

**CURSILLOS  
IN  
CHRISTIANITY**

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**MANIFESTO**

**Eduardo Bonnin  
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*The Manifesto is another of those translated documents that has been around for years but which has been largely overlooked, due to a great extent, to the awkward syntax of the translation which left much of its meaning obscure and the text itself, difficult to read.*

*On our recent journey to Mallorca we questioned the importance of the document and were told by the Mallorca leaders that it is one of the most important documents available.*

*Written in 1981 by Eduardo Bonnin and Francisco Forteza, its purpose was to try to clarify the origins of the Cursillo Movement, and to explain some of the early thinking. It gives a clear explanation of the content of the Study of the Environment Rollo, which, according to Eduardo Bonnin, contains the essence of the method and mentality of the Cursillo Movement.*

*The text is available in booklet form from the Montreal Resource Centre.*

## **THE CURSILLO, A REALITY NOT YET REALIZED**

### **INTRODUCTION**

(Prepared and subscribed by the Diocesan Secretariat of Cursillos in Mallorca)

As we introduce this book, "The Cursillo, a Reality not yet Accomplished", by the Diocesan Secretariat of Cursillos of Mallorca, we are glad to be obliged to remember that we are direct heirs of the first Secretariat that was appointed in the world, by the then Bishop of Mallorca, Monsignor Hervás, who had as his Episcopal Delegate, Dr. Pedro Rebassa, Father Juan Capo, as Spiritual Director, Pedro Sala, as President, Gabriel Estelrich, the Men's Director, and Eduardo Bonnin, as Director of Youth.

That Secretariat was an essential step in the History of the Cursillos. It meant the separation of the Movement from Catholic Action, which first served as the ferment and later as a cover for the founders of the Cursillo. It also meant, through their autonomy and their relationship with the Hierarchy, that the Church recognized and accepted the Movement in its integrity and singularity. It was a new expression of the support that Monsignor Hervás gave to the active Lay Groups, since his arrival on the Island, and that was later expressed in the new writings of Bonnin and Forteza. The pastoral presence and the human and doctrinal support of Dr. Hervás, were as decisive in the beginning as later they would be in his documents, especially his book "The Cursillos, an instrument of Christian renewal".

The Church's visible support during the first steps of the Cursillo was already translated by 1949, into the integration of the island's Diocesan Council of Young Catholic Action (from where the Lay Group of Founders of the Cursillos operated), with Father Juan Capo, first as Vice-Consiliario and later as Consiliario, without whose personal and doctrinal contribution it is not possible to conceive what the Cursillos would have ended up being.

Although the text that follows contains historical references, it is not a history of the Cursillos. We do not wish to disappoint those of you who were looking for this, but it is, simply, the history of a restlessness; and this restlessness has been and it will continue being, an essential part of the truth and the history of the Cursillos.

We find the concern that is aroused by "The Cursillos, A Reality not yet Accomplished" is valid and worth reflecting on. It is a passionate text that always opts for the person and for the Gospel, before the manipulation or reduction to inert structures.

Neither is this document a theoretical and aseptic study. We are sure that if this were their purpose, its authors would have coloured and embellished some of their statements. It is a text that has life, which without a doubt will sow the restlessness and the hope that it is intended to create. We could say that it isn't a medical treatment, but a medication.

For our part, as the Secretariat, we will continue working so that the reality of the Cursillos is accomplished, in line with our predecessors, impelling all the valid initiatives, and among them this "Manifesto" that we believe lucid and timely, and above all, knowing that it reflects the long experience of its authors in this field, with whom we have shared so many hours of joy and challenges.

For the Diocesan Secretariat  
of Cursillos of Mallorca,  
Antonio Bernat, Coordinator.

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## HISTORY AND LEGEND

As the facts, events, and situations take place, we start painting the canvas of History. When what happens is something relevant, out of the ordinary, or unusual, it usually polarizes the attention of public opinion, which automatically formulates values and judgments according to pluralistic points of view and even becomes contradictory.

Around events or the reality that escapes its natural path, points of view and opinions are inevitably formed that will end in a vast spectrum of interpretations.

The fact is, that it is really true and significant, and profoundly effective, to record history objectively is extremely complicated, since it is normal that fantasies, prejudices, stories and histories proliferate, to such an extent that they end up eclipsing, or blocking and complicating the clear and transparent vision of the true history tremendously.

