

Christianity in Action: A Rollo By Any Other Name...

Condensed Outline:

- What is the Christianity in Action rollo?
- The Canadian journey to 'return to the sources'
- What's in a name?
- Short history of the English versions of the rollo
- Understanding the meaning of the title
- What is Christendom in the context of Cursillo?
- How is Christianity in Action linked to the Study of Environments rollo?
- Understanding the purpose of the message
- An overview of the outline
- Concluding thoughts and reflections

I'd like to start off with a short reading from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 6, verses 47-49:

I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house."

What does this reading have to do with today's topic of Christianity in Action? Quite simply, everything! The Christianity in Action rollo is the key to understanding the entire method of the Cursillo movement. In order for us to have a strong movement, it must be built on the solid foundation of the Group Reunion and the Ultreya. Properly done, the Christianity in Action rollo will lay the groundwork for that foundation upon which the entire framework of the Cursillo movement rests. If the foundation is built on the solid rock of concrete ideas that the candidates can understand and claim as their own, we will have a strong movement. However, if the foundation is built only on the sand of theoretical concepts, the candidates will find little to hold onto and their weekend experience will become 'just a pleasant memory' and we will have done little to advance the Kingdom of God.

What is the Christianity in Action rollo? You may know it better as Christian Community or simply Community. It's the second lay rollo on the third day of the Cursillo weekend and is given right after the Christian Life rollo. The message of this rollo as currently experienced in our local movements speaks to the necessity of becoming part of a Christian community, part of a group, and for the group to become the leaven in the environment. But, do we really come away from it with the understanding that we must become part of a small, intimate group of friends who will help us on our Christian journey; and who will help us to persevere in our fourth day as we seek to live out the Gospel message and bring that message to others? Do the candidates on our weekends hear that message? Unfortunately, for many of us, the answer will be a resounding 'no'.

For close to 10 years now our National Secretariat here in Canada has been on a journey to recapture the original intent of the founder of our movement, Eduardo Bonnín. To this end they invited Eduardo to come and tour the country and speak to the various local movements. There have been numerous visits to Mallorca to meet with Eduardo and other members of the Mallorcan movement and some people from Mallorca have come and spoken to us at a few of our National conferences. Canada has also participated in both the 1st and 2nd Conversations of Cala Figuera which were an international forum hosted by the Mallorcan Cursillo movement to discuss the foundational principles of the Cursillos in Christianity. All the topics presented at the 1st Conversations have also been presented at our National Conferences and, hopefully, the message contained in them has been brought back to the local movements for further discussion and study.

The next logical step in this journey has been to take a look at the outlines of the weekend talks and compare them with what they currently use in Mallorca. As we have found out, they are very different than what we use here in Canada. Last year we looked at three of the four Lay rollos that are used in Mallorca and some of the other Spanish-speaking Cursillo movements on that final day of the Cursillo weekend. This year we are taking a closer look at the fourth one, which they call 'Cristiandad en Acción' and in our movement is currently called Christian Community.

During the introductory rollo on a Cursillo weekend, we ask the candidates to put aside any preconceived ideas they have in regards to what Cursillo is...today I am asking you to do the same. *Forget everything thing you know, or think you know, about the Christian Community rollo and listen for the next half hour with open hearts and minds.*

Over the years this particular rollo has had different names in English. At last year's conference there was much discussion around the topic of **what's in a name** in regards to the titles of some of the rollos. As Sylvia mentioned earlier, as long as the person giving the rollo understands the message that is to be conveyed, the name of the rollo doesn't really matter. However, experience has shown us that far too many people have misunderstood the original purpose and message of the rollo and we have ended up far away from what was originally intended.

Let's take a quick look at the history of this rollo in English. Ironically enough, it started off as Christianity in Action in the 1960's and was later renamed Christian Community in Action in 1971. However, the focus of that rollo was quite different to what we have become accustomed to and what we will be hearing at this conference. The original Christianity in Action rollo in English came to us from a 1964 translation of the Leaders Manual that was published by the Ciudad Real Cursillo Movement in Spain. In Ciudad Real, much of the written material was produced by Bishop Juan Hervas who had worked with the Mallorcan movement in the early years until he was transferred to Ciudad Real in 1955. At that point in time the Cursillo movement was viewed with great suspicion by the Spanish Church hierarchy. By accentuating the fidelity of the movement in its relationship to the Church, Bishop Hervas was able to convince the authorities that Cursillo was a legitimate Catholic movement. This came at a cost though, as the original message presented in several of the rollos was changed to be more palatable to the authorities of the day. The underlying theme of the Ciudad Real version of Christianity in Action is, that laypersons, under the direction of the priest and the official Church hierarchy, have an obligation to carry the message of Christ to the world. There is no real foreshadowing of the Group Reunion in this outline other than a vague reference to the ability to work as a team that is mentioned right near the end of the rollo. In that Leaders Manual in the preliminary notes on the objective of this rollo it says:

The most concrete objective of the 'rollo' is not to forestall each and every kind of deviation, but to prepare the cursillista and dispose him to work in the Apostolate as a member of a team or a group so that he may more easily understand the rollo on Total Security.

The soul of the cursillista is prepared for and turned favourably toward Catholic associations and above all toward the parish, the natural hearth of Christian life and the basic cell of "Christianity in Action".

The purpose seemed to be somewhat of a stirring call to action, to plant in the candidates the idea that once they left the weekend and returned to their environments, they needed to get to work and 'Christianize' those environments as members of the hierarchical Church.

The translation of the Leaders Manual into English came on the heels of the end of the Second Vatican council. Catholicism, and American society as a whole, were both on the brink of massive changes and a collective shift in mentality. Towards the end of the 1970s a working group was formed in the United States to look at the Cursillo weekend outlines. According to the book on the weekend talks, The Three Days, which many of us are still using, there were three things that acted as a catalyst for this initiative:

- a more thorough understanding of the documents of the Second Vatican Council
- a study of the "Fundamental Ideas of the Cursillo Movement" which had been published in 1974

- and a study of Pope Paul VI's "Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World" that came out a year later in 1975

The result of this work was the 1981 Leaders Manual, published by the American National Secretariat, in which all the rollos had been revised in accordance with the material contained in the Fundamental Ideas book. It was in this new Leaders Manual that the rollo was renamed Christian Community and later came to be known simply as 'Community'. This is the version of the outline that is in common use throughout most of Canada. The focus of the rollo shifted to become much more lay oriented, which paralleled the direction being taken by American Catholicism during that same time frame. In a nutshell, the focus and key messages of this version of the rollo can be found in the introductory section of the outline where it says:

- Our mission is to reorient our environments toward the goal of Christ, which is to be a Christian community.
- We cannot fulfill this mission alone – only through small Christian communities working together as part of the Body of Christ can we change our environments
- That is why we have this talk on the necessity and reality of Christian communities.

The entire rollo talks about community, community, and more community. Group Reunion and Ultreya are vaguely alluded to and the rollo should certainly evoke within the candidates a desire to belong to something larger in order to experience this community that is talked about at such great length. However, despite all the talk of community and the warm thoughts that often come when we think of community, this rollo speaks much more to the minds of the candidates rather than their hearts. Throughout the outline you will find references to 33 paragraphs of Papal encyclicals as well as 101 verses of Scripture. That's an awful lot of material to process! On a more humorous note, though, the final document referenced in the outline is a booklet by the American National Secretariat called 'Let's Keep it Simple'.

Although one of the stated purposes of this rollo is to introduce the idea of linking people together in Group Reunion and Ultreya to provide a backbone for Christian life, judging by the general overall lack of enthusiasm for persevering in the fourth day within our movement, the original purpose of the rollo is clouded at best, and in many cases seems to have been totally obscured.

In discussing the updates that were made to the Christianity in Action rollo as a result of the Fundamental Ideas book, our founder, Eduardo Bonnín had this to say:

The lay rollo that follows the "Study of Environments" has to be a clear and lived explanation of how a human environment becomes when it is penetrated by Christ and is structured by authentic laypersons. This rollo can be named Christianity or something similar, but it must contain this message. Wanting to alter this logic and to introduce at that point a "rollo" about Christian Community undoubtedly indicates that previously, the original and genuine purpose of the Cursillo movement, of promoting the candidates towards their own environment, has been neglected, and wants to link the candidates to ecclesiastic environments or structures instead.¹

Many of our movements across the country share a common problem...people attend our weekends, have a powerful experience, a good weekend away from home, and then by and large they move on and we rarely see them again. Certainly there are people who do get involved – and this Conference testifies to that fact – but most of the people who attend our weekends do not choose to get involved in Group Reunions, Ultreyas, or the School of Leaders. We have moved further and further away from Eduardo's vision of holding Cursillos in order to have persons to make group reunions. Is it perhaps because the original message has been lost with all the changes that have been made over the years?

