

EUROPEAN SCOUTING IN POLAND: A MOVEMENT OF GREAT ACTUALITY!

Dear guide sisters, dear scout brothers, dear friends,

This evening, I am feeling a great emotion for being among us. Thirty years ago, exactly, I was crossing the Polish border with my wife and an young chief during the siege state proclaimed by General Jaruzelski. Our purpose what to bring 2 tons of food to St-Francis of Assisi parish in Wałbrzych and to get some information about the exact situation of your country by ourselves, at that troubled period when our young Western rovers and rangers were getting ready to make the pilgrimage to Jasna Góra.

1957 : Meeting with Mons. Jean-Baptiste Montini

What a long way since that day of August 1957 when Mons. Jean-Baptiste Montini, future Pope Paul VI, at that time Archbishop of Milan, met the leaders of the first FSE Europa-Camp in Northern Italy, near the lake of Lugano. This Europa-Camp gathered three troops, one Lutheran from Marburg, another one Catholic from Münster – Germany, as well as the Orthodox troop of Paris.

After asking some questions about the aims of our movement, the future Pope invited some young scouts to come to him and pronounced in front of them this short premonitory speech:

« I am particularly glad of the way I have been welcomed by young Europeans who are, according to me, the pledge of Europe of tomorrow, since they are young boys. I am quite pleased to see near me some Germans, Russians and French brotherly mixed, furthermore Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant who have come to welcome me with the same heart when I arrived here. With all my heart, I wish that their work for Europe and Peace may be fruitful and happy. Scouts of Europe, all my wishes be with you!»

These few words from the future Pope still sound strongly in our ears half a century later, at a moment when, several weeks ago, the Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow, KIRILL, as well as Mons. Jozef MICHALIK, chairman of the Episcopal Conference of Poland, signed in Warsaw a historical call to reconciliation between the Russian and Polish peoples.

Who are these young people mentioned by the future Pope?

Many of them have known in their own flesh the sufferings of the war. Some of them, as children, have walked across half Europe in dreadful conditions to settle in blockhouses built throughout Europe by a criminal regime. In front of the unsteadiness of peace, they want to take part, at their place and as much as teenagers can do, to this huge effort undertaken by political men and Church men after the war to dress the wounds of this iron 20th century.

A few months earlier, they founded, without any mandate from their respective Churches or from the international scout movement, a scout community, the aim of which is « to practice Baden Powell's scouting within the context of the European idea and on the Christian bases implied in the idea of a united Europe »¹.

For them, the construction of peace and the settlement of brotherhood between men in Europe are not reserved only to adults or to governments. They think that Europe will not be done at one go. For them, a European brotherhood can only be built by concrete realizations creating real solidarities. And for this, young people from all countries can find their place in this huge work of reconstruction.

They have the intuition of what will be written thirty years later by a famous Pole in his apostolic exhortation « Christifideles Laici ». I quote him : "Youth must not simply be considered as an object of pastoral concern for the

¹ Article 1 of the federal statutes of November 1st 1956.

Church: in fact, young people are and ought to be encouraged to be active on behalf of the Church as *leading characters in evangelization and participants in the renewal of society*.²

The invention of the badge

A bit earlier, these young people have chosen a badge that they wear on their heart and which summarizes their ideal. The badge of all scouts in the world is a lily flower; this shows the North in the old compasses and on the old sea maps. By choosing this symbol, Robert Baden Powell, the founder of scouting, shows his will of training strong characters, that is to say men and women who open the way and who are able to keep the course of their life, whatever the changes of the social and psychological context that surrounds them.

In the preface of his book « Scouting for boys », Baden Powell precises that « the aim of scout education is to replace the preoccupations of the ego by those of service, to make young people really strong, morally and physically, and to give them the ambition of putting their strength at the service of the community... In other words, we aim at applying Christendom in the everyday life and acts, instead of only professing its doctrines on Sundays ».