Few times is this as true as when we try to relate the authentic history of the Cursillo Movement.

The truth that history is always written by the winners is perhaps as old as history itself, but it gets even more complicated, when the principle that is applied is the one that says that each one speaks about the fair according to how he experienced it.

Then, it would not seem strange that different stories exist in diverse chronicles from chroniclers of the same fair. And that they all, despite their disparate views, emphasize certain things which allow them to gain points in the eyes of others.

To this end they centre the history in those events in which they played a part, even though they are not very important events; and even more they relate the basic facts in which they participated as a group or as critics, insinuating a major role that never existed.

Pure objectivity is almost impossible, because each one's perspective is different.

Those who planned the fair, those who put it on, those who made a good business from it, those who were almost ruined, those who suffered some accident, those who promenaded in it, and those who found a girlfriend in it, have a different vision and a very different perspective by which they judge it.

From those who have used the Cursillo fair by taking a nice juicy slice of it, changing it to benefit their own occupations, or who intended to use the Cursillo to build up an existing organization, or to get a religious congregation solidly re-established, even though it may be long outmoded, to those who have received numerous recruits by having planned, assembled, or employed it, there are a whole range of attitudes, opinions, and approaches; there are actually so many that another new fair could be organized with them, especially a vanity fair for those who are conceited, who need to be in the forefront, and those who are particularly selfish, always looking out for number one (and always trying to take advantage of things and events for their own benefit).

Although it can seem anecdotal, it is curious how important that in the verbal transmission and the judgment of the history of Cursillo, a lot of people have listened and received in good faith, what has been repeated as fact.

Today everybody travels and there are many and varied events organized: Seminars, intensive Cursillos, summer Cursillos, national Cursillos, where people from many different places attend etc., It happens repeatedly that some Spanish people (from the island [Mallorca] or the mainland) attend some of them, especially if it is something religious, and a compulsory question seems to be: "You are from Mallorca? or, you are Spanish, what is this Cursillo? Some find it embarrassing to say that they don't know so they make something up. If such an individual lived the experience of a Cursillo in his youth, or the experience of a so called Cursillo, but he didn't know how or didn't want to live it then, or doesn't maintain the basic values of the method now, it is very natural that he says that the Cursillo was not and is not important, and will even express astonishment that so small a thing has been able to spread so far.

When the Cursillos were more fashionable, in Mallorca, and in a great part of Spain, some time before the disconcerting and surprising pastoral letter of the [new bishop] Dr. Enciso<sup>1</sup>, everybody said that they had attended the first one: This statement ended up being so abused that, had it been true, Cala Figuera, San Honorato nor the Monastery El Escorial in Madrid would have been large enough to house them all.

It is unquestionable that the Cursillos were formed and born in Mallorca in the nineteen forties, and they were not a work of chance or of improvisation. They were born with their essence and purpose already present.

However, in this text, we don't seek to make an itemized history of the Cursillo; nor is it to apologize or vindicate the story; and least of all is it intended to be offensive. We are attempting to emphasize the intention with which the Cursillos were born, and to compare the later evolution and their reality today, with that original and basic intention, because we are concerned about the distance that we now observe between them.

All that has life should grow and progress, and in order to make it effective it demands a creative and permanent critique. Whatever is alive, grows and its development affirms its essential parameters, what is its own and is intentional, or it separates them and loses its identity.

## **THE PRINCIPLE OF THE PRINCIPLE**

The beginning or birth of the Cursillo Movement is to be found in the reaction that the group of young men had by becoming familiar with the environment and who tried to study it thoroughly, in those years of the nineteen forties.

The restlessness that it produced in us was captured in the structure and development of the Rollo "Study of the Environment" which was the first Rollo of all and the one that promoted and was the basis of the thinking and structure of all the other Rollos.

The essential elements of this Study are:

### **1) the identification between the environment and interpersonal relationships**

It is not the structured elements (which are certainly important) but rather it is the communication between people that determines the being, state and the dynamics of the environments.

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<sup>1</sup> This was a Pastoral from bishop Enciso, who replaced Bp. Juan Hervas in Mallorca. His Pastoral was devastating to the young Movement. It said: all activity in the Movement is ordered suspended until after serious reflection, the Bishop himself establishes new rules and procedures.