What we are presenting to you here at this conference is the original rollo of Cristiandad en Acción that was developed by Eduardo Bonnín in the Mallorcan Cursillo movement over 50 years ago and is still

¹ Comments Regarding Changes to the Weekend Content; E Bonnín, F. Forteza, F. Suarez, in response to the changes proposed to the weekend by the update to the 'Fundamental Ideas' book.

being used there today. To our knowledge this version has never been presented in English in any official capacity. For us here in Canada, this message may be somewhat new, but it certainly is not foreign to our understanding of the method and mentality of the movement.

So, with that little trip down memory lane, we're back where we started from with **'what's in a name'?**

One of the keys to understanding the message of this rollo is understanding the meaning of the title, *Cristiandad en Acción*. The *en Acción* part is pretty straightforward, in English it means 'in action' just like it sounds; it's the *Cristiandad* part that has caused confusion. The word *Cristiandad* when translated into English is not actually Christianity, but Christendom. In the dictionary Christianity is commonly defined as the Christian religion, a set of beliefs whereas Christendom is a rather archaic term in English that refers to the whole Christian people. ***But is that really what we're talking about here? What do we actually mean by the term Christendom?***

Last year at the 2nd Conversations of Cala Figuera in Mallorca, Ramon Armengol Rodo defined Christendom like this:

"When the persons who have understood the Cursillo and the value of friendship have actualized the three encounters that have been initiated and understand how they are related to each other in order to share and coordinate their Christian life, they have generated a new environment that is "Christendom".

Simply put, when we talk about *Christendom* in the Cursillo movement, we are referring to people who journey together in Group Reunion and Ultreya, not just random groups or communities of Christians working together in order to evangelize their environments, but people who develop close friendships with each other for mutual support in their efforts to live the Gospel message.

Christendom or Christianity in Action is defined as a small group of Grace-filled Christians who journey together in a climate that makes it possible for each one to live and spread the Gospel in the world. This simple phrase sums up the complete message of the Christianity in Action rollo as lived in the Mallorcan Cursillo Movement. The outline for the entire rollo stems from that simple statement and the consequences of living out that message.

A simple statement, but ***what does it really mean for us as Canadian Cursillistas in the 21st Century and how does it fit into the plan of the weekend?*** By the time we reach this point in the weekend, the rollos are becoming more practical and more focused on the Cursillo method. In the rollo on the Study of Environments, the candidates are introduced to the theory of the environment. The meaning of that rollo is very deep and we only scratch the surface of it on the Cursillo weekend. The Christianity in Action rollo takes the concepts presented in the Study of Environments and brings them down to a practical level, to a *where the rubber meets the road* type of a level.

Just as the Acts of the Apostles describes how the early Christians lived the message presented in the Gospels, so too Christianity in Action shows us how to be real Christians in the real world, which is how we penetrate our environments.

In Cursillo, the primary starting point for all our evangelization efforts must be with ourselves; we ourselves must become thoroughly convinced of God's love for us before we can reach out and share that love with others. Before I go any further I feel I should clarify what we mean by evangelization in Cursillo.

In Evangelizing Through Conversion, Eduardo says, *"When we speak of evangelization in the context of the Cursillo, we do not mean, or mostly mean it in the sense of simply passing on or spreading the Good News of the Gospel, but rather to succeed in making the person "BECOME" the "GOOD NEWS", that joyful Good News that Christ is alive in and amongst His people today, just as he was 2000 years ago."*

We must start with ourselves and become the Good News to those we encounter in our daily lives. It is by becoming a living witness of the Gospel message that we are truly effective evangelizers in our

respective environments. We would do well to here remember a couple of sayings: *You are the only Gospel some people may see.* And, *Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words.*

In the ancient world it was often said that 'all roads lead to Rome'; well, in the Cursillo movement it can be just as truthfully said that all our evangelical efforts in each phase of our movement spring forth from a vibrant and living Christianity in Action.

