



SCOUTING AND SIRTUALITY

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First of all, I would like to thank you warmly for the honour you have bestowed on the Congregation of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem, of which I am the general superior, by inviting me to play an active part in this Scientific Congress that WOSM has organised on “Scouting, its development, its achievements and challenges”. I am very touched.

I also happen to be the author of a biography of Jacques Sevin.

The Holy Cross of Jerusalem, which was founded in 1944, is Jacques Sevin’s second key achievement; the first being, as you know, the fact of having managed (not without difficulty) to get Baden-Powell Scouting into the Catholic Church.

My presentation, as you can imagine, while remaining open, will not be neutral; moreover neither is the subject itself. I will try to respond to the theme of this workshop on Scouting and spirituality as best as I can.

At the risk of going slightly off topic, in order to better deal with spirituality as such, I think it is important to quickly clarify how spirituality can be realised through Scouting.

This issue, which recurs more often today than in the past (and of course during this centennial year) is subject to permanent debate. One can find it discussed in magazines and newspapers as well as in television debates in different ways, and it can be summarised as follows:

- What about religion and Scouting? This leads to: can there be a Scout pedagogy without education about a relationship with God, a “duty to God”? And what relations are hoped for between religious institutions and the World Organization of the Scout Movement?

- Is Scouting essentially and solely a method, a spirit, a service... or does it awaken human beings to a spiritual dimension and does it pave the way for Scout spirituality?

In order to try to give an overall answer to these questions as best as I can, I can see three points:

1. The global aim of Scouting according to Baden-Powell and Jacques Sevin.
2. Religion’s place in Scouting.
3. Spirituality per se.

1 The global aim of Scouting

I would not dare to compare Baden-Powell and Jacques Sevin; but their respective strong personalities, their friendship and Jacques Sevin's loyalty to the Founder and to the concept of the Movement that he created, help us to better understand how spirituality arises from the very heart of Scouting and is not something extra that is added.

Both had undeniable talents: drawing, poetry, imagination, a gift for writing, humour, sensitivity to others, love for youth, the poor, etc. Both were upright and loyal, had a sense of duty and respect for work well done. It is hardly surprising that they established a true friendship, even if everything should normally have kept them apart since the first meeting in 1913 between the Anglican army general and the Catholic priest. They understood each other so well that during a congress in Lyons, B-P did not hesitate to state that the best implementation of his ideas came from a French "man-of-the-cloth". A great tribute when one knows what Jacques Sevin went through in terms of his honour as a priest and as a Scout to maintain total loyalty to Baden-Powell Scouting over the course of the first ten years of Scouts de France. Moreover, the trust between the two men was such that, in 1926, at the 50th Gilwell course in Kandersteg, Jacques Sevin was selected as the Chief Scout's assistant.

For over one hundred years, Scouting proposal has been the development of the whole human being, in all dimensions. As Jacques Sevin translated: "To bring each young person to the fullness of his human value". Keeping Scouting up to date is just as relevant in 2007 as it was in 1907. Speaking of Scout traditions, Jacques Sevin wrote: "...the Scout tradition is neither a finished book, nor a closed cycle". However, it must never become cut off from its roots! A tree dies when its roots are cut. In today's dispersed world, so many young people, adults and peoples are in search of their roots. For Scouting to continue to flourish, with dynamic loyalty, and thus bear fruit for the world of today and tomorrow across all continents, it needs to acquire or keep – I quote Jacques Sevin – this "capacity for adaptation without which there is neither life nor movement... adaptation that does not cling to details as if they were what is essential, nor to the means as if they were the end", i.e., to evolve with the times.

However, without at all refuting the fundamental intuition and whilst remaining faithful to the Founder even after a century, to me it seems essential to return to Baden-Powell initial intuition. Diving into the origins and becoming imbued with their spirit so as to better experience Scouting today, so that, without losing any of its values, it can be enriched by those of the 21st century, enables it to not become cut off from its roots and to maintain all of its originality. In this spirit, it might be a good idea, although the organisers must have already done so, to re-examine the Jamboree in Hylands Park in order to prepare the next one, a more Scout-like one...

