

THE ORIGINS OF THE CURSILLO MOVEMENT

The Prison Story

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This story takes place in Palma, Majorca in 1949.

A group of young men of the Spanish Action Movement were attempting to launch what they believed would be a wonderful apostolic work to counter the un-Christian world they were living in.

They had worked long and hard, but all their efforts had been futile. Each day seemed worse than the last. They had become desperate, and were on the point of giving the whole idea up when one of the laymen received an unexpected call. It was the Chaplain of the local prison, asking for a couple of volunteers to come to the prison and help him with a difficult problem.

Two young men in the condemned cell would have nothing to do with him, and his only hope was to try and approach them through laymen.

The young man hastily called a friend and after prayer to overcome their fear of entering the prison, the two men went inside to join the Chaplain. He took them to the condemned cell where the prisoners sat playing cards with their guards, who, as prison rules laid down, must stay in the cell with the condemned men on the last night before execution.

Their cell was littered with pornographic magazines, and the walls plastered with pin-ups. The condemned men seemed bent only on swapping dirty stories and gambling the night away.

One of the two laymen, Eduardo Bonnin, told how they first asked the Governor's permission to take the place of the guards - and when this had been granted, they started talking to the two prisoners, gradually winning them around until eventually, Eduardo said to them, "We came here to ask a favor of you." At this the two men laughed loud and long. "A favor!? Don't you realize that later this morning we..." and he made a gesture of garroting the other.

"But this is something you can do" said Bonnin, "We only want you to recommend something to the Lord for us. You are the only people we have met who know when they will be going to meet the Lord, face-to-face. We want you to say something to Him. We feel it is so urgent. Neither the Pope, or Kings, nor rich or poor men, know when they will have to meet the Lord, yet you do. In the morning you know exactly when you will be appearing before the Throne of God. We have this wonderful apostolic project, from which we expect great fruits - but we have failed miserably, so far, to get it going. We want you to ask the Lord to help us." - and Bonnin proceeded to explain their apostolic hopes and anxieties.

As the night wore on they spoke of Christ, of His love and mercy. They spoke of how the Good Thief had "stolen heaven" and of forgiveness.

In the early hours of the morning, the Chaplain heard their confessions, and held a private mass for the two inmates, Bonnin and his friend, all receiving Eucharist.

When invited to have breakfast with the condemned men, Bonnin could not eat. He was too nervous.

A short while later they were led to the garroting post. One of them cried out for Eduardo Bonnin, and Eduardo told of how that man died, holding Eduardo's crucifix in one hand, and

clasping Eduardo's hand with the other, as he knelt beside him, praying for him. The executioners placed the hood over the man's head and affixed the chain that would break his neck with a sudden jerk.

One of those men wrote to his family that night, and this is a translation from the Spanish - preserving, as far as possible, the grammar and simplicity of the original.

Palma, Majorica

1:00 a.m. Jan. 28th 1949

Dearest Parents and Brothers, so close to my heart.

These lines I am writing, are the last you will receive from your son and brother. I am writing them, more with my heart than my pen. They are dictated by filial love, and in the hope you will keep them all the days of your life.

I am in the condemned cell, and only a few hours remain before I leave this life of misery and tears. But God has given me the great mercy of letting me put my soul in order, and to prepare myself for a happiness that has no end.

After my life of ill-luck, and having been a victim of my surroundings, God has granted me the extra-ordinary grace of enabling me to recognize my past faults, and of making my peace with him - for he has given me this opportunity to put a full-stop at the end of my sins with a sincere confession, which has opened, little by little, the Gates of Heaven.

It only remains for me to ask your pardon, for all the heartaches I gave you during my life, with my straying - and to recommend to my brothers, whom I love with all my heart, never to stray from the path of duty which you, my parents, taught us to follow with your good advice.

I never remembered you with such affection as at this moment, and I hope that these lines, written at the culminating moment of my life, to ask you pardon for all the displeasure I have given you during my life, and also to serve as advice for my brothers, which I hope they will keep before them all their lives - that they may serve God as He expects His most faithful servants to do.

The end of my career has arrived. Praise be to God, who gave me these moments to ransom my life, and to die as do those men who have faith. Only faith gives strength and energy to triumph over so great a difficulty as this.

If you want news of my last moments, write to our Chaplain, who is called Father Jose Marie Fabian Rubio. He will tell you about the last hours spent by me in this world. Be sure I am going to Heaven to pray for you, my dearest parents and brothers.

I await you in Heaven - there we will live happily for all eternity. Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in you.

Signed with my own hand,

My last thoughts on earth are with you. Adios! 'Till eternity,

Your Son and Brother who awaits you in heaven,

s/s

These two lads were executed on the morning of January 28, 1949. The Apostolic work which Eduardo Bonnin and his companions had in hand, and which they had been unsuccessful in launching, despite all their trials and efforts, was the 'Cursillo in Christianity'.

The first Cursillo, as we know it, took place in January of 1949. After the death of those two poor men the Cursillo movement took off to virtually cover the earth.

Surely, Jesus said to them, as He said to the thief who was crucified with Him, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise."

Eduardo Bonnin Aguilo

Born May 4, 1917, in Palma de Mallorca. Attended Padres Agustinos Hermanos de Las Salle School. After school I went into the family business of exporting fruits. I served nine years in the military.

I didn't belong to the Catholic Action but a friend of mine invited me to be a part of a Cursillo movement called Jefes de Pergrino - about the time the Spanish Civil was ending. This was just one step of many for me to admission to the Catholic Action.

In 1948, I was a part of a group from my diocese that gathered in the City of Santiago de Compostela to prepare for a celebration - "the pilgrimage." I was commissioned to go to this celebration as a representative of Mallorca. Afterwards, I was named President of the Young Men Catholic Action of our Diocese. That inspired me to consider that something concrete needed to be done to motivate the youth of Spain. Together with some friends, and after much praying, studying and thinking, the Cursillos in Christianity was born. Today the Cursillos are on all five continents. I have authored many books about the Cursillos. Among these I wrote "The How and the Way" with Reverend Father Don Miguel Fernandez.

The Bell

During a Via de Cristo Weekend the bell symbolizes the call of Jesus on a person's life. Our response to that call is at the foundation of the Cursillo and Via de Cristo movement. It is by sounding the bell that the Rector or Rectora calls the Team to prayer and to service.

The bell has been used through history as recognizable call to action. From an early age people have been taught to respond to its call. Church bells call God's people to prayer; the courthouse bell calls the citizenry to hear important announcements or attend public meetings; the dinner bell calls a family to join in the evening meal. Bells ring out joyfully to celebrate a marriage; they toll for the dead; they warn communities of peril and call soldiers to battle; the peal at the coronation of kings and ring forth at Eastertide around the world. On the Via de Cristo weekend the bell calls us together in the unity of Christ and signals us to respond to His call on our lives.

Bells come in many sizes and tones. Some are pure and melodious and others are ominous and resounding. On the weekend the Rector or Rectora warns Candidates that they may not always be glad to hear the bell sound. It can wake us up when we want to sleep, interrupt what we're doing, and call us to action we'd rather avoid. Sounds like Christ's call, doesn't it? How many times are we so busy doing our own thing that we fail to hear God's call, or choose to ignore it? The sound of the bell may not always be to our liking, but what counts is: Who is ringing it? What it is calling us to? And how do we respond when it sounds?