2) that these interpersonal relationships can be defined in **three clearly defined levels** that would be identified in the words of modern social psychology:

a level of **identity** (relationship) between us : that is centred, first in the relationship each one has with himself, and its development among others with similar nature, and who can really express themselves in the first person plural by their mutual identification (we think, we say, we commit ourselves etc.)

a level of the condition of **others** (that of the relationships with those who accompany us in life) (our friends -) which expresses proximity without actual mutual identification.

The third level is that of the **surroundings**, (the others or the environment in general) in which communication is sporadic, or which only takes place collectively.

3) that the appropriate relationship which takes place at each level, is and should be diverse, not so much as a " tactical means, but more to respectfully gauge each person's situation with relationship to oneself. All the effectiveness in the leavening of the environment is based on the depth of relationship each one has with himself or herself and also, in the relationship between us". But to try to have the same level of relationship with those who merely accompany us in life, as we do with those who we regard as part of us , or how we act and react in the impersonal environment, is the cause of a lack of communication between those who possess the joy of faith, and those who have not yet been fortunate enough to discover the Gospel.

4) The ignorance that we usually have of the others , prompted us to include in the Rollo a description of attitudes, a typology that undoubtedly broke with the categories we used that were, or were based on criteria or circumstances that did not pertain to the person.

Without wanting to structure this typology that was included in the Study of the Environment as sacred, what in fact emerged from the definition of the different types was the negative idea of "good or bad", "believers or non believers", "practicing or non practicing", "educated or ignorant , rich or poor", instead of a plan whose goal was to simply know them better, in order to come closer to the person, - each person - without exclusions or preconceived judgment.

We identified in this way;

those who believe in God, who love God and want to be good;  
those who believe in God, love God, and want to feel good;  
those who believe in God, but that is all;  
those who don't believe because they ignore God;  
and those who don't believe because they reject God.

This was not done with the intention of labelling attitudes but rather as a means of not labelling and pre-judging people s intentions and attitudes without first knowing them.

Notice how the three different approaches that we proposed for each level of communication logically bring us to the three basic elements of the Cursillo method. What is proposed for "the others" or "**the environment in general**" leads to what we call the **Pre-Cursillo**, what is anticipated for "those who accompany us in life" (our friends, neighbours, relatives) is nothing more than what the **Cursillo** explains; and what is recommended on the front of "ourselves" is the key to the **Post-Cursillo**.

It is worth remembering that on the second level (Cursillo) we indicated that the logical way is in the way we approach the person, and to initiate the relationship through "the heart", to continue through the intelligence "the head", (which was described in the first writings) and only leaving the way to motivate the will, so that within his own integrity, he can reconcile himself with the reality and with God. Compare this plan, for example with the sequential development of the Lay Rollos of the Cursillo:

	Man can be more and be better	- IDEAL
	He can be it from where he is	- LAY PERSON IN THE CHURCH
	He discovers his heart spontaneously by	- PIETY
If	He uses his intelligence with conviction	- STUDY
	Puts his will in motion with decision	- ACTION
	And his person as a whole	- LEADERS
And	If he accepts that his reality is made up of persons	- STUDY OF THE ENVIRONMENT
	Whom he can help	- CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION
	As long as it is done in a personal way	- CURSILLISTA AFTER THE CURSILLO
	In friendship	- TOTAL SECURITY/GROUP REUNION/ULTREYA

We could make other points demonstrating how that first Rollo, (Study of the Environment) foreshadows both the Precursillo and the Postcursillo.

What is essential, however, is to capture that this germinal idea, motivated to draw us closer to people without manipulating them, is not to direct these people towards certain acts, nor to get them to serve in a predetermined apostolate, worldly or intra-ecclesial. We didn't look for people so that they could assume new commitments but rather that they could find the way to give meaning to the commitments they already have, provided that they have not been previously manipulated. That commitment which is born from the life being lived, and particularly from sharing life together, we wished, and still wish, to transform it into a commitment of friendship.

