DYNAMICS OF THE WEEKEND

A Cursillo is, in the first place, the exposition of a doctrinal message. It presupposes and demands a doctrinal structure, a solid dogmatic base, which will become the foundation of clear and profound religious conviction. From this will come a solid Christian life imbued with theological truth.

The proclamation of the message should be done without arrogance or false humility. It should be done with simplicity and authenticity, witnessing a life bold enough to inspire imitation, yet expressed with true humility, giving the glory to God.

The talks are to be the joyful proclamation, not of academic and sterile truth, but of truth which has been tried in the lives of the speakers and found valid – dynamic truth. All the talks, whether given by priests or religious, or by deacons or laity, should be both doctrinally sound and provide living witness.

Although the talks are not everything in the Cursillo, they are absolutely essential because they contain the doctrinal body of the Cursillo. Their content outlines what is necessary for living what is fundamental for being a Christian.

They are all synchronized; each is a necessary part within the whole of the Cursillo. The leaders should be familiar with all the talks, have a total vision of the message and know the basic message of the outline for each talk, so that each talk may serve its proper role. We are not trying to give all the Christian doctrine in each talk, rather we are attempting to give what is necessary to encourage a personal encounter with Christ.

The talks should present the Gospel to the Cursillistas in such a way that they clearly hear the call to take a new attitude toward their lives. Therefore, they should be presented in a way that is intimately related to the concrete circumstances of the lives of the candidates and their environments. This should help them see the relevance of the Kingdom of God to today’s world and to see that authentic Christian life should respond to those problems. As many witnesses as possible of group action should be included, encompassing typical secular environments as well as those within the Church.

The Cursillo Movement has a definite approach to making the Christian life accessible to the Cursillista. This approach is based on a psychological theory and on a theological view of the Christian life. The Cursillo’s approach centers around the Christian ideal, presenting only the very basic, fundamental things which are necessary for living life as a Christian, and it presents them in such a way that people can easily see how the Christian ideal relates to them and to their lives.

New Vision

On the Cursillo weekend, the participants have to get a vision of what is fundamental for being a Christian (what it is to be a saint) and of what it means to form Christian life in society (what it means to be an apostle.) They have to understand what they are being challenges to commit themselves to. They need a vision of what their own lives can be.

The new vision of what it means to be a Christian comes in large part through the talks. Through the talks, the Cursillo weekend provides a series of presentations which gradually sketch a picture of the new life the cursillista can live. He first of all get a vision of what it is to be a Christian. Then he gets a vision of what it is to be a Christian leader who works and lives with others in a movement of renewal which provides a backbone for Christian life in the modern world.

The talks in the Cursillo are meant to provide the participants with a vision of the new persons they can become. They are not meant to present an orderly catechesis on Christian living. They therefore omit many things that are important for Christians to know: Things about doctrine and personal and social morality, things about spirituality and the apostolate.

In order to best understand the way all the talks of the weekend work together, it is necessary to consider them (1) individually with their specific messages and (2) as a whole. A good perspective is to view all the talks as one talk divided into many different parts.

THE PROGRESSION OF TALKS

Considering the progression of the talks in the Cursillo is another valuable way of bringing out the purpose and structure of the Cursillo outlines. Actually, considering the Cursillo talk by talk pins down some of the main ideas and shows the flow of the weekend. Considering the main ideas topically may clarify some of the thinking behind the Cursillo, but it obscures the structure of the development of ideas in the Cursillo itself.

There are a number of ways of bringing out the progression of the talks of the Cursillo, because they are interrelated in various ways. One obvious division is that of the spiritual advisor’ talks and the lay talks. They spiritual advisors’ talk present the theology of living the life of grace as a lay person.

There are several interrelationships among the talks, each illuminating a different aspect of the progression, but the basic progression is by days. Each day of the Cursillo is a whole and tries to do something different. The first day tells the cursillistas what they have to be; the second tells them what they must do; and the third day tells them what they must have and how they must act.

