

## **FREEDOM/LIBERTY**

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Good morning. My name is Julie Gray and I made my Cursillo in October 1981 in Port Hope Ontario and I have been actively involved with Cursillo since then. .

My talk today is on the topic of liberty or freedom in the Cursillo Movement as outlined in the Conversations of Cala Figura, the writings of the Founder, as well as Fundamentals Ideas.

When Canada hosted the World Secretariat in the early 90s, it opened up a friendship and dialogue with the Founder, Eduardo Bonnín that has continued to this day. When pressed for his advice about what we as a movement could do to help Cursillo become the effective movement in the world that it was created to be, he had one response. He said that for so long Cursillo has focused on the structure of the movement that it was time we focused on the spirit of the movement and let the breath of the Holy Spirit in.

One of the key elements of that spirit is Liberty. To not understand it's importance is to not understand Cursillo. Liberty/freedom permeates the whole movement and it is an essential quality for creating leaders who are responsible.

### **DEFINITION**

Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act on one's own.

In preparing this talk I found it very revealing to discover that there were 20 pages listed at the back of the book with references to the word "liberty" in the original Fundamental Ideas published in 1974. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition written in 1992, which was compiled without any consultation with Bonnín, who was there at the beginning, I found 3 references. This, to me, seems to verify the need today of looking back to see what was in the minds and earlier writings of the leaders of the movement to see what, if anything, has been lost and to improve our understanding of the movement so it can become what it was inspired to be from the beginning.

My talk is divided in 2 parts. The first part is about the qualities of freedom drawing on Cursillo literature and the Catechism.

**THE KEY TO PROMOTING FREEDOM IN THE CURSILLO MOVEMENT IS NOT IN FOCUSING ON THE "HOW" (THE STRUCTURE AND RULES) BUT IN FOCUSING ON THE "WHY" (PURPOSE) OF THE MOVEMENT.**

Viktor Frankl wrote a well known book called, "Man's Search For Meaning". He had been a prisoner of war and he tried to understand why some prisoners fought valiantly until death to survive imprisonment, torture, and separation from loved ones while others seemed to quickly give up their will to live. In his research he noted that the soldiers with wives and young children at home were the ones who were motivated to survive at all costs. They had someone and something to live for other than themselves

that motivated them to endure the horror of their circumstances. His findings revealed that if one understands the “why” of life than one can endure any “how” of life.

This truth is one of the most important truths for all of us in understanding the human person but particularly in understanding the mentality of the movement from the beginning. Knowing the “why” of our faith and of Cursillo will guide us in the “how”. The “how” is never as important as the “why”. Knowing the “why” we do things allows us more freedom with the “how” we do them when addressing specific situations and cultures.

This weekend conference is a wonderful example of this point. Through the reports and witnessing from the various cultural groups and communities that make up this great movement, we will see the many different ways that Cursillistas live the “how” of Cursillo. The “why” never changes but the “how” can change to reflect the uniqueness of our traditions and culture.

#### LET US LOOK AT THE ORIGINS OF THE ELEMENT OF FREEDOM IN THE MOVEMENT

When the original leaders of Cursillo first came together they had in their minds 2 things. They wanted to know God better and to know the human person better. This is like the old saying that in order to teach little Johnny Latin one must know well both Latin and little Johnny.

To know God better they studied Scripture. They learned that one of the most important gifts that God gave man when He created him was the gift of freedom...the freedom to choose. In the Ideal Talk on the 3 Day Weekend we learn that this gift of free will is what makes us different from the animal kingdom. In the Grace Talk we learn that although God loves us with an everlasting and unconditional love, He invites us to freely accept His gift of grace with faith (Faith Talk) and to freely choose to love Him in return.

In their study of the human person the Founders learned that in order to accept any idea or truth, man must be motivated from within and given full freedom to respond.

And so liberty or freedom became a key element or characteristic of the Cursillo Method in motivating a person’s response to the message of Cursillo which is that “God loves me.

#### THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF CURSILLO IS TO MOTIVATE FROM WITHIN A FREE RESPONSE TO GOD’S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE (MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF FREEDOM)

As young girl I longed for the freedom to make my own decisions. My mother particularly was very strict and controlling and life seemed full of rules and regulations. More and more I fought for independence. “No one is going to be the boss of me I

would tell myself". Mom used to say that saying "no" to me was like waving the red flag in front of the bull. It was true and I still have a tendency to react or stiffen when anyone tells me that I must or should do something. I think of all the reasons why I shouldn't do whatever it is I am being told to do. Think about it. Who likes to be told what to do, what to think or how to act? Either the desire and motivation to think or act is there or it isn't.

At that time God for me was an authoritarian God. I loved Him but felt that He probably didn't like who I was. Even I did not love myself nor feel loveable. After I was married, life improved. I had someone who loved me and I had no rules. We had jobs and money to do what we wanted. We could travel anywhere. We even had contraception so we could have children in number and sequence to what we wanted. This to me felt like freedom but in reality it was not true freedom. I still had a nagging sense of dissatisfaction with life. .

My freedom was restricted by my desire and need to fit in to society, to have friends, to be needed, loved, admired, and consulted. I was trapped by my need to please others in order to feel loved and loveable.

After meeting a personal Jesus on my Cursillo weekend I realized that "with God on my side, who could me against me". The knowledge that Jesus loved me unconditionally where I was at and that He died for my sins, gave me confidence in the person that I was - a child of God, daughter of a King, and heir to the kingdom. This gave me true freedom. I felt loved and loveable and that was a wonderful liberating feeling.

The realization that "God loved me" motivated me from within. As a result of that interior motivation I wanted with all my heart to become the person that He was calling me to be, to be all that He created me to be. No longer did I feel trapped by other people's opinions of me or of my world. Answering one simple question, "what would Jesus do?" became the mantra of my decision making. Using this criteria led me to a new kind of freedom and feeling of peace and real joy. Faith truly liberates because it gives us the confidence to know that we have something and Someone to hold on at all times. Happiness resulted from this freedom to be able to be myself and to express my own uniqueness.

#### FREEDOM EMPOWERS ONE TO EXPRESS THEIR UNIQUENESS

When I love others as Jesus loves them, I want them to be naturally who they are free to be the person that God created them to be. I want them to express their uniqueness with all their gifts and talents that have resulted from all their suffering, their crosses and pain that God has permitted them to experience. When I am in grace I can love them as Jesus loves them with all their weaknesses and limitations because when I take the plank out of my own eye, I can see an image of what they can become if they know Jesus. When I am not in grace, I know that I am capable of giving off subtle messages to people (and probably many not so subtle especially to my family) so that they will rid themselves of those bumps and marks that give them character and are part of who they are so they will look and act like I think they should look and act.

IN THE IDEAL TALK WE LEARN THAT MAN'S FULFILLMENT DEPENDS ON HIS CAPACITY TO BE FREE

We know that animals and plants reach their own fulfillment according to their instincts and without thought. Man reaches his fulfillment by freely choosing what he wants to be.

Since we were created in the image of our creator, we will ultimately only find fulfillment when we are living out His purpose and will in our lives, with all our mistakes, through freedom. And we will feel free when we desire to want to fulfill that purpose for which we were created.

IN THE STUDY TALK WE LEARN THE NEED TO PRACTICE OUR FREEDOM CONSCIENTIOUSLY IN SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH IN ORDER TO BECOME WHO WE ARE CREATED TO BE.

"For freedom Christ has set us free." (Gal 5:1) When Pilate asked Jesus, "And you, why have you come into this world?" Jesus responded, "I have come to this world to be a witness of the truth." Truth is the foundation of our freedom. We cannot be free if we do not look for the truth.

Deep down freedom resides within our conscience. And we have a responsibility to have a formed conscience. Although we are conditioned by our past, our families, nationalities, education, and our genes, they cannot be blamed for our choices and actions today. We have full freedom to think and act. If I was raised by a controlling parent, I can't blame that parent because I have tendencies to be a controlling adult. If I had a strict nuns or priests as teachers or pastors in my youth, I can't use them as an excuse not to practice my faith. We are accountable for our own lives, not in front of others, but before our conscience and before God.

