

Chapter 1

THE HISTORY OF THE CURSILLO MOVEMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

A. Need and relevance of knowing the history

1. It is necessary for us to know our own history to recognize maintain and update our identity, “to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm, and look forward to the future with confidence.”¹ It is a way to grow in unity and to respond to the necessary renewal that God’s Spirit inspires according to the needs of men and women of our world today.²

B. A Conceptual and contextual approach

2. This should not only be known as a series of dates, events and people only, but above all as, an explanation of the ideas, living attitudes and pastoral options which, over time, gave birth to the CM, in a way that encourages an understanding of the “why” of the movement, its essence and mentality.
3. This implies knowing the historical circumstances – the context – which raised a number of problems and possibilities, and how in the attempt to solve these problems and possibilities, the basic concepts evolved.

¹ NMI 1.

² Conclusions of the VI World Encounter (Sao Paulo, 2005) 14

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CM

A. The general situation in Spain

4. The Cursillo Movement was born in Spain, specifically on the island of Mallorca, in the 1940's.
5. The specific social and religious background that characterized the reality at that time must be taken into account.

Spain was going through a post-war period (the Spanish civil war had taken place from 1936-1939) and the society was being rebuilt in an atmosphere of change and insecurity.

The religious situation was also complex. The Catholic Church also experienced great difficulties of insecurity and persecution during the civil war. The post-war period began a restoration process for the Church in which Roman Catholicism was the "official religion" in an apparently Christian Spanish society. What existed, however, was a "social Christianity" that lacked practically any authentic Christian life.

B. Catholic Action

6. That was the background in which Catholic Action which was implemented largely in Spain, sought to promote greater authenticity and involvement of the laity in the life of the church. The youth section, the Spanish Catholic Action Youth (JACE), then resumed a project that was conceived prior to the civil war: a large pilgrimage of youths to Santiago de Compostela, which was eventually held in 1948.³

³ Manuel Aparici's slogan: "100,000 young people to Santiago."

7. The National Council of JACE, then headed by Manuel Aparici, established an intense preparation with the ideal of a spiritual pilgrimage that took place through the Cursillos for Advanced Pilgrims, which were diocesan and led by members of the National Council of the JACE, and Cursillo for Leaders of Pilgrims, held in parishes, led by members of the Diocesan Councils.

3. THE BEGINNINGS OF CM

A. Youth of Catholic Action in Mallorca

8. At that time there was a very lively and active Diocesan Council of Youth of Catholic Action in Mallorca, and the youths of the island had an intense participation in the activities that led to the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in 1948,⁴ mainly in the Cursillos for Advanced Pilgrims and for Pilgrims Leaders.

There was among them a well-formed group of youths that shared common attitudes and criteria, notable apostolic concern and a clear dissatisfaction with the exiting pastoral approach.

B. The first Cursillos

9. In the origin of Cursillos can be recognized the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that was received and shared by a group of people, among them, Eduardo Bonnín, a layman with a preeminent leadership role, some priests such as Monsignor Sebastian Gaya and the then Bishop of Mallorca, Monsignor Juan Hervas. They developed what today we would

⁴ THTW, page 39

call a new way to evangelize, reaching those who were far away from God and the church, what later on was called Cursillos in Christianity.

10. Between the years 1944 and 1949 an intense study, reflection and experimentation was carried out. They took elements from the Cursillo already existing in Catholic Action, and adapted its method to a new purpose.

11. The seed planted by the Holy Spirit was flowering into something new: an outreach to all people including those who were far away, that would allow the essential content of Christianity to be captured in all its intensity even by those who lived on the fringe of religion.⁵

With the grace of the Holy Spirit, this work gave origin to the Cursillos in Christianity, something new and different in focus, purpose and meaning.

C. The beginning of the Movement

12. As those early Cursillos settled, a new movement was taking shape, with a number of distinctive elements:

- a) A group of people who share a mentality;
- b) A purpose: “to structure (to ‘vertebrate’) the Christianity”;⁶
- c) An effective method to achieve the intended purpose;
- d) A minimum of organization and structure.

