

SOCIETY

If we want to summarize, here is an extract from the Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church: *“The Church has the right to evangelize social life, that is to say to proclaim the liberating word of the Gospel in the complex world of production, work, enterprise, finance, trade, politics, jurisprudence, culture and social communications in which man is living”*. It is even a duty.

Such is our subject. This sentence tries to explain the aim of our discussion this morning. I know that everyone of you can know all this and can discuss about it, give testimony on this subject, according to his experience. But first of all it is necessary to know the basic principles of the social doctrine of the Church; we must also deepen the way of applying them concretely in our daily life (Marc has received a specific mission from his archbishop for this). And our know-how and our experience lived in scouting are unique and can be transposed as a service in the Church and even outside the Church; because our method is adequate to act in society (www.diocese-bourges.org/oesd).

Reminders – Common basis

We must start with reminders, so that all of us speak the same language. First of all, I am going to summarize your answers about society. (See Roadbook p. 34-36 too). Your answers give us a first image of what we call the contemporary society (see also the points noted on the slide).

I suggest you to study a conference by Hannah ARENDT about culture (in the Sixties) in Between past and future. She explains that even if you think that a consumption society will be more educated, it is wrong because of the mechanism of consumption that will always take the first place. So, if we do not change this perspective of consumption, if we do not solve the problem at its basis, we'll not be able to build a true society; the consumption behavior pollutes systematically the whole environment, like a bad smell. This analysis is not new, as you see, this is why we can share these things with non christian people who are not sharing our ideas. But we must rely on solid bases and on the good foundations that exist in society (at least 5% good). So we must analyze the good things in order to rely on them.

Scouting can contribute to an improvement of social values (see slide).

In his last message to scouts, BP gives us some suggestions (see slide). It is a testament but he starts telling a story, Peter Pan's story. Then he gives some simple advice: happiness as an essential point of our life; to look at the bright side of things, to concentrate on what is good in order to build the world...

In Scouting for Boys, he also adds a sub-title: “a handbook for instruction in good citizenship through woodcraft”. See also the drawing at the beginning of bivouac 5. The boy is alone, he is ready to welcome other young people to experience scouting, but also to live in society. The main aim of scouting is not to live in woods but to prepare young people to act as citizens in society.

In Aids to Scoutmastership, he writes that scouting is an education to life in society, through game. And he reminds us of the important role of women, so of their training: when mothers are good citizens and have character, they see that these various aspects are transmitted to their sons. Training is necessary for both sexes, principles are the same but must be adapted.

Our Religious Directory deepens some of these important points. On purpose, I have not chosen an extract of the Charter but of the Religious Directory, which gives a specific light on the way we see society and how we can act in society (see slide). Our aim is not to make politics but to contribute to the training of citizens, to build a true European brotherhood... in order to build a more just and fraternal society.

In order to act really and in truth, we must rely on the magisterium of the Church as regards social affairs and not only in the economic field. We must know these principles and welcome them. When they are not respected, the social character of the human person and the quality of the economic activity are compromised (Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church, § 583).

The basic principle is the dignity of the human person, of any human person, from his birth to his death. Man must be in the center of everything, of every reflection, in particular in the center of the bioethical reflection on medical research, which is becoming more and more important in the present world. This comes from the fact that we have been created at God's image, we are made for God. With non Christian people, it is possible to prove the priority of this principle, on a simply human aspect.

The other principles proceed from this first principle:

- Common good, narrowly connected to authority, which is neither the sum of all individual goods nor the general interest of the nation (a term which is much used in France by political leaders). It is the fact of creating an environment helping everyone in society to develop all his personal potentiality. "Bread and games", even if we are not in wartime, is not enough. Authority has to ensure this common good, but it is not easy to apply every day.
- The universal destination of goods, with the legitimacy of private property but also the preferential option for the poor. The three points are intimately linked. If we separate one point from the other ones, we have the beginning of problems (collectivism, individualism...). The point is not to oppose these aspects but to find the best way of combining them. We have said that we want to lighten society with the light of the Gospel; many people, even without being Christian, may understand that it is necessary to take care of the poor. Nobody can refuse this. But the speech of the Church isn't not to forget the poor but to give them the priority (example of the light of the Gospel to welcome and deepen better a purely human principle; we can go much further than many people, because we follow Christ, knowing that people who surround us have sometimes difficulties to go as far as we do).
- Subsidiarity: the basic principle is to do all that is at our level, everyone having to bring his stone to the building; the superior society intervenes only in a subsidiary way (for instance if we are not able to realize our mission). So, if we make a link with what we said yesterday, it is not the State that delegates part of the education to families; it does not come from above. Because we are unique, free, a person, we may / must choose a person whom we want to marry in order to found a family. In the European Union, the problem is that decisions are taken at the central level, the European Commission taking the lion's share, which means taking the power from families and nations.
- Principle of participation: we are not supporters, we must take our place, play our role in society, everyone at his place. We are not sure of winning. We must not lose courage if we do not see a positive result to our action. Nevertheless, we must participate as we want to.
- Principle of solidarity: it is a general and very important principle. It is quite easy with people of good will.

We could talk about the family, work, justice (distributive and commutative justice), religious freedom, freedom of conscience, ethical references... or even the integral development of the human person (especially for us educators), "of the whole man and of all men" (see Paul VI, John XXIII but also John Paul II).

Caritas in veritate gives a lot of advice of discernment for action (§ 5 and 21). We must face the crisis of society and for this we must deepen the social doctrine of the Church. Social action may imply several concrete ways of doing (Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 2442). Nobody knows beforehand if it is better to have a king or a president, it can be discussed; but both have to respect the principles mentioned above. We must try to do our best at the light of these principles.

Scouting and society in the world and in Europe of the XXIst century

Scouting enables us to experience:

- The unique place of each person,
- The principles of life in a small society, with its good and bad aspects, with a common law:
 - o Understanding what happens when we do not respect the principles mentioned above,
 - o Understanding that it is possible to live according to these principles (so why shouldn't we try to apply them also in society in general),
 - o Experiencing the brakes and points of support,
 - o Committing oneself with brothers,
 - o Training oneself to serve,
 - o Experiencing gratuity, competence, observation, priority to the poorest, to the smallest (and the spiritual profit that proceeds from that, not only for the one who acts but also for the whole team or patrol... Hearts open themselves and the style of the unit changes when we welcome young people from other social classes).

Each scout, guide is then able to discern, to act, to commit himself / herself, to give testimony and to drag the others in order to leave the world a little better than we have found it. Then young people give the best of themselves.

Remark : the powerpoint presented during the camp is available to participants. A detailed document, in French, has been written by Marc and is also available, with Internet links and added complements according to the questions that were asked at the end of the conference. It can be used as you want. ■