**Nothing else, but nothing less.**

The serious study and the immediate and concrete practice of all this, led us to the knowledge and conviction that the truth of that which is specifically Christian, was not incarnated in the lives of those who were considered Christian: That which is essentially evangelical, was not a reality in what was lived, because it was not grasped and made a part of the inner life, but rather it was only visible, and then with some difficulty, in some superficial implications, oriented,

without a doubt, more towards a dull performance without nerve rather than to the luminosity and dynamic meaning of the person's life.

This vision, that was making many things clear, included not a small risk of feeling simply like spectators, who see certain events clearly, instead of realizing and feeling that we too were involved in them, in the same world, and committed to the same adventure.

The awareness of the serious risk that the Christian always confronts when he does not grasp the deep meaning of the parable of the good and bad seed, often turns him into a judge of the lives and behaviour of others, a judgment which without doubt belongs only to the Lord.

Assigning labels of good or bad, does nothing more than to deepen the imaginary distance with which we unnecessarily try to separate one from the other, depriving us of the good, mutual, and reciprocal benefit that a sincere and human relationship, offers to all.

From the very beginning of the Cursillo Movement, a warm approach was attempted toward those who didn't think or behave how we had been taught to behave as people of the Church, and it astonished us to verify, with overwhelming successive evidence that the Good News was grasped and understood better, and was better received in those places far from what we normally call Christian. And that it was going beyond the limits of the organized apostolate. It was necessary to move beyond being preoccupied with the structures, to concerning ourselves with the person, from the temptation of creating a professionalized leadership, to an attitude of journeying together.

This made us think, reflect, and continue to deepen ourselves in the real and unheard of power: that of the Lord's affirmation, experienced in the practical reality that we lived.

We had the words of the Lord: The last ones will be the first, I have not come to look for the just, but for sinners, and those who came last, were paid an equal amount, etc.

## **FIRST REALITIES**

These evangelical realities, when changed into the flesh and bones of everyday events, began to multiply within us, among us and beside us, the visible and palpable fruits in real men in whom the realization and the planning had been motivated, guided and maintained by the encounter with Christ and with the brothers. The encounter which takes place in the Cursillo, and which is continued and extended in the climate of the Group Reunion, this confirmed that our intuition, which was the fruit of our study, had the makings of a method.

As the events took place, and when we compared them with the Gospel, they became the light that illuminated and clarified the following steps for us.

The affirmation as well as the contradictions, that we encountered, enabled us to clarify the concepts. It was always suggested that we purify the intentions, by speaking to God about man, before speaking to men about God.

Starting from there, everything was done in a normal, human, and natural way.

Once again we were affirmed in the fact that the Gospel gives courage, momentum and direction, but it doesn't force, neither does it allow events to upset you, but rather it leads to the finish, within the utmost familiarity and simplicity. And that's the way it was.

After a lot of thinking, meditating, and research, regarding some issues that were a surprise to us and had us up in the air in our personal contact with the individuals involved, we saw that what was valid and truly surprising, was all the good that the evangelical seed, which was being fruitful, was achieving within the individuals who had accepted the challenge of becoming a person. Centering lives, encouraging hopes, awakening wills, raising initiative, reducing selfishness, and living life with more desire, with more spirit, with more sense, and more fulfillment.

All this gave us a more and exact concept of how real, fascinating, and unstoppable the process of fermentation of what is Christian, is in men, and in society, when with honesty, simplicity, and good intention, we begin to realize it means only one thing: to play clean with the things of God while taking the world of men seriously.

If we had to make an inventory of the obstacles we met with on the journey, which face us in life and what is more important, in the lives of many people, we could divide them in two big groups:

Those obstacles that came from our elder brothers, behaving more than once more like elders than brothers: and those that were caused by the prodigal sons who had just arrived with their sometimes outspoken and crazy apostolic vitality.

For the former, despite their undoubted good will, the Cursillo was always just a new event in life, more or less helpful to its daily monotony.

For the latter, it was always something new that allowed them to see life as a continuous and fascinating event.

The former had no doubt regarding the truthfulness of the Gospel, but it seemed unusual to them to be overwhelmed by the evidence of its powerful effectiveness, when the Gospel message was practiced with faith, in the daily market place of life. And this by people who, far from their routine way of understanding and practicing it, lived it as they strove to proclaim it with their lives with the same enthusiasm as when they first heard it.

Misunderstanding and opposition was provoked, and the interesting thing about it was, that what provoked them was the holy zeal each one deployed to defend what they believed to be true.