For a guide or scout of Europe, the polar star indicates to him / her by the lily of the compass is Christ who shed his blood on a cross for the salvation of all men. And this cross is anchored by its eight points into the eight beatitudes pronounced by Our Lord in front of the world on the Mountain at the beginning of his predication³. This is the reason why, at the end of scout life, at the moment of their departure, the rover and the ranger recite these beatitudes aloud.

The Franco-German reconciliation

On Sunday July 8th 1962, Charles de Gaulle, President of the French Republic, and Konrad Adenauer, German Chancellor, attend a Mass for peace in the cathedral of Reims, in order to launch, under the look of the Lord, a process aiming at the reconciliation between the German and French peoples. A few months later, the Federal Commissioner of that time, Father Joseph Timmermans, convokes the German, Belgian and French scouts of Europe in order to see how our FSE can take part in this effort of reconciliation.

The twelve-star flag

I am just going to mention quickly a true anecdote that everyone of us experiences without knowing it every time he takes part to a European scout camp: in 1956, the Council of Europe offered to the cathedral of Strasbourg a stained-glass-window of Max Ingrand representing the Virgin with the twelve stars of the Revelation, in order to replace the one destroyed by the bombings of 1944 in the choir.

This anecdotic detail will be important for the first scouts of Europe, who are German, let's not forget it. As their country has no scout past, they have chosen to practice their scouting on the basis of a ceremonial redacted mainly in the 20ies by the founder of Catholic scouting in France, father Jacques Sevin. Well, every morning, scouts are used to praying the Lord and hoisting the flag of their country.

However, these young German are reluctant to hoisting their flag because they are ashamed of the horrors of the recent past of their country. Instead, they have decided to hoist the twelve-star flag adopted by the Council of Europe during its meeting of December 8th 1955, feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. For most members of parliament of that time, who were Christians, this flag evoked the passage of the Revelation by saint John: "a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her

² Christifideles Laici, 46.

³ cf. St Mathew 22, 34-40 and « Scouting for boys » in the 22nd Bivouac

head a crown of twelve stars". For non Christian members of parliament, the crown of twelve stars was simply a sign of plenitude.

Yet Belgian and French scouts find that this habit of our German young scouts is quite strange and they start discussing with them. The conclusion is that if the German people has a duty of memory, young people are not responsible for the madness of their parents. Is there a country without any black period in its history? So they decide that now on the young German scouts will hoist the flag of the "Bundesrepublik" beside the twelve-star flag and French and Belgian scouts commit themselves to hoist the twelve-star flag beside their own national flag.

This is how, long before the decision of the European Union to adopt the twelve-star flag in 1985, this flag has already floated for thirty years upon the FSE camps.

The three principles of guides and scouts of Europe

Simultaneously to this work of purification of memory, these young Europeans are going to try and define the aims of their movement by giving a new formulation of the three principles redacted by **Father Jacques Sevin** in 1920⁴ in the context of former French scouting. They choose some simple sentences, accessible to young people whose mental structures are not yet fixed and who, for this reason, must be able to find around them the references and the anchorage points allowing them to keep the course of their life and going ahead without being confused in an uncertain world.

A text from **Robert Schuman**, a French statesman and great Christian, one of the fathers of Europe, and another text from **Pope Paul VI** directed to the European Movement, will be at the basis of this process of updating. (Please note that Father Jacques Sevin was declared "venerable" by Pope Benedict XVI a few months ago and that the beatification process of Robert Schuman is now being studied in Rome).

The 1st principle « **A boy scout's duty starts at home** » is integrally taken from Father Sevin's principle.

The 2nd principle « **Faithful to his country, a boy scout favors European unity and brotherhood** » is taken from a declaration made by Robert Schuman in 1957-58. Let me read it to you. It is very important to understand the past action of our movement in your country.

