

The Origin Of Tres Dias

They spoke boldly about the Lord, who proved that their message about his grace was true by giving them power to perform miracles and wonders. The crowd in the city was divided: Some were for Jews, other for apostles.
Acts 14:3-4.

These words of scripture may be said to represent the genesis of Tres Dias, for they were the first words my eyes fell upon after I had prayed for some kind of guidance about what I should do with this powerful tool of God that I was experiencing. It was Saturday, the second day of my Cursillo weekend. After years as a nominal Christian—Sunday school teacher, deacon, financial secretary and willing worker—I had finally *experienced* Christianity. I had met, and talked with, and walked with, and loved my Lord for the first time in my life, and I was overwhelmed!

This thing called Cursillo was too beautiful to keep to myself, but how could I share it? I was a protestant on a Roman Catholic retreat. Wouldn't that immediately alienate my views from both Roman Catholics and protestants alike? If I tried to explain what was happening, who would believe me? The fact that I was the only protestant candidate on the weekend must mean something. In fact, the whole thing seemed hopeless; yet, I was somehow filled with boundless, joyful, and completely unreasonable hope.

Not knowing what else to do, I prayed. Not just the recited kind of prayer that I was accustomed to but a real, heart-to-heart talk with Jesus, my Brother. Of course, this was a new experience, and I didn't know how to listen for an answer; so I asked one of the other candidates at my table, a priest named Nick Canning, how he would go about listening. Father Nick introduced me to "scripture roulette." He said that, "God answers prayer, if we only know how to hear the answer." His most reliable source of answers, he said, was the Bible. If I prayed earnestly for guidance and believed wholeheartedly that God would give it, I could open the Bible and the answer would be there. Well, I tried it, and the first thing I read was:

They spoke boldly about the Lord, who proved that their message about his grace was true by giving them the power to perform miracles and wonders.
Acts 14:3.

Perhaps you can imagine my enthusiasm at that point. If ever there had been a direct call from God, I thought, this must be it! If God wills it, who can stop me? So, without further ado, I started telling everyone who would listen, and almost everyone who wouldn't listen, that there was going to be a protestant Cursillo, perhaps in a couple of months. Having made a Cursillo weekend, didn't I understand enough about it to duplicate it? With God behind me, wouldn't protestants flock to share this experience? Of course they must, I thought! In retrospect, I realize that I also read:

The crowd in the city was divided: Some were for Jews, others for apostles.
Acts 14:4.

But this had negative connotations, so I ignored it. A few days later, I tried scripture roulette again, this time using the *King James Bible*. I read Proverbs 19:21, which made absolutely no sense to me, and I decided that perhaps I was overworking God's word. Perhaps I would have slowed down if I had read *The Living Bible* transliteration of that verse:

Man proposes, but God disposes. Proverbs 19:21.

In fact, I read that verse in *The Living Bible* over a year later, and then I understood. In April 1971, however, I had a long way to go toward understanding what God wanted me to do, and I was bound to find it out the hard way. I spent a year trying to organize a protestant Cursillo before I realized that I was totally incapable of doing it. I had to fail miserably, fall flat on my face and admit defeat, before the Lord was ready to use me as a tool.

All of this is a little bit like the second reel of a three-reel movie show. A lot of you don't know much about this Cursillo that I've talked about, and there were many events to follow that were equally significant to the formation of the Tres Dias movement. I've started in the middle of the story because that's where I came into the picture. The real roots of Tres Dias lie in a different place and time. The source of the Tres Dias structure and method is the Roman Catholic Cursillo movement, which started in Spain in the late 1940's.

The "Cursillo de Cristiandad," which means "Short Course In Christianity," was started by Bishop Juan Hervas and Eduardo Bonnín, a layman. Around the time of World War II, these men were sharing their Christian walks in a small group of friends that met regularly to help each other persevere in their faith. When they began to consider means of revitalizing the waning Christianity of their communities, they decided that the best method was to spread the practice of such small meetings of friends, or group reunions. To teach others the value of such groups, they began to conduct weekend retreats aimed at moving people from the ideas of Christianity to the reality of the Christian life, sustained by the group reunion method. These retreats, which came to be known as Cursillos, became so popular and successful that they surpassed both the expectations and the understanding of their founders. I have been told that Senor Bonnín was so astounded by what he had founded that he later took a degree in psychology in an attempt to understand what he had done. This may or may not be apocryphal, but I can easily believe it.