PREPARING THE TALKS – INDIVIDUAL EFFORT AS PART OF A TEAM APPROACH

Giving a talk on a Cursillo weekend is different from most others types of speaking. If a unified message is to come through, each speaker must cover the part he is given in the way it is meant to be covered. This takes a special kind of discipline, humility and technique.

THE FIRST DAY

The first day of the Cursillo is a presentation of the life of grace, that which is fundamental for the Christian life, the direction of one’s whole life to God. The message of the first day is the basis for the rest of the Cursillo. Perhaps the most characteristic mistake on this day is saying too much. The talks are only meant to present the idea of living the Christian ideal of the life of grace. The message of the first day is: accept the Christian ideal.

The talks sketch the Christian life from the angle of living grace, but what is said is very general and not directly challenging. As Bishop Hervas says in his Leaders’ Manual (p. 93), “It is not a question of challenging the attitude of the cursillistas directly, but of presenting him a much more worthwhile ideology, a ‘value’ much more sublime which, by its intrinsic power, will displace the standards, perhaps not so Christian, which he has upheld until now.” This means that none of the talks (with the exception of “Christian Life”) explain definite things the cursillista has to do to attain the ideal. “Laity,” for instance, does not say how a person should be an apostle. It just says that he has the calling of an apostle and should see his action in the world in relation to the Church and the hierarchy. “Piety” does not say how to direct one’s life to God except in general terms. The things that have to be done to put these concepts into action are talked about, but the specific details are not given. The first day is just a call to give oneself to God and to the work of bringing others to Him.

The talks are low-key during the first day. They do not use the actual experiences of the speakers as examples which are intended to be imitated in the way the later talks go. The talks are not enthusiastic, moving the listeners to action and dedication. As it says in the instructions for the first day in “Hervas’s Leaders’ Manual (p. 93), “Enthusiasm will not be the outstanding note in the presentation of the themes, since neither their nature nor the inclination of the cursillista permits it. One must really take into consideration the fact that one of the main points of resistance on the part of the cursillista will usually stem from his shying away from their “desire to convert him.’” The manner should, above all, aim at clarity, naturalness and conviction. The cursillista should be told clearly what a great thing he is called to. He should not be directly urges to it. Moreover, the use of illustrations and examples is carefully controlled. The ideas are illustrated by stories, comparisons and incidents which make the points clearer. But they are not illustrated by experiences which show how something can be done and which, because of their immediacy and the way they are addressed to the cursillistas, urge them to take any specific actions.

The low-key approach of the talks ends with the reading of the Palanca letters and the talk on “Piety.” These are the two “shocks” of the first day when the cursillista is brought up short and made to realize that he is going to have to respond in a way he probably never has before. The “Piety” talk uses living testimony in a way that none of the other talks of the day has, but differently from the way it will be used later on. “Piety” presents the picture of a person who is truly growing in holiness, of how he came to realize what piety has made in his life. It should not contain the kind of examples which show in a very concrete way “how to do it.” That is only sketched in broadly, and its development waits for the second day. “Piety” is intended to provide a summary of the first day by showing a life which is dedicated to living the life of grace fully and unreservedly, and it is the very force of the picture that produces the challenge for the cursillista.

THE SECOND DAY

The whole of the second day is a presentation of the life of grace and of true piety, like the first day, but on a different level. It no longer stresses the beauty of the calling and the importance of a personal relationship with God. Rather, while echoing the message of the first day, it patiently explains how it is done. It explains what each person must do to form himself in the Christian ideal – to become more Christian. It explains what each person must do to become a leader for Christ.