IN THE ACTION TALK WE DISCOVERED WHY WE WERE GIVEN FREEDOM - TO LOVE AND SERVE OTHERS

To do whatever we want to do or live however we want to live is a false concept of freedom. We were given freedom in order to love and it doesn't stop with ourselves which would make us egocentric. That is what characterizes our society today. It leads to neurosis, depression, and many lonely people. Freedom becomes a tomb when it is not projected toward the world in service.

We have reached an elevated level of freedom when we try to live for the others as opposed to ourselves.

FREEDOM IS GUIDED BY ETHICS AND THE LAW

Civilization is founded on ethics. Ethics is the behavior of knowing how to respond.

In his book called, *The Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis describes how every civilization and every world religion is founded on a similar code of behavior, ethics, and morals. For Christians that code is the 10 commandments. Love the Lord your God, do not lie cheat, steal, kill or commit adultery. Honor your parents and don't covet you neighbors' wife or goods. Every civilization is founded on that same code of ethics but they refer to their code by a different name. For Jews it is the Torah, For Muslims it is the Qur'an. These are basically the rules for living successfully in community that are necessary for the survival of the community or civilization.

By deviating from the moral law man violates his own freedom, becomes imprisoned within himself, disrupts his relationships, and rebels against divine truth."

IN THE CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION TALK WE HEAR THAT FREEDOM DOES NOT MEAN INDEPENDENCE.

We are free but not independent or self sufficient. We depend on air and food. We also have a mutual need for one another. No one can live in total freedom and independence. Independence is isolation.

FREEDOM MAKES MAN RESPONSIBLE

Animals are not responsible and the more responsible a person is the less animal they are.

Total freedom cannot be given to children until they learn responsibility. We cannot give freedom to one who is not responsible for their actions. When someone is not respectful of others, he does not have the same rights. We all have a right to defend ourselves against those who are doing something wrong to us by being irresponsible. That includes taking their freedom away, because freedom is mutual respect.

FREEDOM DENIED

When freedom is denied, people are denigrated and depersonalized. We can put up with anything but humiliation which intimidates us and takes away our freedom. We are all equal in dignity, but not in our behavior, our strength, our abilities, our gifts, our intelligence, or in our possessions. In fact we are unequal in almost everything. When some one tries to make us the same; they take away our capacity for initiative and our capacity to develop.

PRECURSILLO PHASE

The 2<sup>nd</sup> part of my talk will be looking at how we can inspire or can sometimes diminish freedom in each of the 3 phases of the movement. I want to emphasize at the beginning that my examples or witnessing are strictly my own observations, feelings or opinions which I pray will be food for further prayer and study and discernment IN your particular local diocesan movements and not become sources of argument and dissension.

The purpose of this talk is not to change the structure, invent new rules or propose another cookie cutter solution for success but to lead us to think, to open up our minds, and to be sensitive and respectful of others freedom.

I am not exaggerating, (well, maybe a little) when I say that I have heard more arguments than God has both for and against every guideline regarding who should and who should not make a Cursillo weekend.

The ultimate decision is always the responsibility of each diocesan secretariat. I think of secretariats as being bodies of wisdom that comes from prayer and discernment rather than authoritarian bodies of command. It is quick and to establish hard and fast rules and much more difficult to be flexible in their application. Rules with no clear purpose can diminish people's freedom to learn to act responsibly. Isn't it one of the goals of the movement to train Christian leaders to think?