One must never forget that Scouting is a "movement". Without wishing to play on words, one can say that it is thus always moving, on the move, evolving... but what evolution? When debating Scouting and in particular its spiritual development, we need to bear in mind that its very essence is that of "an educational movement" with a specific pedagogy that has proved its worth, a true school of life. There is sometimes a great temptation, due to its rituals and symbols, to turn it into a spiritual movement. But, let us be clear, this is no longer the Scouting that either Baden-Powell or Jacques Sevin envisaged.

Of course, to ensure the development of the whole person, Scouting encompasses a very broad programme of training in terms of spirit and character where the Promise and Law come into play, where the psychological starting point is to train the child and the young person to "learn by doing" and not through theory, to see and learn for oneself, to live with others and to play an active role in one's own development. It is not about external modelling

but something that springs forth from within. Practical training that places the accent on learning first-hand about taking initiative, responsibility, helping others (the “good turn” that is sometimes scorned these days, but which teaches one to look beyond oneself, to think of others, to become a man or a woman with a heart and who is always prepared). A selfish Scout is a contradiction in terms!

The Scout Promise and Law, which, in a way, are the practical application of this, appear as two pillars that shape Scouting soul. Their place in life establishes morals and an ethic. One does not practise Scouting in any old way. B-P’s writings are full of advice on modes of behaviour in every area; moral and social development. Scouting morality, as you well know, is expressed in the “game of Scouting”, respect for nature, the given word, patrol and group life. There are contracts and laws, etc.

And what about spiritual development? In describing everything that Scouting does, we have talked about it without naming it as such. Sometimes, when we mention this specific point, there is like a shiver that runs through those gathered together due to the fact that the meaning and points of view can seem so different, or even opposed. In reality, those who fully experience Baden-Powell Scouting are being enriched by this spiritual dimension, sometimes without putting words on it.

At the beginning of my presentation, I was asking questions that I have read or heard here and there. I do not have a comprehensive answer, but we can think about it together.

The word “spiritual” is ambiguous. If we take its original meaning, it represents everything that concerns the spirit, the soul, that part of ourselves that can neither be reached, nor quantified. It is also what touches upon the areas of emotions and intellectual activity. It is not directly connected to spirituality. All this is what a Scout will experience through Scout activities. This dimension permeates daily life and gives it meaning. Let us not forget that Scouting is – and has been since it was created – education for Peace and Brotherhood. That is not enough to find spirituality. Moreover, some stop there. Others think and experiment with the idea that, in a way, bringing together Scouting and a religion gives birth to spirituality.

2 THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN SCOUTING

What place did Baden-Powell want to give to religion in Scouting? Scouting is not a religion. Baden-Powell words left no doubt about that. Neither did he situate Scouting within a particular religion. However (and his writings are very clear on this), he considered a Scout to be a religious being. A Scout has a religion, which is experienced and which connects to others in a relationship with God. In his book, *Le Scoutisme*, Jacques Sevin analysed the place of religion, based on B-P’s own texts. In *Scouting for Boys*, Baden-Powell noted “an organisation such as ours would miss its goal if it did not give its members some knowledge of religion, but in general we go about it the wrong way”. It is on purpose that we have only talked about the observance of religious practices in general terms: we wanted to give a free reign to organisations and individuals who would like to make use of this book in their own way.

In *Rovering to Success*, B-P wrote: “The funny thing is that there has been more fighting and quarrelling in the world over religion than for any other cause. It is worse than funny, it is ridiculous; but at the same time true that the more we care for our own religious beliefs, the more narrow-minded we seem to become about the religious beliefs of other people.

“We forget that we are all sons of the same Father and that we are all striving to do His will, though it may be in different ways.

“There is one thing, however, that I feel sure of myself, and that is that God is not some narrow-minded personage, as some people seem to imagine, but a vast Spirit of Love that overlooks the minor differences of form and creed and denomination and which blesses every man who truly tries to do his best, according to his lights, in His service.”

