METHOD AND THEORY OF CURSILLO TALKS

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

There is a progression in the Cursillo talks, a carefully worked out progression. The talks should build up a picture gradually from Friday morning to Sunday night. It is therefore crucial that each one be done right, in its own style, and not say too much. It is not uncommon for Layman in the Church to be given with an enthusiasm for changing the world that should only appear in "Fourth Day". Nor is it uncommon for it to say things about the apostolate that should not be said until Christian Community in Action. Each talk is meant to do a certain job in a certain way.

The simplest point that can be made about giving the talks is that the intention of the founders was that the points in the outlines should all be made and not others. This is not to say that they intended to have "canned" talks or to make the talks rigid, but that the progression of points is carefully worked out and if each speaker makes the points in the outlines to his talk a much more effective job will be done.

If something is left out, a part of the picture will not come through. If more is added, it will usually obscure the purpose of the talk and the flow of the weekend.

Each talk should do two things: (1) explain some part of the picture or method and (2) urge (inspire) the cursillistas to do what is presented. But each talk should do both in its own way. The opening talks should explain Christianity more generally and pictorially, and their way of urging to conversion of life is by making the Christian ideal seem very attractive. The final talks should lay out a concrete method with definite steps and inspire to action with more enthusiasm, usually recounting examples of how the Cursillo method of renewal is a success. In between, the various talks operate in various ways. If the talks are given right, the cursillista will see a vision being gradually unfolded before him, and he will be interested in the development up the last minute of the last day.

The use of examples is almost as important as the explaining of ideas. Examples make a point strongly, therefore they have to be tied into the outlines as closely as the ideas do. A speaker can make one point with the ideas he presents and a different point can come across to those listening, because the examples were not well chosen. Moreover, there is a progression in the use of examples in the Cursillo just as there is a progression in the ideas. Examples of apostolic action, for instance, should be different in the different talks on apostolic action.

There is also a development in the minor topics in the Cursillo. There are a number of ideas which do not have a talk given to them, but which are gradually developed in sections of more than one talk. Lay-clergy relations, for instance, are treated at length in three places (Laymen in the Church, Sacraments, and Christian Community in Action), each time in very different ways. The three talks should be carefully coordinated on this point. Spiritual Direction is explained twice, in Obstacles to Grace and in Life in Grace. Each time a different thing should be said.

THE FIRST DAY

The first day of the Cursillo is a presentation of the life in grace, that which is fundamental to the Christian life, the direction of the whole of 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 (any full living of it, of course, involving bringing it to others through apostolic action). 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 it says in the Leaders Manual (p. 93) "It is not a question of challenging the attitude of the cursillista directly, but of presenting him a much more worthwhile ideology, a 'value' must 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 the eighth section of Actual Grace. Explain definite things the cursillista has to do to attain the ideal.

Layman in the Church for instance, does not say how a person should be an apostle. It just says that he has the calling of an apostle, and he 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 actual things that have to be done are talked about, but not explained. The first day is just a call to live the Christian ideal, or to put it another way, it is a call to give oneself to God and to bringing others to Him.

The low-key approach of the talks end with the reading of the Palanca letters and 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 did before. The Piety talk uses living testimony in a way that none of the other talks of the day has, but it uses it in a different way from the way that will be used later on. Piety presents the picture of a truly pious man, of how he came to realize what piety involves and what a difference this has made to him. It should not contain the kind of

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 in which later talks do. The talks are not enthusiastic, moving to action and dedication. As it says in the instructions for the first day (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 urged to it. Moreover, the use of illustrations and examples are carefully controlled. The ideas are illustrated by stories, comparisons, and incidents which make the point clearer. But they are not illustrated by the telling of experiences which show how something can be done, and which, because of their immediacy and the way they are addressed to cursillistas, urge them to some kind of action.

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 the life of grace, of true piety, like the first day, but it operates on a different level. It no longer stresses the ideas, the beauty of the calling, the importance of the relation to God. Rather, while echoing how it is done, or to be more precise, how the cursillista can do it. 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 each talk on the second day:

(1) Each talk tells the cursillista what to do and how to do it. It must explain. At the end of each talk, the cursillista must be able to say that he knows something he should be doing which he may not have been doing before, and that he has 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 in and how a person goes about doing them. (The talks should not, of course, bog down in details.)

(2) Each talk also avoids trying to tell too much. Especially beginning with the second day, the Cursillo is not a course in every-thing which goes into being Christian or into being a human being. It starts trying to explain 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, like those of the first day, have a definite style. They are for the most part explanatory of method. Although they should urge the cursillista to do things he has not done (unlike most of the talks of the first day), they should be somewhat restrained. The main way they urge is by showing the cursillista the value of these things for his own life and the lives of others. They show what kind of an effect these things can have. The examples, too, should be primarily explanatory, revealing how the method works. They are not primarily inspirational. What has been said is true for the Action talk too.

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. As on the first day, this last talk should differ in style from those that have preceded it. Although it does not neglect to explain (it has to stress the idea of hard word) it is intended to inspire, to stress what a person can do who is forming himself according to the methods given during the day. Leaders should present the picture of the man who is putting all he has into being Christian and it should reveal the success such a man can have.

THE THIRD DAY

The third day, like the second 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 operates 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 operate 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.

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

The examples used during the third day have a character of their own. They 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 who group themselves about Jesus Christ with the aim of spreading the Christian ideal and translating it into works." The cursillistas should have the feeling that there is such a team in operation, that there is a coordinated team effort going on, 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 it is being done.

The third day involves the presentation of a method. The first and second day do not present anything that is unique to the Cursillo. The third day presents the Cursillo method, the Cursillo approach to the environment. Each talk, therefore, presents its part of the method. As it says in the instructions for the third day (p. 146) "all talks of the day will be carefully explained." The cursillistas are being given instructions on how to operate a successful approach. The instructions, therefore, are intended to be as careful and as clear as possible. They are the same sort of instructions that might be given to someone about how to drive a car. The instructions cannot substitute for actually working on driving and getting the feel of it, but they have to be provided, and they have to be practical (not just enthusiastic exhortations to the greatness of driving cars).

As on the first two days, there is a progression in the style of presentation. The first two talks are more low-key and clear. The third talk is the most stirring. The last two are enthusiastic. Moreover the talks of the third day are stronger, more urgent, and above all, more confident and triumphant, then the talks of the second day. They should have the tone of talks written in 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.

SUMMARY

Each talk in the Cursillo has its own place. No talk is purely enthusiastic or a simple call to action. Each talk does its part in laying out a picture and adding another part of a message. In general there is a build up during each day. The last talk of each day is much more confident and urgent than the first talk which tends to be clearer and more intellectual. There is also a build up from day to day. The third day is much more stirring than the first. The movement of the Cursillo is that a careful unfolding, the cursillista being led from one talk to the next, from one day to the next. Each talk and each day brings something new and brings him to a greater dedication to God and to the apostolate.