The essentials of the Cursillo movement were established early and steadfastly maintained through the years. However, a few new traditions have been added along the way, including the song and salutation "De Colores," which originated in a song which was popular in Spain during the early days of the Cursillo movement. This song was not written for the Cursillo, as many have supposed, but it was just picked up along the way, much as we might have adopted "Day By Day" as our motto and theme song if the Cursillo had been founded in the United States during the 1970's. The Mananita, a cherished tradition, wasn't a part of any Cursillo that Hervas or Bonnín organized, nor was it present on my Cursillo weekend. It began in the Phillipines, I'm told, and it was brought to this country by a priest who worked on a Cursillo in the Phillipines and later visited New York. The Mananita was re-introduced to the Cursillo in New York on the women's weekend that my wife, Marcia, made in May, 1971. We discovered how *not* to do the Mananita that

weekend, incidentally. We showed up at 6:00 am in the rollo room, started singing, and watched the bravest of the candidates file into the room in total dismay, if not shock. Our singing was neither very good nor very bad; the girls didn't notice much, because they were still in curlers and bathrobes, and they were embarrassed more than surprised.

To continue the Cursillo story, Spain continued its monopoly on this powerful method until the late 1950s, when a group of Spanish air cadets training in Texas brought it to the United States. These cadets had made Cursillos in Spain, as had the local priest. Consequently, the first Cursillo in the United States was held in Waco, Texas, for Spanish-speaking airmen. From there, the movement spread like wildfire, but only among the Spanish-speaking, until a group of bilingual Cursillistas decided to share the method with their English-speaking brethren. I haven't discovered just where or when this happened, but I am told that the first English Cursillo in New York was held in the City in the early 1960s. From there, it spread during the late 1960s to upstate New York, where I made men's English Cursillo #26 in late April, 1971.

Incidentally, I've spoken so far only of men's Cursillos. I don't mean to be a male chauvinist; I'm only reflecting the views of the Cursillo founders. Their stated objective was "to vertebrate Christianity," and in realistic terms, this meant bringing the head of the household back into Church activities. By and large, the women were already there. We still find this emphasis in the rule that husbands must precede wives, both in Cursillo and Tres Dias. Women's rights notwithstanding, this is a sound, time-tested rule. The Lord has given us a tool, and shown us how to use it; I can testify from personal experience that we've no business letting our personal pride get in the way of the workings of this tool. I hope the ladies can understand and accept this.

Back to the development of the Cursillo movement: once the Cursillo was translated into English, a second movement effectively began. Despite many attempts at cooperation and interaction over the years, the Spanish and English Cursillo movements have remained separate. This has resulted in much concern over the years, especially when the Catholic Church officially recognized the Spanish movement and not the English. In the long run, though, this most likely is the Lord's will, which works for the good of all. Spanish traditions and culture are markedly different from the English, so any attempt to merge the two would necessarily be very painful. The Spanish Cursillo movement tends toward a much more rigid and dogmatic approach than the English culture can readily accept. Because each movement is very effective among the people it reaches, I think the present situation is appropriate, despite the mental anguish that results from thoughts of separation along racial lines.

Other divisions also exist. When Marcia and I made our Cursillos in the spring of 1971, we thought very little of the fact that we were usually the only protestants in most Cursillo gatherings. We were Christians, and they were Christians, so we thought that everything was in its proper place. Well, not everyone was as pleased as we were. I don't mean that there was any animosity or anything of that kind, but rather that there was uneasiness about this unauthorized ecumenism. The English movement was trying to gain official sanction, which had already been granted to the Spanish movement, and some of the rules were being broken. Therefore, it was decided that more attention would be paid to the rules, and people who were

not Catholics would not be accepted as candidates on Cursillo weekends, except under special conditions. These conditions, which were generally referred to as "the grandfather clause," left the door open to spouses of Catholics, which was to be expected. However, provision was also made to accept "those planning to participate in a non-Catholic Cursillo," which was not at all expected. Although I accepted it as a normal thing at the time, this was another example of the Lord's work to lay the foundation of the Tres Dias movement. It resulted from much heart-wrenching discussion among Cursillo leaders, and it proved to be one of the keys to the formation of the Tres Dias movement.