In 1926, addressing Scout leaders at High Leigh, he replied to a question: “I have been asked to describe more fully what was in my mind as regards religion when I instituted Scouting and Guiding. I was asked: ‘Where does religion come in?’ Well, my reply is: ‘It does not come in at all, it is already there. It is the fundamental factor underlying Scouting and Guiding’”.

Another text quoted by Jacques Sevin humorously summarises B-P’s thoughts. It is taken from a meeting with H.G. Elwes, the editor of Headquarters Gazette: “Turning a boy into a man means training his body, his spirit and his soul at the same time. It is a matter of finding the right balance. If you only develop the body, you will have a magnificent animal, but that is rearing, not education. If you only develop his brain, you risk producing a false or dangerous spirit; and if you claim to only address the soul, three quarters of the time, young people will not come to you. Truly scientific education must address itself to the soul, the spirit and the heart at the same time.”

I could quote many other texts: you will no doubt easily find them in Scouting for Boys, Aids to Scoutmastership, Rovering to Success, and B-P’s other works. The same goes for the works of Jacques Sevin: *Le Scoutisme* and editorials in *Le Chef* (compiled in *Pour Penser scoutement*) and of course, in numerous current publications.

Earlier, I had said that a meeting point between Scouting and a religion could make spirituality spring forth, and that spirituality is a particular way of living one’s religion or one’s life as a Christian. I’m saying: “a way of living” a religion and not of “teaching” it. Scouting is not responsible for teaching religion, and even less for indoctrination, which – in today’s context – could be a temptation.

When I visited the Jamboree at Hylands Park, I was surprised. I was expecting, as had been the case at previous Jamborees, to find spaces for spiritual reflection and sharing where Scouts of all confessions could come to seek inspiration. Instead, when I entered this inter-religious space, I had the impression of finding myself in a huge fairground in which the distribution of all kinds of papers and booklets made it seem like a shopping centre in which religion was something “to be sold”, to use today’s terminology. This kind of auction place did not appear to me as being in the spirit of the Founder, nor as a vehicle for peace and brotherhood.

Jacques Sevin had infinite respect for all religions, and yet the times were not in favour of ecumenical or inter-religious contact. Moreover, it was due to this that he had to leave the International Bureau. It was he who took the first steps to bring the Scouts Israelites [the Jewish Scout association in France] into *Scoutisme français*... and his initiative was refused!

You will understand that it is with the same respect that my presentation on spirituality will be limited to Scouting experience of a Catholic spirituality.

3 A SPIRITUALITY PER SE

Spirituality does not begin by establishing theories; it is something that is lived and enriches every experience in Scouting, just as Scouting enriches spirituality. While Scouting is not a religion, it is not spirituality either. However, it determines it and adds shades of colour to the spirituality that underlies it. Jacques Sevin understood this very well. The more he got to know Baden-Powell and Scouting; the more his intuition led him to believe that this pedagogy corresponded closely to a Christian vision of Humanity, the very same one that the Bible professed.

It was only late in the day that Jacques Sevin formulated what he considered to be a Scout spirituality. He started by experiencing it and by getting others to experience it starting with Scouting life itself. He was convinced that there were areas of harmony between Scouting pedagogy and the Gospel. At the time, it required a slightly mad audacity to undertake getting Scouting a recognised place and structure in the Church. He had to present it, explain it and argue against the objections on numerous occasions and at great length. And he had to establish in depth the areas of harmony between Baden-Powell intuition and the vision of Humanity inspired by the Christian faith. He wanted to show how young people could be brought to live a more profoundly and radiantly authentic Christian life through Scouting.

He was determined to show that Scouting proposed a certain way of imitating Christ through its way of life: taking to the road, sleeping under the stars, setting up a tent, cooking a meal, helping others, looking back at one's day or an activity. Christ is present in all that. Scouting very pedagogy leads to a certain simplicity, a way of living in joyous poverty, of meeting God through contemplating creation, in the beauty of one's own work, in giving each other a hand within the team. In a word, it is a simple school to discover or rediscover God. All that's left is to put words on all that to help young people to make the connection between what they experience and Faith.