Whenever I think of application dilemmas, I am reminded of a woman I will call Amy. To most people Amy would have met none of the important criteria for a candidate. She was not a Catholic or married to one. She was living with a man who was not her husband. She was a recovered alcoholic and did not stand out as a leader in the community. But to her sponsor, who was not in a permanent group, she had a strong personality and was searching for something more in life. She had heard about Cursillo expressed an interest and willingness to go. I also knew Amy fairly well and agreed that there was a spiritual longing about her. After making the weekend she was inspired to organize a Festival of Faith celebrating Jesus for anyone who wanted to come and celebrate. 500 people gathered for a day long event that featured celebrity bands, speakers and a variety of activities. For 2 years she was the head organizer of our week long World Youth Day activities in our small parish of 120 of full time (not including summer) families that included hosting 150 pilgrims (50 of whom were from Africa). She started a youth group in our parish and took them to Kingdom Bound in New York. She attended leader school, was on team several times, chaired our ultreya for a number of years, and is still a member of a permanent group. She did all of this with little or no money and not in what some would consider the "right order". And she is now living on her own and raising her nephew and has become a confirmed Catholic.

When I referred back to the First Edition of Fundamental Ideas for this talk, I realized that Amy actually fit the criteria fairly well. Yes, she wasn't a textbook picture either ...but she had the potential to be an excellent candidate because of her strong personality and her desire to learn more about Jesus. We have taken many of the "who can" list in the Fundamentals and turned them in to "who can't"s. Do we ever consider that we may have to answer before God for turning away people who had a desire to meet Jesus but who we turned away because of some hard and fast rule, without thinking about what was possible?

In the selection process we need to keep 3 criteria uppermost in our minds:

1. Does this individual fit with the purpose of the movement?
2. What would Jesus say or do?

3. What is common sense in this individual's situation?

The purpose of the Movement is to reach those far away from God. But as Bonnin has said, we can't have all cabooses on the weekend we need engines as well. Engines would be the natural leaders.

Scripture tells us much about what Jesus would do. Who did he choose to be his apostles? Fishermen, a tax collector... Who did He befriend? Mary Magdalene, from whom He drove out seven devils, the Samaritan woman at the well, Zaccheus, a tax collector, drunkards and sinners. He said that it was not the healthy that needed the doctor. He did not tell the Samaritan woman to get her marriages annulled and the final one blessed. Nor did He baptize her. He just told her who she was and who He was and she immediately went to tell others.

In the Story of Zaccheus, Jesus did not try to make him revise the pay for his workers, or create a cooperative, or a bank for the poor, or give a donation for the temple in Jerusalem or that he attend a course in his community to become a catholic first. Jesus knows too well that Zaccheus, once liberated, will do much more with greater enthusiasm and creativity

Other things to think about in achieving a sense of liberty in pre Cursillo are:

- Instead of pointing out rigid age limits for example we could also look at the maturity of the candidate. Holding separate Cursillos for older and younger people instead of doing them together perhaps is something else we may question. Besides putting the future of Cursillos in jeopardy, we waste the opportunity of bringing the different ages together and fostering understanding and acceptance between them. In our society older people tend to judge younger people by their revealing attire and by the number of piercings and tattoos while younger people judge older people to be boring, old fashioned, with archaic ideas that are non relevant. John Paul II has shown us that the young can touch the old and vice versa and that the combination of the two is a much more effective mix because the Spirit works to build bridges from heart to heart and create unity through understanding each other. The point is that we realize that regardless how much the world changes, man remains the same and the solution will always be the same. The Solution is Christ and His grace which are the only things that give meaning to lives and fill the longing within our souls.
- Bonnin has also cautioned us not to insist that husbands must do the Cursillo before their wives, common sense dictates that unless the partner with more influence does the Cursillo first, the other will probably never do so.

Another point I read in my research was to keep in mind that the whole reason for talking about "environments and selection of candidates" in Precursillo, is not because Cursillo is for the elite but because we desire to reach the most people as soon as possible with the gospel.

I have often heard a cursillista refer to potential candidates as “not being ready”. What I sometimes wonder is, who is ever “not ready” to receive the message that God loves them? It is a known fact that the people who are farther away from God experience the greatest conversion. Look at St. Paul. When he was Saul, he murdered Christians. He would never have been cured of blindness had not Ananias, a Christian, had the courage and openness to God, to approach Saul.

