lay Apostle in respect to the hierarchy.

And what is even worse, their confusing the obedience of a member of a Movement with the obedience of a priest, cleric or monk. Rationally, the reaction to an irrational and indiscriminate demand for submission and obedience could not be other than 'controlled disobedience' or rather the indispensable obedience so that we would not fall out with the Ecclesiastical communion.

To understand the Foundational Charism' it would be of help to know some of the features which with time have become part of the Cursillo.

For Man and the Church (man in a generic sense of course) the message that we thought, and still think has to be communicated, is synthesised and summarised by certain ideas which concerned us at the beginning and which still concern us today.

These ideas were formulated as follows:

- Some men, with the help of science and financial support have been able to go from the exterior of man to the surface of the moon. We are trying to achieve something that is immelishly more difficult, ie. to go from the exterior of man to his innermost being, in order to learn to understand ourselves and to move towards other people, so that we may become more aware of the wonder of our life, to learn to live in harmony and love our fellow men/women and to share with them the challenge and adventure of becoming a true person.
- We thought that the best way to achieve all this was to bring about a circumstance that would facilitate communication with and between as many as possible (the weekend).
- We would try and present attendees with a whole yet simple exposition of the central learned realities of Christianity.
- This exposition or presentation was carried out by people who were able to pass the message on naturally, because they really endeavoured to live the Christian realities in a serious, deep, yet cheerful way. They were able to pass on these realities and Spirit because they had incorporated them in their daily lives.
- We took care that the number of attendees would be no more than 35 in order to achieve a personalised communication. We invited people to the weekends from different walks of life, in order to gather a heterogeneous group, formed by people who were completely different in all senses.
- The venue chosen, an isolated place, in order to maintain some separateness from the daily routine and to favour a profound and serious reflection.

- The style of communication, fresh and in touch with the reality of daily life, a communication of personal experiences, commonplace, close, alive and contagious.
- The duration had to be brief—----three days.
- We explained the fundamental Christian message to them in an appealing and attractive way, but only what is fundamental in the Christian message.
- We would limit ourselves to explaining **why** but never the **'how'** ie. what was to be achieved but not how to do things.
- When we talk to someone who is able to understand the why (what it is all about) and we tell them the 'how' (how to go about it) then things and the world become less attractive, because we are depriving them of the opportunity to contribute from the originality of their personal creativity.
- We would always aim at their singularity and originality, to the personal and concrete creativity of every one, with no interest or reference whatsoever to their role as married, man/ woman, single, young, mature, etc. etc.
- It is advisable or necessary rather, that young people should attend the weekends for men or women, because besides guaranteeing the future of the Movement, they learn how to talk and discuss with mature people and mature people learn to talk and discuss with young people.
- it is very helpful for a father/mother to talk to a son/daughter who is not his/her own. Likewise it is helpful for the son/ daughter to talk to the father/mother who is not his own parent.
- The important thing is that we look for young people who have a personality and we should not set up any age barrier, which always complicates things.
- Cursillos for men must be attended by men only and Cursillos for women only by women.
- Also, the Leaders for Cursillos for men have to be men and women Leaders for women's Cursillos. It is a fact that when dealing with members of the opposite sex, appearance plays a big role and in Cursillo we should value only truth and sincerity.
- At the weekend we have to facilitate a personal encounter with self for each one, so that they can discover their qualities or assets first, with the aim that they learn to be thankful for those assets because this is the best way to facilitate their accepting their own limitations afterwards.
- We want also to facilitate their personal encounter with Christ, with the alive commonplace, close, and friendly Christ from the Gospel, a man to man, deep and sincere encounter which is the prerequisite to becoming His friend and sensing that one is becoming His friend and

sometimes even experiencing the fact of actually being His friend.

When a person becomes aware of His freedom and himself determines to make that freedom part of his life, then he should not feel he is alone, he should meet the Spirit of God.

We have to simplify the way for them, so that the fact that God in Christ loves them sinks deep into their heart and becomes a personal conviction that will prompt them to make their decision and will support them and increase their constancy of will.

Then they will realise that what is really and truly Christian is nothing but true cheerfulness.