From the beginning what we were developing to serve the person without removing him from his natural surroundings, was used by the elder brothers, without doubt with the best of intentions, and put at the service of Catholic Action first, then the diocesan Pastoral plan later, etc. which although it does not seem to be a contradiction, is different.

The Cursillo is not opposed to Cursillistas being personally involved in activities at the diocesan and parochial level, etc. and there have been and will continue being many Cursillistas who are included in the ranks of leaders of a multitude of religious and civic associations; what we do think, is that when we do this we miss the target, since the Cursillo, without a doubt, points and is guided toward a much more efficient and effective goal, for the convincing reason that it has the quickest and biggest impact.

Since the beginning, when the Movement took the founders from surprise to surprise, they made the time to explain to the astonished clergy the topics, on which the experience and doctrine on which the Cursillo was based. The How and the Why was born in 1955 for this reason, and

published in Proa and then in 1971 and 1973, in the first and second editions, by the National Secretariat of Spain..

## TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE PURPOSE

Those who maintained our freedom of personal decision at a time when organized apostolic action was almost the only possibility, can easily maintain it now, when theologians and Vatican II in its decree on the Laity, have re-established that freedom, and the Lay Groups within the Church have multiplied, while the limits have been broadened allowing for the recognition that there are different ways of being a Christian in the world.

To tell the truth, it is an unquestionable fact that throughout the history of the Cursillo Movement, there has always existed two ways to understand it and consequently, also, two ways to channel it and to guide it toward its purpose.

Some believe that it is only to give vitality to the already existing structures and organizations, leaving the original in place, but with a better spirit; and others who believe that if the Movement is given the space to live its basic and minimum structure of Group Reunion, Ultreya, and School, with the same dynamism, it can bring the Good news of the Gospel to all the hidden places of human existence, personal, family, and social.

The limitless and sometimes jealous zeal of each of the two perspectives has been revealed in each situation and circumstance. Perhaps it is well stated in the words of a man who came from a hostile and stubborn environment. He had a very low opinion of the criteria and practice of our Religion. On a certain occasion he told his bishop, at the end of a Cursillo: Excellency, you do not know and cannot know what I feel now after finding Christ. Excellency, you have always had it. Not I. That is why I can only show you in a small way what is happening to me. What can I say? It is like a person born blind who could see, all of a sudden, and for the first time, a starlit night, the smile of his son, and his mother's face .

It was due to the explosive Grace of the last day of the Cursillo, when life becomes a song and the song becomes life for all.

Those who have been living the Good News of the Gospel through tradition, inertia, or routine, as if they did not believe that it is good, or new and capable of restoring everything, have difficulty understanding, putting it in context, and especially receiving the overwhelming and not always focused enthusiasm, of the newly converted.

To the jealous guardians of the law, it is difficult to understand that things are simple for the person centred and guided by Christ.

The Cursillos were born, propelled by the nonconformity of the young ones that was sometimes outstanding and thoughtful, and at other times, it overflowed and was overwhelming.

What was sought then, and what we seek still, is to help people to understand that the Gospel, besides being true, is possible in the circumstances of ordinary life; and not only possible, but effective. And that its truth, its possibility, and its effectiveness can be proved, that it is real and immediate, as soon as the person realizes that it is all about starting with what a person already has within himself.

In a word, when the knowledge and conviction of the truth that the Gospel contains becomes real, it brings a sense of security, it proclaims, expresses, broadens and sharpens the unquestionable need for living that experience in life.

### "IT ISN'T THAT, NOR IS IT THAT"

Having been in the Cursillo Movement since the beginning, we understand that faced with the super expansion and proliferation of growth that has happened, not only deviations have occurred, but even a prostitution of the concrete and specific purpose of the Movement, deriving something from it, that even though it may end up being very good, in all honesty, they can never be called Cursillo, since they are not Cursillo, nor will they ever even come close, we are obliged to exclaim with the saying, 'it isn't that, and it isn't that'.

What is more, we should confirm that the Cursillo has hardly ever really been what it was intended to be; that the Cursillo in its fullness is new, for the same simple reason that in daily life, so is the Gospel, also like the dynamic of the 'Our Father' and the Beatitudes, neither of which have had their debut.

