

CONGRESS “100 YEARS OF GUIDING”

“THE ANSWERS OF GUIDING”

Introduction

100 years after the apparition of the first guides in the history of the scout movement, we meet in our cities many girls who are still fascinated and enthusiastic about the idea of facing a style of adventure and of values which make them quite “original” in comparison with the young people of their age ! Exactly the same as in Cristal Palace in 1911. These girls are in my mind when I evoke the 100 years of Guiding: the ladybirds, the girl guides, the rangers and the young leaders whom I know and knew personally because they constitute the “concrete experience” from which I’ll start saying what I am going to say. When I looked at their faces, when I listened to their questions, when I talked with them and when we looked for answers together, when we played together and walked on the same path, when we worked together with our hands and our heart, sometimes chatting, but always united at the end for the prayer, we have united our lives and built an adventure that would last for the future.

Many other “young guides” have also passed on the baton to us previously; they made us grow so that now we may open the way to the ones who will follow. But the protagonists are the unit leaders, rangers, guides, ladybirds of today. The adventure of starting from the current conditions, of taking the baton and passing it on to transmit Guiding to the future generations is especially entrusted to them.

“Learning....by living”

The answers of Guiding, a way for women today

In 1948, Olave BP said that « Guiding and scouting are practical means to bring an abstract ideal into the young people’s daily life” (Olave BP, *Pris sur le vif*, Neuchatel 1948, p. 113); she spoke of practical means and of daily life to explain how impossible it is to define oneself as a guide or a scout if we do not enter into the game.

We can also add BP’s words: « I have been asked why I had chosen the name of guides for the girls’ movement. Today, women have conquered a bigger place than formerly in the affairs of the world. (...) The training of guides is structured in such a way as to prepare the young generation to assume this increased responsibility. The term “to guide” seems to summarize in one word the high mission of the woman, as mother, wife, and citizen. So the name of “guide” is the best that can be given to a girl, to express this high ideal for which she is getting ready (...). Women must assume not an imaginary but a real part of the welfare of the nation and they have the power of bringing to it a very precious contribution, while remaining in their role of women” (BP, *Yarns for Boy Scouts*, C.A. Person, London 1909, p 207-208).

Catholic Guiding, understood as the implementation of the method for girls, can offer the conditions and environment so that each guide may feel the new wish of living the adventure of her life thoroughly, discovering God’s plan for it.

“We, guides, want to be active, to overcome the first trap and reach the substance. (...) If we, guides, were able to transmit the feeling of this presence of Beauty around us, in our working place, in our family, then we would switch on a spark of this spirit in the others’ spirit and the world would really be better around us because people would learn to discover good everywhere. And we would be faithful to BP’s message” (Nina Kaucisvili, *Le trèfle*, n.3, 1959, p.8-9).

The point is to open a way so that each girl should answer to the main call of woman in society and in the Church: to be a guide in her family, to pay attention to the others’ needs, to be ready to sacrifice herself for others even in civic commitment, to be open to the values of the Spirit and to God’s plan on her life.

Guiding can transmit in a positive way the values attributed to femininity in a concrete educational path; the guide law creates a "style" which may guide the internal attitudes, the thoughts and actions of the girl and, through her, of the future grownup woman.

Nowadays, there is an urgent need of regaining these essential values and the woman can do a lot to pay more attention to the person and to offer a more serene and generous face towards life and social relationships.

To be life-bearers and to be conscious of being educators of life: in BP's mind, this is what the term « Guide » means.

It is certainly not anachronistic to think that still today Guiding can be a means of accompanying the woman, since her childhood, to become a "woman of character", to discover her vocation of woman.

Guiding gives a concrete possibility of highlighting this treasure of potentiality constituted by the "feminine genius" indicated by John Paul II in *Mulieris Dignitatem* as a specific gift for the whole mankind. This "highlight" consists in revealing the wish of realizing one's own human adventure according to God's plan.

And « Woman can only hand herself by giving love to others » (*MD* nr. 30).

So, thanks to the means offered by Guiding, it is possible to make girls become aware of the charism of their state of woman and of the realization of this charism in the dimension of reciprocity, which goes only through giving oneself, on the track of a love which has its source and leads to the Absolute.