However we choose to explain this and other circumstances, one inescapable conclusion remains: God's hand was on the tiller in the foundation of Tres Dias. There are far too many "coincidences" to be explained by chance. I believe that each of these "coincidences" is really a small miracle. Let's consider the call I received a couple of weeks before my Cursillo from a casual friend whom I hadn't seen for almost a year. He called me one night, knowing that I was not Catholic, but not knowing much about my participation in church activities, and he asked me to make a Cursillo! He knew that I didn't know anything about the Cursillo, other than that I worked with a screwball named Rudy Veltre who was always turning me off with his stories about these "miraculous weekends." Despite this, Ron Rupert called me, and I agreed to make a Cursillo. For some time after that, I tried to figure out why I said "yes." I also tried to decide whether I ought to be involved in what I perceived to be a way-out kind of "holy roller" activity. All my logic said, "NO!" But I still didn't back out.

Miracle #1: Ron called me, without knowing why.

Miracle #2: I said "yes," without knowing why or to what.

Miracle #3: I didn't back out.

And ... this is only the beginning of the "miracles." I've already told you about my weekend, and how it affected me. Well, on Sunday, after the Cursillo closing, we had an "afterglow" party at the Veltre's home. It was a song-filled exclamation point to the weekend. Without my knowledge, my sponsor had invited my wife, Marcia, to the party. I was floating seventeen levels above cloud nine when I got there, so I immediately filled out an application form for Marcia. I placed it in front of her and said, "sign this." Probably to avoid embarrassing me, she did. Those of you who know my super-efficient, cool, organized, and quietly determined wife will agree that this was miracle #4. Then, with a month to wait before Marcia's weekend, and with her completely upset by the way my whole life and personality had turned upside down, we arrived at miracle #5: Marcia didn't back out.

After Marcia's weekend, and despite the embarrassment of the Mananita, she understood how I felt. Nevertheless, she didn't understand the things I was doing, let alone the things I was talking about doing. First, it turned out that my old friend and co-worker, Rudy Veltre, was the rector of the very next men's Cursillo. Of course, I figured I had to be on that team, so I did everything but break Rudy's arm. Eventually, he allowed me to help out in the kitchen and to attend team meetings on the weekend. I was so green at the time that I didn't even know that there were team meetings *before* the weekend. I suppose I made two contributions on that weekend: I cleaned a grill that had been without cleaning since Napoleon played with toy soldiers, and I helped George Burke in his midnight attempts to find the bell that a candidate was supposed to have thrown into the deep end of the pool. Oh, yes, I also sponsored two candidates to that weekend, under the "grandfather clause."

The next men's Cursillo was in the fall of 1971. When I heard that Helmut Maier was to be the rector, I cornered him at the July 4th picnic-Ultreya, and almost convinced him that I had to do the *Piety* talk; well, if not *Piety*, then at least *Leaders*. Helmut checked with the Cursillo Secretariat, and then agreed to accept me as a team member -- but NO TALK! Aside from my obvious inexperience, I suppose the Secretariat figured that I was already talking far too much! Anyhow, I worked as an auxiliary in October, 1971, and sponsored my pastor, Ian Todd. The following February, my dear brother, Don Jones, asked me to be Chief Auxiliary on the weekend that began to teach me something about the Cursillo method. I've never worked harder in my life! I'm sure I was an inch taller than I am now before that weekend began, and it all came off my feet!

In any case, that weekend began to teach me how much I had to learn. I began to see how little I knew, and that my loud words had turned a lot of people off. I began to get the impression that people I considered friends were crossing to the other side of the street, or chapel, or whatever, to avoid meeting me. I realized that I had been an over enthusiastic loudmouth, and it *hurt!*

I began to wonder how the Lord's work could be so painful, especially when He had shown Himself so clearly to be on my side. You see, that's the mistake I was making I wanted the Lord on my side, but I saw no need to be on His side. I was learning the hard way.