⁵ BHTW page 12

⁶ THTW page 51-52

13. A key point was the configuring of the mentality, the foundation stone which gave the movement shape:
- a) A perception of reality: a world with its back turned to God; lives that had ceased to be authentically Christian.
 - b) A conclusion that a new evangelizing activity was needed, capable of renewing the world from within.
 - c) A burning conviction that a new world and faith comes from transformed men and women.
 - d) A certainty that the world is the place of salvation.
 - e) A conviction that Christianity was the answer to all problems of mankind and the world; that it was possible for anyone, even those who lived on the margins, to make their life Christian and become apostles who would transform the environments.⁷
14. A mentality that established a new form of evangelization:
- a) That starts from the actual reality of people;
 - b) That enables people to live what is fundamental to being Christian;
 - c) That moves them to become apostles in their environments.⁸

This mentality gives rise to a strategic method that would characterize the Movement.

⁷ THTW page 17

⁸ THTW page 18

15. The Movement, begun in the early forties, and which became a reality in the diocese of Mallorca, was consolidated in the subsequent years (1949-1954).
- a) More Cursillos were held, their beneficial results were clear, it was proved that the Movement could bear a universal solution in the task of evangelization since it presented itself as an answer to different people (young and old, close or far from the religion), and to different social realities.⁹
 - b) Some basic structures are created: the School of Leaders with its prominent role; Group Reunions and Ultreyas to support life in the Postcursillo; and Diocesan Secretariats as specific and particular service structures.

4. THE EXPANSION OF THE CM

A. In Spain

16. From Mallorca the CM enters mainland Spain, in 1953 (Valencia). As a result of both – personal initiatives and the activities of the JACE National Council, the Movement spreads across various dioceses of Spain.

The transfer of D. Juan Hervas to the Diocese of Ciudad Real in 1955, and the publication in 1957 of the Pastoral Letter “Cursillos in Christianity, Instrument of Christian Renewal,” stand as defining moments for the acceptance of the CM and its national and international expansion.

⁹ THTW, page 31-41

B. From Spain, to the Americas

17. Many lay people and priests who participated in the Movement in various dioceses of Spain, excited about its evangelizing potential, bring it through different means to the Latin America countries.¹⁰

The first country to receive the CM was Colombia, through Catholic Action, where the first Cursillo outside Spain is held. This was also where the first Cursillo for women was held (1953).

In a few years, in various ways, it spread throughout other countries of South America. In North America the first Cursillo was held in the United States in 1957 and from there it spread to other English-speaking countries.

Across the Americas it extends with great strength and vitality: large numbers of people and groups are mobilized; service structures are established; integration into diocesan pastoral activities and leavening of the environments resulted.

C. The rest of the world

18. From Spain, and later from different countries, it is introduced into Western Europe, where an active Movement develops, which is consolidated at the diocesan level.

In Asia and Oceania, a similar process occurs during those years.

A new impetus occurs in the CM when, from Austria, it is introduced to the countries of Eastern Europe and, although to a more limited extent, it is introduced in some countries of Africa.

¹⁰ CM, page 56

D. A universal Movement

19. In this way the CM is shaped as a universal Movement spread throughout the whole world, in different cultures and social realities it evangelizes, builds up and serves the Church worldwide.

5. CREATION OF FORMAL STRUCTURES

A. A necessary step

20. As the CM spread worldwide and developed as a Movement, the basic service structures that give shape to the Movement as such were established.

B. Diocesan Secretariats

21. Diocesan Secretariats are the first and most necessary organizational structure, a link with the diocesan Church and bishop.

Historically the CM had its beginnings with a supporting group of people embodying the mentality proper to Cursillo and willing to work with its Method.

Immediately, however, it became apparent that a basic organization and ecclesial support was necessary to develop the movement, and this was how Diocesan Secretariats emerged.

C. National Secretariats

22. National Secretariats were born as a consequence of the need to coordinate and unify the life of the CM in a country.

In many countries, their introduction was preceded by meetings or national assemblies, the first opportunities for communication and coordination of the various dioceses. From them, as a natural consequence, National Secretariats were established, with recognition by the respective Episcopal Conference.

23. The first National Secretariat was established in Mexico in 1961, after the First National Conference in the country. Then, in 1962, Venezuela, Spain, Portugal, and Brazil formed their National Secretariats. In the same year more than twenty national Secretariats were formed.¹¹

D. International Encounters and Groups

24. In the process of global expansion of the CM in the 60's, the need for connection and coordination between National Secretariats became apparent. International meetings and encounters of various kinds were held in different times and places. These international encounters gave rise to the CM International Groups.