It was in this sense that in his book *Le Scoutisme*, i.e., as of 1917, Father Sevin brought an unexpected dimension to prayer, which is worth re-reading 90 years later. I quote: "This religious atmosphere will not be the result of multiple practices of piety, nor of sermons about everything and nothing.... Let it (prayer) above all be alive, adapted, openly cut off from non-liturgical mundane formulae that are incomprehensible to children and that too often weigh down books; have your own prayers, thanks to which they will understand that they do not have two lives, a Christian one that one dons on Sunday morning and for ten minutes a day during the week, and a Scout life that attracts their attention and shapes them the rest of the time, but that these two lives are but one..." (*Le Scoutisme* p. 119)

He recommended leaders to simply use Scouting pedagogy. With a simple, well-prepared passage from the Gospel or the Acts of the Apostles, told like a story, in boys' language, putting figures in their context, one can enthral even the least attentive of children. For them, Saint Paul's journey becomes more exciting – may God forgive me the analogy – than the adventures Sherlock Holmes, and the applications burst forth on their own from the apparition of Jesus on Lake Galilée or the parable of the Good Shepherd. Your young audience will be astonished, then touched, when they realise that their camp life is what mankind's Saviour lived through for three years, without knowing where to rest his head.

He, too, the Divine Master, loved the countryside and open spaces; he knew how to light a campfire and cook breakfast. He, too, was a handyman who was able to use carpentry tools.

It is then that they can better understand: "...the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us"; they feel Him closer to their young humanity. And, around a dying fire, it is a to living Jesus that they will sing the last prayer rising from the woods.

In his books and articles, Jacques Sevin shows how young people's experience of camping bears evangelical values, and prepares a kind of living catechism without using the words. Through camp life (as Father Sevin established at Chamarande and that he managed to spread throughout the Movement), he taught how to pray starting with situations arising from Scouting and really simple experiences, such as those that I have already mentioned and which offer spiritual meanings... There were prayers for all the important moments of a camp (leaving... arriving, etc.) and for various moments of the day, with simple words borrowed both from biblical expressions and Scouting symbolism. Life in nature and wonder at the beauty of Creation are roads to the Gospel.

Many of you, like me, have no doubt had the opportunity to visit Gilwell Park. In the magnificent exhibition are numerous paintings by Ernest Carlos. I stopped, as did Baden-Powell and Jacques Sevin, in front of "The Pathfinder". A young patrol leader is standing near a table on which is lying an ordnance survey map. Is it his guide badge or the itinerary of a hike at camp that he is preparing? Just as he is about to make notes, the hand holding the pencil hesitates; the child looks up as if seeking inspiration elsewhere. And here, behind him, a very soft form comes forth, a shepherd's crook is outlined in the shadow, and on his shoulder is a firm and defined hand: the hand of the person who says "I am your Path? Shepherd..."??? And beneath the painting are the lines of verse by Lily Burn:

"Look up, my son,
Stop a moment,
Hold out your hand, my son
To find your way;
The Scoutmaster is me,
Me, who's divine Presence
Is always by your side,
Whatever happens."

Tents, nature, hiking, service, and camps are all symbols that have their roots in the great biblical tradition.

As I tried to show, it is less a matter of putting God into these activities (He is already there), than revealing His presence, which, moreover is Baden-Powell's message. Any Scout activity is where He reveals Himself to us. The action words of grace, forgiveness, peace, sharing, etc., will be as many words revealing this presence that significant moments of Scout life will make palpable. Who has never perceived God's presence in the deep silence at the end of a campfire?

Jacques Sevin showed that B-P's Scouting ideal can be directed towards the spirit of the Gospel (see *Les Méditations scoutes sur l'Évangile*). Spirituality takes root in natural virtues. These are the harmonies that Jacques Sevin perceived; it is on these that his pedagogy was based to take young people and adults through a profoundly evangelical spiritual process.