« We must make Europe, not only in the interest of free countries, but also in order to welcome the Eastern countries who, after getting free from the servitudes that they have suffered till now, could possible ask us for joining us and for our moral support. For many years, we have been seriously hurt by the ideological boundary line that splits Europe. It has been imposed by violence. May it fade away in freedom! We consider as a full part of living Europe all those who wish to join us in a reconstituted community. We render homage to their courage and their faithfulness, as well as to their sufferings and their sacrifices. We must give the example of a united and fraternal Europe. Each step that we make in this direction will constitute for them a new chance. They will need us in the huge task of readjustment that they will have to do. [...] Our duty is to be prepared. »⁵

This text is prophetic and has a strange echo in scouts' ears. It was used again in August 1964 by Wilhelm Jung, Federal commissioner at that time, in front of all the participants of the "Eurojam" of Marburg, gathered in front of the barbed wires of the iron curtain near Eisenach.

Paul VI's allocution of November 9th 1963 to the European Movement will be at the basis of the redaction of the 3rd principle: « **As a son of Christendom, a scout is proud of his faith: he labors to establish the reign of**

⁴ Principles redacted by Father Sevin within the context of former scouting :

1. A boy scout is proud of his faith and submits his whole life to it.
2. A boy scout is a son of France and a good citizen.
3. A boy scout's duty starts at home.

⁵ Unpublished text, published after Robert SCHUMAN's death (on September 4th 1963) but this text was written in 1957 or 1958. Generally only the first part of the declaration is quoted.

Christ in all his life and in the world around him ». The Pope considers Europe as a “interdependent Christendom... quite ready to be vivified by a same spirit and animated by a fraternal and communitarian spirit. In order to achieve these aims, a psychological preparation can only play a benefic and perhaps decisive role... It is important to idealize the tasks to be done and inform everyone, especially youth, of the excellence of the cause of unified Europe...”

The final version of the three principles was adopted at the Federal Council of Antwerp, in Belgium, at All Saints' Day 1964. The Federal Council committed itself to be prepared if, thanks to the Providence, the countries behind the iron curtain became free. John Paul II's election is the “shutter release” and as soon as 1978 the first contacts are taken in Eastern Europe. The will of creating FSE associations in the countries of the ex-soviet block as soon as the fall of the Berlin wall is a concrete illustration of Robert Schuman's declaration, which is not forgotten in our movement : **in 1989, we are prepared**. At that time, we were thinking that our scouting, among other initiatives, might take part usefully in the renewal of a civil and ecclesial society in the countries that had been submitted to a totalitarian dictatorship for many years.

Our commitment of 1964 was not forgotten in 1989

« No speech, let us show our scouting as it is lived », such is the slogan of the FSE after the fall of the iron curtain. At that time, we thought, and what will follow will confirm it, that our scouting, method of education relying on notions of natural order, could perfectly, among all sorts of initiatives, satisfy the expectations of families of Eastern countries wishing to rebuild on the ruins of atheistic totalitarianism a civil and religious society in the context of the new evangelization recommended by our Polish Pope.

Twenty years after the huge wave of enthusiasm that pushed the Western youth to cross Europe and come to pray the Black Virgin, now that the tide is low, we only discover some rocks appearing on the surface. On one of these rocks, the Baussant flag is floating and we can be proud of this.

On November 18th 1965, the Polish Episcopate sent a message of reconciliation to the German bishops, inviting them to take part in the millenary of the Christianization of Poland. On last August 17th, the Patriarch Kirill co-signed in the royal palace of Warsaw, with Bishop Michalik, a historical call to reconciliation between the Russian and Polish peoples. These events are important and imply concrete realizations. The European guides and scouts of Poland, with the help of their brothers from the whole FSE scout community, are ready, as it is shown by their multiple activities in Russia, Byelorussia, Ukraine and many other countries.

European guides and scouts of Poland! May the Lord protect you and bless your action!

Maurice Ollier

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