And therein lays the wisdom. If we are a praying people and we ask God to guide us in who we sponsor, we shouldn't have too many problems. The Movement often has had to establish rules because we don't pray and don't discern and we don't ask God about our friend before we ask our friend about God.

We should not fear our faith differences. They can be a source of our dynamism. Last Thursday Pope Benedict XVI in speaking to the World Council of Churches said that, “in the very first days of my pontificate, I stated that my primary task is the duty to work tirelessly to rebuild the full and visible unity of all Christian followers. This requires, in addition to good intentions, concrete gestures which enter hearts and stir consciences...inspiring in everyone that inner conversion that is the prerequisite of all ecumenical progress.

As a rule I believe in sponsoring candidates on a weekend close to the tradition in which they were raised and in which they will feel most comfortable. I have sponsored United people on United weekends, Anglican people on Anglican weekends. But what does one do with a non-catholic friend who clearly prefers to go on a Catholic weekend? To me it may be worth considering if the sponsor is in a permanent group who would welcome the candidate after the weekend. The candidate would also need to understand that Catholic liturgy would be used on the weekend. On occasions where this has occurred, far from having a negative experience, they have come away with a deeper appreciation of the sacraments, our devotion to Mary and the Stations of the Cross. Our understanding of the Eucharist is explained before the first mass on the weekend by the celebrant and in positive manner and any non catholic that may be present is invited to come forward during communion for a blessing. Obviously these people would be exceptions because it is not the intention of Cursillo to convert other Christians to Catholicism but to a deeper relationship with Jesus.

These are just a few points to illustrate how focusing on rules and structure instead of the gospel and common sense can sometimes choke the Spirit as well as our freedom. When we function lonely by the rules and never look back, we lose sight of their original intent.

## CURSILLO

In order for Christianity to bear fruit in a spontaneous dynamic person on a Cursillo Weekend he must be given full freedom of decision and action. I need to respect and be open to another's individuality and careful not to intimidate him with my expectations and presumptions of him or imprison him in a structure that diminishes his freedom and spontaneity. Unless I put myself in the shoes of the distant one, I will never know

what diminishes his freedom. I need to become his friend in order to understand just how far away he is.

As a leader is my witnessing practical and attainable for the average active person or do I leave my listeners feeling more inadequate. Does my witnessing motivate and inspire or just leave people with an impossible expectation? I should be using every day examples from my every day world – my family, work, and social environments, not just parish related witnessing where we are preaching to the converted.

When speaking of formation, one must not neglect or diminish the focus of the teaching about the meaning and practice of the sacraments and private prayer for the development of the spiritual life.

Does the message of the weekend express the mentality and purpose of the movement. We should avoid complicated theories on evangelization. Missionary enthusiasm does not come from plans imposed by strategies. It is born when we convert to Jesus Christ. We sometimes talk too much like theologians.

We need to rediscover an evangelical simplicity and tone...to know how to say simply to all people; God loves you. Christ came down to earth for you.”

#### POSTCURSILLO

In our diocese I sometimes feel we are constantly harping on the need to be in a permanent group. Yes, I know it is a recipe for success. Would it not be more effective though to give a current witness of how we grew thru our group sharing this week as opposed to just empty repetitions of how great permanent group is? We need to think about what is going to motivate people from within to want to group rather than imposing a menu for Christian living that may leave them feeling that their new found freedom is being eroded. To follow up this story and to make matters worse this past winter a very nice woman and new Cursillista stood in front of our central ultreya asking for someone to group with in her area. She told me after the meeting that no one came forward. How can we be credible when this occurs?

Following their Cursillo weekend new Cursillistas also need time to assimilate what they have learned before they are rushed into all kinds of other apostolic and church related activities. I recall how I felt after the closing. It sounded so overwhelming and impossible. How was I going to add to add prayer, study, Christian action, leadership of others, study and evangelization of my environment, and weekly attendance at ultreya and permanent group meetings to an already busy schedule that included working full time and raising 3 little ones? But my sponsor was a very gentle woman, understanding of my commitments but also very persistent and persuasive. She invited me in a way that made me want to come and discover the joy and growth that she had obviously found. She made it sound so stimulating and fun that I just had to attend. It was just a small group but the depth of friendship, sharing and contagious joy was nourishing and liberating. I wanted to return.