25. The formation of an International Group was first discussed at the First Latin American Encounter held in Bogota, Colombia in 1968, and became a reality at the Second Latin American Encounter in 1970 in Tlaxcala, Mexico, when the Latin American Office of Cursillos in Christianity (OLCC) was established.¹²

¹¹ CM, page 88

¹² Now GLCC – Latin American Group of Cursillos in Christianity

26. In 1972, as part of a World Encounter, the European Working Group (GET)¹³, was created and held its first meeting in Mallorca later that year.

27. The need for an English Language Group to facilitate communication became apparent and countries in North America, Europe, Asia and Oceania raised the Group (IELG) in 1973. Coordinated by the USA, work began on the publication of the literature of the CM in this language.

By 1983 the countries of Asia and Oceania began moves to form their own Group and held their first meeting in Guam. They formed the Asia-Pacific Group (APG) in 1990.

When the English speaking countries of Europe joined GET in 1997, the North American/Caribbean Group (NACG) was formed.

28. International Encounters and World Encounters were soon held. The First World Ultreya, celebrated in Rome, Italy in 1966, with the presence of Pope Paul VI is considered the World Encounter I. The World Encounter II was held in Tlaxcala, Mexico in 1970; the World Encounter III in Mallorca, Spain in 1972, where it was agreed to produce the Fundamental Ideas of the CM, as the book that “identified what characterizes the movement worldwide.”

E. World Body of Cursillos in Christianity (OMCC)

29. In 1980 the then existing International Groups (OLCC, GET, IELG) meeting at the fifth Inter-American Encounter in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, decided to establish

¹³ Now GECC – European Group of Cursillos in Christianity

the World Body of the Cursillo (OMCC) as “an organization of service, communication and information,” formed by the International Groups of the CM.

30. Subsequent World Encounters were celebrated under the coordination of the OMCC: the fourth World Encounter was held in Caracas, Venezuela in 1988 where it was agreed to publish a second edition of Fundamental Ideas; the fifth World Encounter was in Seoul, Korea in 1997. At the sixth World Encounter in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 2005, the decision was made to publish a third edition of Fundamental Ideas, and in 2013, the seventh World Encounter was held in Brisbane, Australia, where the draft of the third edition of Fundamental Ideas was approved.

6. CANONICAL RECOGNITION OF THE OMCC

31. One of the activities of the OMCC is to represent the CM worldwide, especially at significant ecclesial gatherings. In 1989 the OMCC sought the admission of the CM to the Conference of International Catholic Organizations. Such request made clear that canonical recognition by the Holy See of the CM was a necessity.

Although the CM counted on pastoral acceptance and recognition worldwide (including acceptance and recognition by Popes Paul VI and John Paul II), it did not have explicit canonical recognition from the Holy See.

The OMCC began the process by submitting the statutes of the OMCC to the Pontifical Council for the Laity, seeking canonical recognition of the OMCC as the coordinating body of the CM worldwide

The process took several years and finally, in 2004, the Pontifical Council for the Laity decreed the canonical recognition of the OMCC as a “structure of coordination, promotion and dissemination of the experience of the Cursillos in Christianity, with private juridical personality” and “approving the statute of the above mentioned body.”¹⁴ In September 2014, that Pontifical Council confirmed the definitive approval of the statutes of the OMCC.

7. CONCLUSION

A. Know the history of the CM

32. It is necessary to be aware of the history of CM, recognizing the work of the Spirit, from the beginning to the present day, and also recognizing the commitment, enthusiasm and effort of many people, that began with the founders and which continues with so many “anonymous Cursillistas” who have lived their lives in service to the CM.

B. Discover in it the reality and identity of the CM

33. The history shows how the identity of the CM came into being.

Through the years, the inspiration of the Spirit and the commitment of many people have shaped an evangelizing ecclesial movement that has a mentality, a purpose and its own method.

By means of the Movement the Holy Spirit enables many people to encounter God’s love and live a meaningful life.

C. Respond in three dimensions

34. The history enables a response in three dimensions: gratitude, commitment and hope.

- a) Gratitude for the action of the Spirit and for the dedication of so many people that has brought good into the lives of others.
- b) Personal and community commitment and dedication to continue to live with enthusiasm everything the CM offers.
- c) The Hope to be open to the future, always counting on the Holy Spirit.

¹⁴ Decree of Canonical Recognition of the OMCC, PCL, 2004