By May, 1972, I was thoroughly beaten, and I knew it. I had done nothing that I could see in a full year, though I had thought that two months would be more than enough. A lot of people thought I was a boor or a nut. Worse still, I was becoming very unpopular in my own church because of my outspoken criticism of passive Christianity, and because of my known association with an active Catholic movement. There were fifteen members of our Consistory, and I still remember the pain of a fourteen to one vote. Moreover, I had gotten my pastor involved, and now he was subjected to the same kinds of criticism. I still remember the deadly silence that greeted us when Ian and I contrived to open a Consistory meeting with an agape meal, complete with wine. It was truly beautiful, but I felt many an antagonistic glare from those who thought I was showing our pastor the ways of wickedness. Ian and I both were treated as outsiders from then on.

Well, the upshot was that I quit. I was thoroughly discouraged and beaten by the conventional ways of the world. I had been wearing my Cursillo mission cross for a year, but now I took it off. I felt more like a pagan than a disciple of Christ. I prayed a little, and cried a lot. I've seldom felt so alone or lost. It was like watching the very dearest friend I'd ever known fly off in an airplane without saying goodbye. I was lost.

Miracle #6: The Lord was always in charge, but He wanted me to know it down deep inside. He got me out of the way so that He could do His wondrous works!

A couple of days later, I received a phone call. The Cursillo Secretariat had appointed Helmut Maier and Tony Meier as its representatives to help in this crazy scheme I'd been talking about for the past year. Since I had just admitted defeat in that self-same scheme, I wasn't very enthusiastic, but I said, "Sure, let's talk it over." Next evening, I went over to Helmut's house, and I found that he had the missing link: A list of all English-speaking Cursillistas, and he remembered fairly well who were the non-Catholics. Counting Marcia and me, there were sixteen non-Catholics on the list.

I immediately wrote a letter to these people, told them of my dream, and invited them to a meeting the following week. By the Grace of God, eight of them showed up, in addition to the two Cursillo representatives.

That meeting was held on June 7, 1972. The first order of business was prayer, after which we agreed that there was a need for a protestant movement. Then we discussed at length the subject of a name for the movement, so we wouldn't be reduced to calling it "that thing." We tentatively agreed on the name "Taize Weekend," because what we were attempting seemed to be in the spirit of the ecumenical community of Taize, in France. This idea fell through when we received an answer to my letter to the Prior of Taize, asking permission to use the name. The response was a very firm "NO!". We then decided to call the weekend what it was -- three days -- and, in deference to the Spanish origin of Cursillo, we chose the Spanish words, Tres Dias.

Mostly because I had written the invitation to the initial meeting, I was named rector of the first weekend, which we set for November 2-5, 1972. The question of how we would get from raw desire to accomplished fact never really came up. We just took it for granted that the Lord would show us the way -- and He did!

It turned out that the first Cursillo de Cursillos, a kind of intensive weekend training session for Cursillo leaders, was to be held in June, 1972. This was the first in English, though there had been many in Spanish. In fact, the weekend was conducted by two laymen and two priests, who gave the talks in English from their Spanish notes. I gained much valuable knowledge on that weekend, not the least of which was the knowledge that I knew very little.

We needed written material. The Cursillo Secretariat provided copies of the talk outlines, but they were decidedly Catholic, and needed adaptation. We also needed guidelines for team members and for sponsors, a description of the weekend for all concerned, song books, and a Pilgrim's Guide. Then there were the incidental chores, like finding team members -- in one case, a man was asked to make a Cursillo weekend for the sole purpose of being a team member. Another minor problem was finding a place to hold the weekend. Then there was the problem of financing it. Then we got to the real problems, like what to do on the weekend. Should there be a Sacraments talk? What should it say? Who should give it, and how? Should there be an Agape? A liturgy on Saturday? How about Stations Of The Cross? Mananita? Liturgy at closing? Communion? What form? And so forth.

Miracle #7: The work got done, on time, with no real strain.

Miracle #8: The great manipulator (me) stood aside and let the Lord do His thing.

Things happened during this time without any real planning or effort. We needed money. OK, so I got an old cigar box and left it out during team meetings. It always contained just enough money to get through what had to be provided. Then just before the weekend, when we needed several hundred dollars to buy the food and supplies, an *angel* gave me that amount. Talks needed to be assigned, but I didn't have the right mix of team members, so I placed the stack of outlines on the conference table at a team meeting and invited the team members to pick the one they liked best. The talks came out great.