In the Study of Environments rollo that was presented at last year's conference, we were introduced to the concept of the 3 fronts that need to be studied and understood: ourselves, our friends and acquaintances, and the others in our environments, those who are far away from us. These fronts directly correspond to the 3 phases of our movement; the Pre-Cursillo, the Cursillo weekend, and the Post-Cursillo

In the Pre-Cursillo we are primarily dealing with persons in our environments that are not close to us; the people we don't really know; studying them, understanding them, and getting to know them; recognizing those persons who are leaders in their environments and reaching out to them. On the Cursillo weekend we make friends and acquaintances. These people are closer to us than the people in the Pre-Cursillo, but are not yet a part of *us*, either personally or the movement as a whole. For a Cursillista the Post-Cursillo is where we find those who accompany us on our journey as, together, we seek to live out the Gospel message. The Cursillo weekend is a catalyst that brings people from the Pre-Cursillo phase into the Post-Cursillo, into a Christianity in Action.

It is in a Christianity in Action, that is, in our Group Reunion and the Ultreya, that we live our Fourth Day, the rest of our lives. In our Group Reunion we journey together with a few other people, sharing our lives and our experiences with each other. Each of us working in our own environments, but sharing with each other our successes and triumphs as well as our struggles and frustrations. We all have different experiences, but share a common bond with each other. A good example of this is my own Group Reunion.

There are four of us in my group reunion. Collectively we belong to 2 different parishes; 3 of us are married and 1 is single; collectively we have 8 children ranging in age from 2 years up to 23 years of age. Some of us work outside of the home and others don't. We're all involved in different ministries and activities within our parishes – and some of these are in common with others in the group but most of them aren't. Our ages span a gap of about 15 years, and so too does our length of involvement with Cursillo. Despite all these differences, we are united by our common love of the Lord and the sharing of our Christian journeys with each other. We come together every Monday evening to encourage each other in this common journey, this pilgrimage of life.

In the Ultreya, the reunion of the Group Reunions, we also journey together with others – a lot of 'others'. The relationships we have with others at Ultreya aren't usually as close as the ones we have with the persons in our own Group Reunion, but they, too, strengthen and encourage us in our daily walk. The relationships we have at Ultreya also serve to broaden our vision and open our eyes to new possibilities. For those who are not yet in Group Reunion, the Ultreya provides them with an opportunity to meet with others to share their faith and, ideally it will provide them with an opportunity to find some people with whom they can form a new Group Reunion.

Living as a Christian in today's world is a definite challenge. It becomes even more of a challenge when we work to bring the Gospel to those in our environments. It's easy to become discouraged when the world seems to be against you and things are not working out the way you planned. In order to be effective apostles for the Lord, we need to support and encourage each other along the way as we journey together in our Group Reunion and the Ultreya; sharing love and friendship with each other on a continual and regular basis.

The thrust of the Christianity in Action rollo is about living the Gospel; it's not about building community. It is about living the words of Jesus when He said, 'Love one another as I have loved you'. When we live that message and share it with each other as we journey together, we will have a Christian community.

However, in presenting the message of the Christianity in Action rollo we must be very clear that a Christian community is the fruit of living the message, not the aim. Jesus and his disciples were a community as a result of being a Christianity in Action. What better example can we draw on than that?

The outline for the rollo is very simple, it starts off with an in depth, phrase by phrase look at the definition given earlier, *that is* – Christianity in Action is a small group of Grace-filled Christians who journey together in a climate that makes it possible for each one to live and spread the Gospel in the world.

Let's take a quick look at how this is broken down into bite-sized pieces:

The outline starts off by describing a 'small group of Christians' as persons who know each other, 'live together' in the sense that they journey together, admire each other and most importantly, are friends. The group exists in Grace, that wonderful gift from God, and they maintain this Grace through perseverance and looking out for each other. The persons in the group journey together to sustain and encourage each other, to be more effective in their apostolic efforts, and to be faithful to the Lord's command to 'love one another as I have loved you'.

The group journeys together in a climate that is the fruit of living out the Gospel – the differences between people disappear, such as I described earlier in my own group; miracles happen as each one lives that abundant life that Christ promised, and our lives become a reflection of the Father's love for us. This climate also helps each person within the group to live and spread the Gospel. The life of each member of the group becomes a witness that attracts others to the truth of the Gospel; this witness also gives each member the strength needed for the task of living out that message in their own day to day lives. It gives them courage in the face of adversity and hinders the pride of success. And last, but certainly not least, the group is the source of palanca for each persons efforts in their apostolate.

