

Presentation:
A Christian Culture of Respect of Nature and Environment in Scouting

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by Baldur Hermans
Secretary General of ICCS

This second Ecumenical Encounter is focussed on an actual and important subject of discussion: nature and environment or – in a religious terminology – creation. And to be more precise: Our respect and behaviour towards this subject.

Our founder's inheritance

We know that the founder of the Scout Movement had a very intimate relation with nature and environment. For this it is a lucrative effort to study carefully his literary inheritance. We will have most interesting discoveries. But also when we look at his artistic work – on his drawings, sketches and paintings – we can see his devotion to nature. And finally: He started scouting also as a way to open children and adolescents a path to the experience of nature, God's creation, on the background of their daily life in a damaged environment by industrial activities and mass concentration in the big cities. This intention finds later a clear reflection in the Scout Law.

But here in our encounter in Athens we want to focus ourselves on a more religious access knowing that this has been also for Lord Robert Baden-Powell as an Anglican Protestant Christian of great importance too.

Our Christian inheritance: God's word – the Bible

Let us start with our biblical fundament of faith. Reading the first and second story of the creation in the Book of Genesis (Gen 1 and 2) we feel and see how unshakable we as human beings are joined to the creation in its whole and that we got for this a high responsibility for the Lord saw that “everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good”. And when we read later in Genesis the story of Noah's Ark (Gen 9,8-9,17) and the new order/covenant that He made with men, we easily will understand what we have to follow.

It is important that in scouting those who belong to the leadership read time by time these stories in Genesis but also to bring them to the ear of our children and young people in the branches. And not at least let us go to the New Testament. So many parables Jesus has given us which include stories and pictures of nature, - creation!

Our liturgical devotion

But there is also a great praise for the Lord's creation in the bible, continuously. Let us take for this some psalms to read, to pray and to include in our scout teaching. I propose to you the psalms 8, 66, 103, 104 and 148. All Christian communities have a rich tradition of liturgical praxis containing texts of meditation, prayers, responses, songs and so on which can be used by our scout groups and in our encounters of training and discussions. At this point – quasi in a second view – I also like to propose to use and to tell the stories of our saints and great Christian teachers and masters of life where we can find praises of the Lord for his creation, stories which tell us about His love of men and of the whole creation.

As a Catholic I always mention at the first place and as dominant example Saint Francis of Assisi (1182 – 1228). You will know roughly his biography. The number of books about him is countless. He left us a wonderful prayer praising the Lord's creation. I will add it at the end of these lines. Saint Francis became in Catholic Scouting the patron of the Cub Scouts. So many cubs know the stories about his sermon to the birds and his friendly encounter with a wolf which terrified the inhabitants of the town of Gubbio in Italy.

But in our tradition – and I suspect this also for the Greek Orthodox Church – there are remarkable number of saints, men and women, who are in a close relation with God's creation. I mention Saint Patrick of Ireland, Saint Hildegard from Bingen in Germany, Saint John Bosco from Italy ... Some of them have left us wonderful texts of praise about the divine creation.

But this is not a tradition that ended in old days. A famous theologian and natural scientist in modern times, the Jesuit Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) brings us to reflection of creation by the wide aspects of modern natural sciences. So he was called by Pope Paul VI. "an indispensable man of our times". In his famous Hymn of the Universe Teilhard de Chardin prays: "I live at the heart of single, unique element, the centre of the Universe, and present in each part of it: personal Love and cosmic Power ...".

Unfortunately there is no time and space to go deeper and more extensive into this explanation. But I like to recommend it to you.

Our responsibility in society and politics

Sometimes we come across a reaction in Scouting that shows an absolute distance to all that could be political. But I am not speaking about party-political activities and strategies. I mean that Christians have beside a great responsibility for social and public life (justice, welfare, health, peace etc.) also an ethical based responsibility for nature and environment. And there is a cross over between all. In the Catholic Church we are using the so called "Social-Christian Teaching" as a fundament for our positions concerning and contributions to social life and for all the questions around the protection of nature and a human and healthy environment that we have to hand over to our children and grand children. We have to commit ourselves to this ethical complex and to find out what scouting as a movement of children, adolescents and adults can contribute by its educational, social and ecological projects, activities and daily behaviour. And this – as we see clearly today – under the demand of sustainable care.

I am sure that this is not only a "Catholic" issue. It is our common challenge. The protection of the bio-diversity, the care for natural sources of human life, the problems of a balance between economy and ecology and so on can not be excluded from our scout life and from our Christian responsibility for God's creation that is not our own.

Our educational methods and targets, projects and seminars/workshops have to be open to and to be used for this ethical-political issue too.

The Song of Praise of Saint Francis of Assisi

Most High, all powerful, good Lord,
to You all praise, glory and honour and all blessing;
to You alone, Most High, they belong
And no one is worthy of naming You.

Praised by You, my Lord,
with all Your creatures.
especially Milord Brother Sun,
who brings day, and by whom You enlighten us;
he is beautiful, he shines with great splendour,
of You, Most High, he is the symbol.

Praised be You, my Lord, for sister Moon and the Stars:
in the heavens you formed them,
clear, precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, for Brother Wind,
and for the air and for the clouds,
for the azure calm and for all climes
by which You give life to Your creatures.

Praised by You, my Lord, for Sister water,
who is very useful and humble,
precious and chaste.

Praised by You, my Lord, for Brother Fire,
by whom you enlighten the night:
he is beautiful and joyous,
indomitable and strong.

Praised by You, my Lord,
for Sister our mother the earth,
who nourishes us and bears us,
and produces all kinds of fruits,
with the speckled flowers and the herbs.

Praised by You, my Lord, for those who pardon
for love of You bear sickness and trial.
Blessed are those who endure in peace,
by You, Most High, they will be crowned.

Praised by You, my Lord, for Sister Death,
from whom no-one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in their sins!
Blessed are those that she finds doing Your will.
no second death can do them harm.
We praise and bless You, my Lord and give You thanks,
and serve You in humility.

(There are more English translations which differ a little from each other!)