- We should try to encourage them to move from the 'price approach' (commercial approach) how much is it going to cost me, what's the price of it, to the fascinating 'esteem approach' (appreciation approach) which has so often been devaluated and prostituted by the "price".
- The Good News that God loves him/her, brings about a personal reaction and normally triggers the process of conversion in the person. In this moment we should help him to understand that all of this should be first of all for his personal benefit and should help him become a true Christian in the very place where God has 'planted' him in his own environment in the world.
- No one should try and encumber their lives with Apostolic 'offers' which will complicate things for them instead of freeing them.
- In Cursillo we try to help the person get to know himself 'a little better' and to discover Christ and the brothers and sisters, but not an abstract and distant God but the personal and friendly God.

Therefore from the earliest stages we defined it as "the living being" personal and full of hope and trust in each person, who desires good and therefore is interested in the welfare of each one and who is omnipotent. (I know well the plans I have for you, plans for your welfare, not for woe).

- Our hope and aim is that after the three day weekend, it has become clear and apparent to them that what is really important and urgent is to be "Christian in Spirit and in Truth", starting with oneself and from 'now' so that they get to discover the true meaning of their life.
- We want them to know as well that the Cursillo can be prolonged indefinitely. It can develop and turn into friendship and to this avail he can count upon a few concrete means:

Group Reunion (the reality of life shared with friends) and the Ultreya (the circumstances that makes it possible for the best in everyone to reach as many as possible)

- Cursillos need some sort of organisation, but this should be minimal and carried out with what is normally known as 'common sense'



- The organisation should make every effort to speed up things and clarify them and it should keep pace with the rhythm imposed by the message.

The organisation should also endeavour to protect the message from improvised or makeshift ‘brilliant ideas and updating’.

The tree of the Cursillo Movement has its roots in the restlessness described in these pages, and its trunk is formed by the blending of aspirations joined together by the uniqueness (unity) of the message.

Finally, about recognition by the Hierarchy.

The group of Founders, formed of Lay-people only, for the reasons that have already been thoroughly explained, were immensely happy when the news arrived that Doctor Juan Hervas had been appointed by the Holy See as Co-Adjutor Bishop for Mallorca, with a right to succession.

There was a number of priests at that time, who understood the Founders and trusted and helped them put on a few Cursillos, and who were also delighted with the appointment of Dr. Hervas.

Although the Cursillo Movement in those days had already been conceived, structured and set off, it is a fact that with the appointment of Dr. Hervas as Co-Adjutor Bishop first (in 1947) the Movement received a support, boost, an impetus and strength almost unprecedented.

When the group of priests and lay people felt and realised the fact that the bishop was really listening and supporting them, with him, and at his side, they lived and experienced historical days full of fervour, and thanks to the Bishop’s enthusiastic cooperation and support the Movement had an impact within the Church.

It did not occur to anyone before then to number the Cursillo weekends. Only when the Movement got an official recognition we started to number the weekends and then not until 1949.

It was then, not before, that a few priests and two or three religious people joined the group of Founders in an official way, as it were.

In response to a request from those Lay people to the Bishop, Dr. Hervas himself appointed Father Sebastian Gaya as a ‘Cousilizio’ (Religious counselling advisor or aucellor), and when Father Juan Capo returned from Rome the Bishop appointed him as Vice-Cousiliazio.

### **SUMMARIZING AND STATING THE MAIN POINTS.**

I think that the Charism of the Cursillo Movement has been sufficiently explained here; and we have seen it has the four elements that theologians consider a Charism and must be considered as such.

The tree of the Cursillos will grow and expand only if it remains faithful to its identity, if it deepens its roots and does not grow apart from its trunk. Occasional grafts to the Tree of Cursillos -sometimes stemming from a marked tendency for wanting to be in the limelight - generally do complicate things.

Having said that, we need to have a sufficiently broad minded view in order to be able to develop the embryonic ideas and attitudes that form - at all times - the fascinating and fertile world of the beginnings of the Movement.

It is obvious that the organisations that have been created to preserve the Identity of the Cursillos Movement, are the ones that will have to discuss each case and tell good from bad.

But they must bear in mind that discerning does not mean uprooting the roots in order to 'clericalise' Cursillos and use them for a greater comfort of the "good ones" or for the service of an inter-ecclesial sector of their interest.

On the contrary, Cursillo has to be focussed towards the world and preferentially - though not exclusively - towards the 'distant ones.