The specific purpose of the Movement is to help people to live what is fundamental for being Christian. To achieve the goal that a person's freedom meets the Spirit of God. That which will never be contained in programming will collide with all temptations to frame and to classify something which is so free-flowing and spontaneous as when a person encounters the Gospel of Christ.

The Cursillos seek to create a hunger for God, instead of offering a means to satisfy it. The Cursillo looks for people, instead of hunting for personalities.

It goes from the person to the structure, and not from the structure to the person.

It doesn't want to create new commitments for people but to create commitments among people whose motivation and goal is friendship, starting from there and reaching as far as is possible.

Without insisting, with a disinterested interest, on following some apostolic and specific plan, already dressed and prepared by others, but rather within a climate of friendship, conviction, decision and perseverance will mature.

We know that people today want to be able to ask questions more than to find answers to everything and to do it in an atmosphere of hope and with the possibility of finding the answers for themselves. A person feels more like a person when they ask questions and discover things than when they accept answers from others.

When making these statements, we don't seek to defend a methodical orthodoxy; the nucleus of the fatal deviation, and its danger, is in complicating the simplicity of the Cursillo so that everything which should be directed to the essential, is directed towards other things, which are without doubt, good, but not fundamental.

The important thing is not to distract by complicating the way, misleading them from their purpose. The difficult part is accompanying people and sharing with them the associative strength of friendship, the adventure of living with dedication, and constantly facing God and the brothers and sisters, which can never be replaced by aprioristic programming depriving the person of his own journey towards God.

What we really worry about is: the direction in which circumstances are leading, almost obsessively converting it. It is not a method for a method's sake, but affirming that the method is already straightforward and concisely at the service of what is fundamental to being Christian. But instead of that, its energy, its drive and its vigour is being used to increase the proliferation of the flora and the fauna of pious things which already exist in astronomical quantities in the Holy Church of God. And when you look to the proof of progress and adaptation as the reason to move away from the original and essential focus, the danger is even bigger.

The worst in this case is that the meaning of the Cursillo has been changed. The error is not of calculation, but of direction. And (since) even in this different direction the Cursillo continues to have an unquestionable effectiveness (and even more so, if what is sought is to create pious intra-ecclesial processions of obedient and willing people), it is very difficult for some person who has unconsciously caused it, to realize that they have done so.

Perhaps we will never know when the advance of Christianity in the world deteriorated, nor the quantity or quality of those we have turned off and out of reach of the message through overloading them unnecessarily - sometimes in the Cursillo itself, and at other times later on - by inflating statements of the faith with others that don't come from the Gospel, but rather from occasional and contingent theories, according to the changing times and circumstances.

In order to allow Christianity to germinate, grow, and come to fruition in the person, with spontaneity, dynamism and opportunity, their full freedom of decision and action should be preserved.

This is accomplished if the person lives in a climate of Gospel and friendship that reveals that what he/she experienced in the Cursillo is still true in the lives of the new friends who deeply regret it if they sometimes fail in being what they want to be, Christians, while many continue to maintain what Cursillo and their life should be.

Instead of being promoted, the capacity to decide for oneself, by oneself and from oneself, is almost always coerced and even threatened, for the sake of pre-concieved projects schemed about and concocted by those who introduced him/her to the truths of the Gospel and who had only his/her consent to attending the weekend without respecting his/her will regarding the intended project.

## **CONCLUSION**

In synthesis, the division of the Cursillo in its deeper truth affirms that the real encounter with oneself is what makes possible the encounter with others and with the Gospel.

Instead, those realities, those although they call themselves Cursillo, tend to be frequently preoccupied with sending people to take refuge in mysticism or to get swallowed up in activism. They give evidence that the basic encounter with their own being and the meaning of their life, never existed or has ceased to exist.

This reality responds to disconnectedness between the Cursillo itself, and the postcursillo, - in faith and in life -, as a consequence of the change in the direction of the purpose. This has taken place and has resulted in the current absence of many who wanted to, and who could have, contributed a lot, especially those of deeper personality and those with more complicated circumstances.

When somebody thinks that what we say now is the truth that has not been explained before, the mature reaction and therefore evangelical, would be an active return to the simplicity of the beginnings, though we will always be in need of the contribution of all.

The unity of the message and its full implementation has been, and continues to be possible.

Mallorca, 1981

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