

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHIEFS AND PRIESTS

Generalities

One day, a priest who was a chaplain in another scout movement than ours told me that, considering our enormous task and the impossibility of doing everything correctly, he thought that he could evangelise the scouts only through the chiefs and that it was not indispensable for him to meet the boys. I protested vigorously because, even if scouting, whatever it may be, is a movement led by lay people for lay people, I can't imagine not being among the young people whom it gathers. I come more for the young people than for the chiefs, except that my people is composed of all persons gathered by the Movement.

We are here because scouting is a Church activity but, much before the encyclical letter "Christi Fideles Laici", lay people have had an active part and responsibilities in the Christian community.

We are present because we have to make unity between all the Christians to whom we are sent, be they in scouting or elsewhere. We are present to be among the scouts a member of the Body of the Church, at our place, only at our place but fully at our place!

We are here to warrant, at least by our presence, that any word said on behalf of God and to God is said within the Church.

European scouting aims at forming fervent and missionary Christians, deeply linked to Christ by a strong personal relationship to him, holding their whole place in the Church. We want to form adult Christians on whom we'll be able to rely, inserted in society, taking in all fields fruitful initiatives and responsibilities for their neighbour. "With you I am a Christian, for you I am a priest", said saint Augustine.

We are here because if we want to be faithful to a well understood Christian spirit, nobody must try to separate religious life from the technical life of a unit. Faith animates the whole life of a person and gives him its full development, so that Christians cannot live fully without the active presence of a priest in their life.

For the choice of a priest, see the subject « Insertion into the local Church », treated by father Rendler.

Participation to decisions

We do not have to organise activities or to take decisions, not because of a lack of time but because it is not our task.

Priests may take part in Courts of Honour, Chiefs' Councils, Clan or Fire Councils and then take part to decisions but their presence is not always indispensable.

The priest suggests, insists if he estimates that it is necessary, asks but never has the final word in the decisions which are taken. Nevertheless, he must share as much as possible the chiefs' decisions, in order to assume with them the consequences of the decisions, even if he does not quite agree with them.

If chiefs are inexperienced in their task, he normally has a greater experience about youth education; so he may give precise advice; but except in a very serious case, he never imposes a decision. Only once I had to go against a chief's decision: the big adventure of a camp had already lasted two days, with a very bright sunshine. The chiefs wanted to have Mass in the sun. I refused without any hesitation, all the more because one boy had already been in hospital for two days for insolation.

Faith testimony

Considering the part taken by chiefs in our scouting, they are quite naturally led to testify of their faith, to apply concretely the third principle said at their promise: « The scout, the guide labours to establish the reign of Christ in all his / her life and in the world around him / her ». This requires from him an unceasing deepening of his faith and the desire of testifying of it directly in the guidance of his group of young people, not only in acts but also in words. Chiefs are allowed, even in the priest's presence, to lead a prayer, to help some boys prepare Mass. And what do they say to a boy who prepares his promise if they don't mention the religious aspect of this step?

Chiefs' training

Logically, this means that the chief goes on continuously training, just like us, priests. For this, the chief has magazines especially made for him by the Movement, possibly some meetings for chiefs on specific topics.

For a few years in Besançon, some chieftains and rangers have made a group of formation with a priest (who had been a scout) on theological questions or to discover recent texts from the Pope. But there are also personal means, adapted to each personality. We must encourage our chiefs to such work, even if it is an individual work. I know a chieftain who goes on studying the Catechism of the Catholic Church: I can assure you that she quotes it quite often.

For their personal progression, chiefs receive enough stuff from the Movement. I think especially of the Rover Departure for boys and of the green ribbon for girls. Commissioners are asked and allowed to take stock on this question discreetly but we may also give suggestions.

We take part in the chiefs' formation during the training camps. I have been able to take part in only two camps, with future chieftains. My task was not only to celebrate Mass. The leader of the camp had asked me to speak of the following topics: relations between boys and girls, forgiveness, spiritual guidance.

One of my greatest satisfactions was to animate a retreat for a clan. A boy had wished a subject about the Holy Spirit and I realised that he had not received the sacrament of Confirmation but he dared not tell me; the steps have immediately been taken to fill this vacancy.