The Cursillos should not become like chameleons and change their style and their mien, in order to follow the latest trends in vogue.

Let's not forget that wanting always to be in tune with the latest trends almost always means being off tune altogether.

Neither should we try and distort or misrepresent Cursillo though wanting to adapt them continuously to keep abreast of the signs of the times.

What is important is that we keep analysing , deepening and studying the Foundational Charism in the light of the 'signs of the times' and if possible in the light of today's signs and that of the signs of the times yet to come, the future times.

But it is something completely different to the ever present wish to graft into the Cursillo Movement, day in day out, everything that the Holy Father says in his countless speeches and everything that is agreed on, at the more or less important meetings around the world.

I will give a few examples here;

- Changing the name of the rollos and by doing so making them less understandable to the 'distant ones', without even knowing why the Founders gave them their particular name.
- Trying to channel or direct the generosity of the Cursillistas, in an imperialistic way as it were, telling them or indicating concrete ways of doing things, without having been asked for advice at all, etc. etc.

- Updating, provided it does not stem from personal or even national interpretations, will prove efficacious only if it does not stray from the simplicity of the Pater Noster or the everlasting freshness of the Beatitudes.

This is the way we see and understand fidelity to the Foundational Charism and the way to remain always in an open attitude towards the 'signs of the times'.

*The following text, is a summary of what Eduardo considers to be the most important points in his presentation. Unfortunately, it was not included in the document of the presentations that was prepared as a record of the Encounter. Eduardo has asked that we include it so that his text is complete, as he presented it in Korea.*

### **CLARIFYING THE CONFUSION BY THROWING LIGHT ON THE ORIGINAL INTENTION OF THE MOVEMENT.**

The Cursillo in Christianity was not thought up, structured or prayed for, to evangelize the world but man.

The Cursillo Movement was not born as an answer from the Church to the world but as one way to communicate to man that God loves him.

We know of no adaptation or alteration to the Movement which has made its purpose clearer, more precise, simpler, more understandable or more efficient.

In order to be able to grasp fully what the Cursillo Movement attempts to achieve and will surely achieve provided we don't distance it [from the origins] it is wise that we start from the following basic facts:

Man does not change, since his creation he is substantially the same.

Although he will try to run away from his feats and reach for his aspirations, his constant awareness of his options, his ability to choose, is what substantially makes him a man: the ability to move from merely existing to living fully as a person, and the feeling of frustration he has when he deviates from his personal path is what will orient him towards his concrete and specific fulfillment, which is knowing that he is loved and is capable of loving.

The challenges that the world presents to the man of today have the same root as they always did - the absence of God in the mind and in the heart of man.

This is why the solution is always the same, the solution is Christ and His Grace, which is the only thing that can give him the feeling of being alive and of leading a meaningful life.

The Cursillo Movement, when it doesn't deviate from its original Charism, attempts to connect Christians who are trying to live their evangelical faith in spirit and in truth, with those who do not have the living Christ who is the only one who can bring them life, and who are preoccupied with

fending for themselves with the result that they have no time to think about themselves and those around them.

The Cursillo Movement, when its value is not diminished by being misused, is an instrument and at the same time a place, where man can encounter himself and become aware of his existence and the existence of others, approaching them with the enthusiasm that stems from hope and establishing a mutual communication by listening to one another.

This technique will allow them to get to know, understand, respect and value one another, finally learning to love each other.

Although this may be a long process, Cursillo allows this to occur in a natural and normal way and offers the Cursillista the specific means to gradually transform the encounter into friendship.

These specific means are the Group Reunion and the Ultreya.

This is what the Cursillo Movement wants to offer to the man of today and for him to discover that his life has a meaning.

The crux of the question is that we understand once and for all that, no matter what, however much the world may change, man does not change, he remains always the same and, therefore, the solution will always be the same.

The only thing that we can spread like a contagion is the faith that we have that Christ loves us.

If we don't have this faith, we cannot ferment anything: not attitudes, environments, or structures.

Instead, if we don't have the faith, we shall stir up trouble, as we almost always do, and we shall carry on endlessly criticising those we call the 'bad ones' while continuing to make inventories of all their wickedness and lamenting the sorry state of the world.

Eduardo Bonnin