#### LEADER SCHOOL:

Are our Leader Schools dynamic and fertile planting grounds for our new Cursillistas to thrive and grow and become thinkers in an atmosphere of freedom? Is the Cursillo method communicated in a lively stimulating way encouraging open discussion, new ideas and sharing with other enthusiastic Christians like we do on the Cursillo Weekend? Or are they places of static indoctrination where independent thinkers with initiative, who are natural leaders, feel stifled or manipulated. If and when they quit attending, not only Cursillo loses but Christ also loses another person who would have been an effective leader winning more souls for Him.

Remember that the book we use as a guide for the movement is titled The Fundamental Ideas of the Cursillo Movement rather than the Fundament Rules.

We need to be careful about turning people off by our own set interpretation of how Cursillo should be implemented. It would be more effective to focus on what is essential and how we can deliver that to the greatest number of people and avoid harmful arguments over structure and rules. What is the truth that will set people free?

“Christianity, more than just being morals, rites, or structure etc., is a personal relationship and friendship with Christ and with our brothers, which results in happiness to those who find it.” (Bonnin)

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

#### FREEDOM AND THE GOSPEL

The correct path is always to adopt the Gospel solution and the attitude of Jesus, who after resurrecting Lazarus told those present, “Let him walk”.

When God works that same miracle of resurrecting the candidates on a weekend, we do not want to let them go. We always want those coming out of a Cursillo weekend to be perfect. When new Cursillistas exhibit signs of being too liberal or too bohemian, we shy away from them and wipe out the spirit of joy and enthusiasm of their encounter.

- The blind see, and instead of rejoicing, we complicate their lives by telling them where to look.
- The lame walk, and we prefer to tell them how and where to walk instead of rejoicing that they are no longer lame.
- The lepers (such as the alcoholics and drug addicts) are cured and the dead rise but we are not very enthusiastic about really becoming their friends. We cannot accept through faith what God has worked on them. We think they still have some rough edges that they need to work on.
- And the Good News is announced to the poor, and they live it with a contagious joy. But they are a little too enthusiastic for us because they want to change things instead of leaving them as they are. We avoid them hoping they will calm down and be mature Christians (read boring) like us.

Let us not put barriers up that will stifle the Spirit and remove the enthusiasm in their lives. Let us always remember that man has the right to make mistakes. Notice that I didn't refer to women making mistakes because that really would be unnatural.

THE SPIRIT OF FREEDOM IS A SPIRIT OF JOY AS OPPOSED TO BEING SULLEN AND PIOUS

The tragedy is that what is authentically Christian does not reach the world very often, and if so, it is disfigured and reduced to moral rules and regulations which lived in a distant and different manner, are not relevant. The fact is that today faith, which is the only thing that can give meaning to life, does not reach people with clarity, joy and strength since it is served in a mixed up expressions which are unappealing and unattractive to the young people particularly. If angels on the night of the birth of the Messiah had employed this type of language to communicate the Good News to the shepherds, they would have no interest in going to the cave, even less taking gifts.

I recently read a line in an article by Fr. Raymond DeSouza, a priest from Kingston, that I think was fitting to close with because the main themes of this weekend are the role of the person and the role of freedom. His comment was referring to church but it also applies to Cursillo. He said that the church "recognizes that changing social and political realities (of our time) cannot be confirmed within rigid structures, what the church does is constantly to reaffirm the transcendent dignity of the human person, (Fr. Syd Miffen's talk) and constantly to defend human rights and freedom - a freedom which attains its fullest development only in openness and acceptance of truth."

We have talked this weekend about getting out of the sanctuary and into the world. I am saying let us leave the catacombs where we are enclosed in a structure and answer the words of our the late Pope John Paul II when he called us to; "Be not afraid... and "open wide the doors to Christ."

De Colores