We needed a lot of literature, as I've already said, but we lacked the means to produce it. Bob Essert managed to come up with a semi-usable duplicating machine, which he donated to the effort. With a few spare parts and a lot of prayer, I managed to repair the old machine sufficiently to do all the needed work.

Because nobody else volunteered, I wrote the needed Pilgrim's Guide and team members' handbook, and edited and transcribed the talk outlines. I didn't know that I didn't know enough to do these jobs, so I did them. The team came up with a list of songs we wanted to use, and team members and spouses and friends typed them on stencils. Al Green and I sat up all night running the stencils on the limping old machine that ate two pieces of paper before it produced each good copy.

Al Green had a friend named Father Bagen who ran a seminary in Newburgh that was about to be closed because it was expensive to operate and not serving enough useful purposes. We visited Father Bagen, and arranged to use his place in return for whatever money we had left after paying the expenses of the weekend. I told him that it might be nothing, or it might be as much as \$200. He agreed. We donated \$676. Mid-Hudson Tres Dias weekends have been held at Our Lady of Hope, Father Bagen's place, ever since.

On the first several weekends, we were completely dependent on the Cursillo community for palanca, and they really came through for us. The only shaky moment I can remember was at the closing of men's Tres Dias #3, where we moved the closing into the chapel and still spread the people out so the small turnout wouldn't be noticed. It wasn't.

This brings me to the subject of Tres Dias as an ecumenical movement. The ecumenical nature of Tres Dias has been both a sore spot and the source of much joy and beauty over the past eight years. Some Catholic team members on that first Tres Dias weekend had been prepared to accept communion as a sort of agape meal, but when they discovered just how deeply many of their protestant brothers and sisters revered the Eucharist, they were unable to treat it as lightly as they had planned. This led to much agonizing soul-searching, and then to a much deeper understanding and sharing than any of us had ever thought possible.

Some protestants have wanted to exclude Catholics from Tres Dias participation, as protestants have been excluded from the Cursillo, I think it is fortunate that the majority view has consistently opposed such exclusion. St. Paul wrote that, though we are different, we share one faith and one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. It seems to me that we would have to take an awful lot upon ourselves to deny such a clear teaching.

Early in 1974, I received a telephone call from Bob DeLancey, in Pittsburgh, who said that he had made a Cursillo there, and was trying to figure out how to spread it to other non-Catholics. He had spoken to someone in New York City on one of his business trips and had found out about Tres Dias. The following weekend, Bob hopped in his plane with a representative of the Pittsburgh Cursillo Secretariat and flew to the Stonnville Airport. We spent the afternoon at our house going over the literature used in Tres Dias. About two months later, several of us from the Mid-Hudson Tres Dias were invited to the first Pittsburgh Tres Dias closing. Using our literature and advice, and with the help of the local Cursillo movement, the Pittsburgh Tres Dias movement was launched.

The Connecticut movement got underway at about the same time, but with much more direct involvement of the Mid-Hudson Tres Dias. Several Connecticut residents had made Tres Dias weekends at Our Lady of Hope, but they lacked a Tres Dias community in their own area. So, with the help and direct participation of the Mid-Hudson community, they launched their own series of weekends. Similarly, the New Jersey Tres Dias was inaugurated with the direct participation of our local people.

At about this point, the growth of Tres Dias began to stagger my imagination. It's too much for me to deal with now. My ego finds reasons to become inflated, though I know beyond all shadow of doubt that nothing I did on my own had anything to do with the success of Tres Dias. The Lord took me after I had failed completely and proved that he can use even the dullest tool to do any job He wants done.

Despite such phenomenal growth, however, I am heartened to find that the Tres Dias structure and method remain faithful to the Cursillo from which they came. During the formative stages of Tres Dias, we were willing to change anything that needed changing. We investigated other ecumenical activities, including the Episcopal Cursillo, which was already going strong in 1972, and the joint Catholic-Presbyterian Cursillos held in Detroit in 1969. We contemplated many changes, but we always returned to the proven Cursillo method. I pray that it will always be thus.

De Colores!

Dave McManigal
December, 1980

RETREAT OF THE
TRES DIAS SECRETARIAT
Mid-Hudson — April 24-25, 1981



CHRIST IS COUNTING ON YOU.
I AM COUNTING ON CHRIST!