Once the definition is fully explored the next section is called 'How it proceeds'. In this section we reinforce the earlier message of working in your existing environments. It is also in this section that the idea of 'friendship groups' is introduced. The next section is entitled 'What it achieves' and brings out the truth that in our friendship groups, in a Christianity in Action, with the help and encouragement of our friends, through the Grace of God, the conversion of people and the Christianization of our environments will be accomplished.

The rollo finishes off with the conclusions that these things happen within a Christianity in Action because the message is truthful, and most importantly, because we who testify to it are living it. The result of living out this message is that it will bring happiness to people, the world will become Christian, and the redemption that Christ has purchased for us will be wholly effective.

This rollo is most effective when it's presented as a testimony of the life of the person presenting it. The rollo should be vibrant, lively and penetrating. It should also show the candidates that it is possible to live as a Christian in today's world, bringing victory, hope, and the salvation of the Lord to the rest of the world – one heart at a time.

The purpose of the Cursillo weekend is for the candidates to experience the triple encounter of self, Christ and others. It is both a method and a process of conversion. As we heard in the Study of Environments rollo, in order to penetrate others and bring them closer to Christ, we must first start with their hearts. The Christianity in Action rollo definitely speaks to the heart of the candidates, whereas the Christian Community rollo, with its multitude of explanations regarding the various types of community, speaks more to their minds than anything else. The Christianity in Action rollo as presented at this conference relies heavily on the personal witness of the life of the rollista to testify to the effectiveness of the method. The Christian Community rollo also makes use of that method, but seems to rely more on information overload to drive the message home, unfortunately often obscuring the message itself.

So, where does that leave us? If we understand that the original purpose of the Christianity in Action rollo, as developed by Eduardo and the Mallorcan Cursillo movement, was to lay a firm foundation for the message in the Total Security rollo, where Group Reunion and Ultreya are fully explained to the

candidates, then there is only one conclusion – to bring this message home to our local movements and study what it means to be a Christianity in Action. Each local movement needs to take a serious look at the fruit of their labours on the Cursillo weekends and ask themselves:

- Do we, as leaders within the movement, understand the importance of this rollo in relation to the fourth day?
- Do we ourselves truly understand that the purpose of this rollo is meant to lay the groundwork for Total Security in the Group Reunion and Ultreya?
- Do we feel that the candidates on our weekend come away with the understanding of the necessity of Group Reunion and Ultreya in the perseverance of their fourth day?
- If not, why don't they? Is it perhaps because the message has become too complicated?
- Is there a better and more simple way to get that message across?
- Are we willing to step out of our comfort zones and try something different?

Eduardo has always said that the Cursillos in Christianity are an effort to make Christianity simple². In order to do that, the rollos on the weekend also need to be simple. The Christianity in Action rollo as presented here at this Conference, and indeed the entire set of rollos used in the Mallorcan Cursillo movement, that are now being offered to you in English, are incredibly clear in their simplicity. They are like a breath of fresh air. We may do well to step back, reflect, and re-evaluate the methods we currently use to proclaim the message we give on our Cursillo weekends. Maybe there is a better way than what we have been using for so many years.

Despite the challenges we are facing as a movement in the perseverance of the fourth day, we do have a very vibrant movement here in Canada; a movement that has borne, and continues to bear much good fruit in the vineyards of the Lord. But, perhaps the harvest can be increased! Those who come away from our weekends with a sure knowledge of the importance of persevering in their fourth day by way of group reunion and Ultreya will become active members of a Christianity in Action. Our job, then, as leaders within the Canadian Cursillo movement, is to ensure that we lay a firm foundation during the Cursillo weekend in order to build a solid framework to support us in our fourth day.

In conclusion, I'd like to leave you with these words of encouragement from St. Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians:

But we have to give thanks for you at all times, dear brothers and sisters in the Lord. For God chose you from the beginning to be saved through true faith and to be made holy by the Spirit. To this end he called you through the Gospel we preach, for he willed you to share the glory of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Because of that, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold to the traditions that we taught you by word or by letter. May Christ Jesus our Lord who has loved us, may God our Father, who in his mercy gives us everlasting comfort and true hope, strengthen you. May he encourage your hearts and make you steadfast in every good work and word.

De Colores!

Jennifer Segers

² Presentation to the GET Encounter by E. Bonnín in 1997