Guiding, from the ladybird to the ranger, gives the possibility to cultivate this charism and to live it through a path enabling discovery, maturation and personal expression.

This implies the meaning of « educating to a feminine way of living one's own human adventure, of living one's experience of faith and discovering one's vocation » (P. Bignardi, *The feminine face of vocation*).

Then it is possible for Guiding to be one of the modalities, maybe original and rare in these times which are rich in homology and poor in "specific identities", to educate in the feminine way, to bring about "the feminine genius" with a specific efficiency due to the strength of a human experience as specific as the life in scout units can be.

« Vocation is meant here in its fundamental, and one may say universal significance, a significance which is then actualized and expressed in women's many different "vocations" in the Church and the world » (*MD* nr. 30).

"To practice Guiding", it is to live, to face situations in order to plan and solve them, to consider the consequences of one's acts and choices, to be loyal, to open oneself to the adventure of discovering oneself and others, to be spent for the sake of others, to discover God's love in one's life.

Girls can experience all this if they are accompanied at the various stages of their growth by an adult being interested in knowing them and having a relationship with them, with a remarkable capacity of introspection, reflection upon oneself and upon experiences.

In a period when many aspects of the person and of the relationship between people are placed at a virtual level of relationship, considering also that the fact of coming in touch with several « dimensions » can make someone become more superficial and scattered in reality, Guiding, through life in the open air, the taste for well done things, patrol life and patrol duties, the use of techniques, simple life, the road, the commitment to spread out joy, can educate to the sense of concrete things, enriching introspection, makes girls enter into the real world, beyond the danger of self-centeredness.

A quieter rhythm of activities and games, compared to boys, the sense of aesthetic, the harmony of the patrol, the joy of ladybirds, the spirit of the road are the expression of an interiority which can still belong to girls and which is cultivated, so that it may become a space of discovery and of self-acceptance, beyond superficial and short-lived emotions, which do not facilitate the perception of valuable things, in a period impregnated with relativism and quick experience.

The attention paid to tiredness, the physical conquest and internal conquests linked to both is also an occasion for girls to discover, in a period of full exposure of the feminine figure, a really positive meaning of the body : a body “redeemed from the superficial and manipulated perception spread out and in order to recover a series of behaviors – of respect, decency – which reveal a well reflected and deep way of living the relationship towards oneself and towards others... in order to grasp the human meaning of sexuality, to learn how to live it in an unusual way, as the dimension of the whole person and as the expression of one’s life orientation” (The feminine face...). Another aspect that Guiding can highlight thanks to its means is the girl’s natural attitude to perceive the symbolic meaning of things (that is to say the deep meaning beyond what I can see and beyond the experience that I have) : this is the source of this idea of “poetry and adventure” that BP associates to Guiding.

To be able to perceive the meaning of experience is a fascinating possibility in all branches (from the paths of the ladybird to the road of the rangers, not forgetting the tent of the girl guides) and it constitutes a great richness of training. This can fascinate or at least raise question to the girls, as moral commitment (to go till the end, to pay attention to others and to reality, when everything around you goes so quickly and burns even before understanding what has just been lived) as well as spiritual training.

For a spirituality with sensitivity and emotion without end, but directed, supported by a community and by a leader, in order to deepen, contemplate, without being afraid of going beyond superficiality and of facing one’s own thirst of answers about the sense of life and about the horizon on which one’s identity and choices can be placed. “Guiding prepares to a presence of adults in the Church. We need adult people: persons who have matured the human values, who are able to become responsible and take initiatives, who have acquired the most beautiful values to build a life: the spirit of poverty, of justice, the sense of hope. And these people will be adult because they will be Christian” (Anna Bertolini Signorini, page 169, A promise...).

So “to see God’s work in Creation” means to discover at each step His kindness and experience undoubtedly trust, relationship and love which does not give up and does not disappoint. It is in the value of sacrifice and conquest, in the dimension of serenity and in the fact of feeling oneself “at home” in nature, in humility and joy, that life in the open air can help taking advantage of the talents received as a gift and thus contributing to find the meaning of one’s human history.

And this can be done from the very beginning.

In the ladybird method, for instance, Law and symbolism help understand gradually the meaning of true joy. From the awareness of internal harmony which depends on one’s own behavior (path of the field), to the discovery of joy in trifles of daily life and in difficulties to overcome (path of the wood), till the final step (path of the mountain) where the ladybird shares with others all she has learnt, because she has understood that “the real way to get happiness is by giving out happiness to other people” (BP’s last message).