Spiritual guidance

Let us speak of it. I really like the fact that our scouting insists so much on it. It is such an efficient means to inscribe the Lord's law into our hearts that the Church, in its great wisdom and its experience, suggests us to practise it insistently. I appreciate the progressive preparation to it offered by scouting. On the one hand, we must observe a normal discretion with everyone; on the other hand, we must be ready to offer this service, inasmuch as – in France at least – young people have to give the name of the religious guider for their Rover Departure or for the green ribbon. But young people do not belong to us and everyone is free to meet the priest of his choice, even outside scouting. We have not a single right upon them!

Repartition of tasks: some examples

1°) a patrol leader has first accepted his task with enthusiasm. But gradually he was disappointed because the boys did not cope with his expectations or, better said, he has not found the right way of leading this boys forward. The troop leader, who holds his place and really wants to do his best, did not perceive early enough what was happening in the patrol, so that the patrol leader's disappointment, added to personal problems due to teenage, provoked a real resignation from the patrol leader. The problem is now the following one: how can we

give new courage to the patrol leader and stimulate him, how can we help him to put his patrol again on the way of good scouting?

In such situation, we must consider the boy's personal evolution, his place in the patrol and in the troop, but also the patrol members' progression. Last Wednesday, I took part in a Court of Honour. We tried to think about all this. This Court has not yet given the expected results. The chief is more than disappointed, maybe discouraged. He has written to me to ask for help. Before receiving his letter, I had written personally to the young boy to offer to help him personally. This is the situation today. Next Monday, we are going to come back to the subject.

2°) another example, with a positive conclusion:

Five years ago, three troops were camping at the same place. In one of the troops, some boys sang Nazi songs and had Nazi reflections. The three chiefs and their assistants tried to discuss with them and make them change, using friendly correction and firmness, but they did not succeed. Then one day two of these boys did the same in the streets of the village. This provoked a big scandal and a witness came to the camp to protest. The chiefs did not know what to do. They asked me to intervene during the morning gathering. At the beginning of my intervention, I did not show my anger. But gradually I expressed it strongly, during 10 to 15 minutes perhaps, in front of 60 boys, rather astonished to see me so angry, as I am usually rather quiet. During the day and the day after, the guilty boys came to me and recognised clearly their mistakes and apologized. We could discuss peacefully. At the end of the camp, the whole concerned patrol (which we had most to complain about) came to say goodbye to me, as to mean by this attitude that all had understood the lesson and that they would remember it.

3°) during a camp, we traditionally have a cooking competition. Once, at the moment of giving marks to the various patrols, I estimated that the chief's behaviour was really bad. He was enjoying himself like a child, without caring of his educating mission (at least this is what I perceived). I became quite cross, so that I had to explain my reaction to him, because he had not understood it.

4°) a clan comes to my house for a week-end. The chief proposes to the rovers a topic from the magazine "Maîtrises", without informing me or asking me to take part in the discussion, without asking my opinion about the article while he disagreed totally with that article. It was his right, of course, but he practically dictated to the rovers what they had to think. He had just written a letter to the national leaders of the Movement, accusing the author of the article of speaking "against the Church". Two rovers informed me afterwards because they disapproved this sort of manipulation of spirits. The district commissioner, who had received a copy of the letter, informed me too. I tried to discuss with the chief but he never answered. What could have been a collaboration ended with no conclusion.

5°) in the town of Besançon, near where I live, there is a yearly pilgrimage at the end of May to a sanctuary to the Virgin Mary on the hills over the town. One year, the Guides and Scouts of Europe, as well as the Scouts de France, were solicited to animate this pilgrimage. I had to help both scout movements to collaborate. At that time, it was quite easy for me as I had responsibilities in both movements.

6°) during a camp, a young boy who was going through a personal drama pretended to go on the loose but he was so frightened that he couldn't escape alone in the night. According to the circumstances, the chief and I ran behind him because there was nothing funny in the boy's attempt. When the chief saw that I joined the boy, he left me with him. Later on he said: "the priest has more life experience than me".

7°) one year, the chiefs were not numerous enough to travel with the troop to the camping place. The chief and his assistant needed to travel ahead, for serious reasons. So they asked me to be responsible for the troop's travel.

8th example, which is very pleasant for me. As I live in the countryside, I can easily find places for a week-end or for a summer camp. All units of Besançon (2 packs, 1 clearing, 1 company, 2 troops, 1 clan, 1 fire, the staff) and isolated patrols came one after another. The research of a week-end place or a camp place is sometimes a precious help brought to the chiefs.