At the end of this presentation, I would like to summarise the essence of Scouting spirituality by mentioning four aspects:

1. A spirituality of contemplation: in a world invaded by noise, pollution, the wasting of natural riches, Scouting helps one to rediscover this path of Creation, of nature. It enables one and teaches one to tame it, admire it, respect it, make others discover it, preserve it and not destroy it, to know how to marvel at a starry sky or a drop of water on a blade of grass, to give thanks for this gift, and to say a prayer in our own words.

2. A spirituality of the tent and the "itinerant camp": the road of poverty, that of the camper who sheds what is useless, superfluous and who needs others. It touches the body as much as the soul. To not settle, to not be weighed down, to go from campsite to campsite like Abraham and later like the disciples gathered around Jesus, to walk with him towards the beginnings ... the "tent" that one pitches again elsewhere as God's camper, without settling in comfort or habits. Through this camping life, Scouting forms people who are called to walk towards the Promised Land, the breath of the Spirit "that always has something to tell us". The tent where one meets others... an open place without locks, just like the image of what our hearts should be... a place to meet others and "the Other" as He has pitched His tent amongst us! A spirituality is not at all static: it can only either grow stronger or else wither. It only continues to exist because it is experienced and not because it is described!

3. A spirituality of service ... the road to others and joy. For us Christians, it is in the image of Christ who became a servant. It leads to giving of oneself. It is not by accident that Father Sevin gave the Scouts de France the prayer attributed to Saint Ignatius: "Lord Jesus, teach us to be generous..." and as an insignia, the Cross of Jerusalem that was set up in Jerusalem, where the Good News of the Resurrection also came from with all the symbolism of a cosmic cross formed by four tau (the letter T in Greek, the shape of the cross that Christ carried), headed towards the four cardinal points to symbolise the universality of Redemption.

4. A spirituality of commitment, adapted to each age and to each stage of life, in which the given word finds all its value, in the image of Christ, which was simply YES.

Scouting obliges one to anchor the pedagogy of faith in what has been and is being experienced. Each person can take this road and help others to do so... somewhat like the road of Emmaus on which Christ walks with us... very often without us knowing about it... but which one day reveals itself..

This very superficial study merits being developed much further. Allow me, before I conclude, to express two wishes. First, that Scouting continues to be more and more active in the quest for Peace and Brotherhood. Second, that it does not lose its soul and what makes it real. Why not share together the various religious experiences and enrich each other through what each offers without losing any specificity?

And I will conclude by wishing everyone who, at the dawn of this second century, would like to be loyal to the thinking of the Founder, Baden-Powell, and, I would add to that, the thinking of Jacques Sevin in terms of his contribution concerning spirituality. It is not enough to claim a heritage, one must "be prepared" to take up the challenges that it contains. In a world of change, one must more than ever create, invent, and move ahead with enthusiasm. To be open to a lot and to many young people, because living in the truth

of the Gospel, without any Pharisaic formalism, is essential in order to remain faithful, to “bring each young person to the fullness of his/her human value”, to develop the whole of the person. There is still much to discover in this heritage. It is up to us to find today’s words; it is up to us to make them more profound, to live by them and share them so that others live by them. Because Christ was everything to Jacques Sevin, nothing that was human was a stranger to him.

We must keep a heart that listens, that listens to the origins, that listens to the world, that listens to the spirit. To be faithful, it is indispensable to not let the spirit die out and to always stoke the original one, until the day when we all meet up - all the Scouts in the world - in the “great eternal camp”.

As Jacques Sevin used to get people to sing:

“We love all Scouts in the world

Dear brothers that God gave us

Spread around the world

The same law shaped them all

Like a wave that inundates us

Their love surrounds us

We really all feel like brothers.

Separated by contrary winds

We sail towards the same port.

But one day, throwing the anchor

Discovering that the shore is there

We will see all the Scouts of the world

Dear brothers that God gave us”

(Composed by J. Sevin for the Jamboree in 1920)

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