In these first steps, isn’t there already a vocational way?

In the life of the Circle¹, the lantern is a precious and irreplaceable symbol: as well as the lantern lights the space around it, the ladybird enlightens all those who are near her with her joy. “Jesus told them: Does a candle come in to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? And not to be set on a candlestick?” (Mk 4, 21-22).

While she puts her joy and her light at the service of others, while she makes a pleasure to someone every day, the ladybird is preparing herself to the Good Turn for the day she becomes a guide and to the spirit of service when she becomes a ranger; she begins to integrate the value of free service, of attention to the other for what he is.

Everything is summarized in the motto « Here I am », quick answer to a call, availability to do and to be for others, continuity of Mary’s answer (“Here I am”), fundamental in the history of Salvation and of man and beginning of “Here I am, ready to serve”, which is the spiritual program of Guiding.

“Only by” welcoming the first steps of the little girls in the Circle, Guiding already considers the moral stature of the woman in her commitment!

By proposing so « simply » to the little girl to give joy and to walk towards « the mountain », Guiding answers to the request of trust and to the « thirst of meaning » which comes nowadays from young generations.

Girls see in front of them the possibility of realizing a project.

They can discover that it is possible to live one's life in the first person and not by conforming oneself to the majority; as protagonists according to specific steps of progression, according to a Promise based on "doing one's best" and on the accomplishment of one's duty by asking for God's help, following a law presenting trust, loyalty and freely chosen values straight away. The guide is a protagonist, a person considered as able to choose and worthy of consideration, whereas the world offers almost a style of "playing" on the one who passively undergoes the choices made by others.

So, thanks to its road made of commitment and personal choices, Guiding may give a concrete answer to the conception, generally spread today, of seeing freedom as a synonym of "revocability of choices". This conception of freedom is spread out among many young people, who fear to choose "forever" and who often go one step forward if and only if it is possible to go backwards after.

But life does not always allow this. So, "in the spirit of adventure", which is at the same time the spirit of game, Guiding becomes life because *from life* arises dynamism open to risk and invention, because *like life* it is woven with unexpected events and it refuses any anticipated solution, because *in life*, that is to say in the reality of time and space, it incarnates and renews itself as long as it circulates, transmits itself, gives itself... as long as it flows on the banks of the Eternal" (Agnese Baggio, 1966).

« Here I am, ready to serve ».

'For in giving themselves to others each day women fulfill their deepest vocation. Perhaps more than men, women *acknowledge the person*, because they see persons with their hearts. They see them independently of various ideological or political systems. They see others in their greatness and limitations; they try to go out to them and *help them*" (John Paul II, Letter to women nr 12), because « *Woman can only hand herself by giving love to others...* The moral and spiritual strength of a woman is joined to her awareness that *God entrusts the human being to her in a special way*. Of course, God entrusts every human being to each and every other human being. But this entrusting concerns women in a special way - precisely by reason of their femininity - and this in a particular way determines their vocation" (*Mulieris dignitatem* n° 30).

The awareness of this trust grows by cultivating one's attention, interest and sensitivity; these aspects, for the woman from her childhood, are always applied to the concrete and unique aspect of the person, to discover him as the image of God ; hence the typical way of leading a patrol, with the capacity of helping each other and giving support, the sense of reality and the capacity of welcoming and paying attention to details ; techniques and manual skill applied to the concrete aspect of action and to what is useful and not virtual ; the service lived by the ranger as an attention and a presence, as a welcome of the other, as a question raised about one's real availability not only to give but also to receive, first concrete step towards the dimension of motherhood, which is not only physical.

"This awareness and this fundamental vocation speak to women of the dignity which they receive from God himself, and this makes them "strong" and strengthens their vocation.

Thus the "perfect woman" (cf. *Prov* 31:10) becomes an irreplaceable support and source of spiritual strength for other people, who perceive the great energies of her spirit. These "perfect women" are owed much by their families, and sometimes by whole nations" (*Mulieris dignitatem* n° 30).

Which better answer then?

For Catholic Guiding, such is the "perfect woman", the "woman of character" whom BP refers to.