There are two characteristics of the talks on the second day:

1. Each talk tells the cursillista what to do and how to do it. Each must be explanatory. At the end of each talk, the cursillista should be able to say that he knows something he should be doing which he may not have been doing before, and he should have some idea of how to do it. There is a temptation just to say how the topics of the second day (“Action” for instance) fit into the Christian life and how great a thing it is to do them without saying what they consist of and how a person goes about doing them. On the other hand, the talks should not bog down in details.
2. Each speaker also avoids trying to tell too much, limiting himself or herself to what is fundamental to the message of the day. Especially beginning with the second day, the Cursillo is not a course in everything which goes into being a Christian or into being a human being. It explains what goes into being a leader in a Christian community according to a special method. A particular kind of action and a particular kind of leadership are meant to be explained in these talks.

The talks on the second day have a definite style. For the most part they indirectly explain the Cursillo method. Although they should urge the cursillista to do things he or she has not done (unlike most of the talks of the first day), they should be somewhat restrained. They should motivate the cursillistas by showing them the value of these things for their own lives and the lives of others.

They show what kind of an effect these things can have. The examples, too, should be primarily explanatory, showing how the method works. They are not primarily inspirational. Sometimes the tendency is to make “Action” the inspiring talk of the day, but it is not intended to be. The inspiring talk of the day should be “Leaders,” where the whole of the day is summed up in a moving way. This last talk should differ in style from those preceding it. Although it does not neglect explanation (it has to stress the idea of hard work), it is intended to inspire, to stress what people can do who are forming themselves according to the methods given during the day. Leaders should present the picture of the person who is putting all he has into being a Christian, and it should reveal the success such a person can have.

On the second day, the focus is primarily individual and personal. All the talks and examples should focus on the individual Christian and his or her relationship with Christ and other individuals. The development of how to live for Christ in an environment or how to live for Him in a community comes on the third day. All the cursillista has to know at this point is what he must be like and what he has to do in order to take his place in the Christian community in action.

THE THIRD DAY

The third day is an explanation of what is involved in being a Christian leader, an apostle of Christ, a person who lives the life of grace fully and unreservedly in the modern world. But it functions on a different level. It does not focus on the individual as much as on his presence in the world and his relations with other Christians. It stresses particularly how he must work with other Christians in a Christian community in action. It fills out the vision of how the Church and, therefore, how the individual apostle, can function in the modern world.

The third day involves the presentation of a method. The first and second days do not present anything that is unique to the Cursillo. The third day present the Cursillo method, the Cursillo approach to the environment. Each talk, therefore, presents its part of the method. As Bishop Hervas says in his instructions for the third day (Leaders’ Manual, p 146), “All the talks of the day will be carefully explained.” The cursillistas are being given instructions on how to use a successful approach. The instructions, therefore, should be given as carefully and as clearly as possible. They are the same sort of instructions that might be given to someone about to learn how to drive a car. The instructions cannot substitute for actually driving and getting the feel of it, but they have to be provided, and they have to be practical. They can’t just be enthusiastic exhortations about the greatness of driving cars.

The third day also provides a vision and in terms of that vision explains a method. The vision is that of a triumphal (not triumphalistic) Church, a Christian community in action that is on the move, full of hope and really accomplishing something. And it is the vision of a team of leaders within that Church who are really making a difference. At the end of the day, each person will have seen a picture of what it means to have a Christian community in action and will know that there is a successful one that they can become a part of.

As on the first two days, there is a progression in the style of the presentation. The first two talks are more low-key. The third talk is more stirring. The last two are enthusiastic. Moreover, the talks of the third day are stronger, more urgent and, above all, more confident and triumphant than the talks of the second day. They should have the tone of talks written in the light of the Resurrection, written after having seen the victory of Christ. He is risen, and He has overcome the world, and He is present in His Church, still overcoming the world.

The examples used during the third day are predominantly examples of a community working together or of an individual in a community. While illustrating the points, they should provide a glimpse into a real Christian community in action, a handful of determined, enthusiastic, dedicated men or women who group themselves about Jesus Christ with the aim of spreading the Christian ideal and translating it into works. The Cursillista should have the feeling that there is such a team in operation and that he can fit into this team. At the end of the day, no cursillista should doubt that what is said is possible and is already being done.