



THE RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES OF THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA



SCOUTING IS YOUTH MINISTRY IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The complex world of the 20th century, with its emphasis on instant answers and high technology, has had a devastating effect on our young people. Working mothers, single-parent families, and the difficulties of maintaining family life all add to the problem. The suicide rate among teenagers is the highest of any age group, and you will find drugs and alcohol prevalent even among preteens. It is no wonder that young people wander about in search of something to hang on to, someone to trust and in whom to confide. They have difficulty finding God, because there is no one to show them the way.

How significant it is, therefore, that the latest revisions of the Boy Scout Handbook have restored the emphasis on duty to God in its pages. For, while the charter of the Boy Scouts of America has always had a religious principle, it was not always obvious to the individual youth in the unit.

In recent years, as the Catholic Church developed its apostolate to youth more fully, it became known as youth ministry. Scouting is a significant part of this ministry.

There is one particular aspect of Scouting that deserves special attention today, that is, Scouting has a tremendous potential for developing Christian leadership.

Many of our youth today are struggling with an identity crisis and problems that growing up in these times often creates. Boys involved in the Scouting experience have a real advantage in coming to know themselves and attaining skills that will give direction to their lives.

Training, challenging, and supporting young men to develop responsibility, maturity, and leadership are constant elements of the BSA.

The Catholic Church is fortunate to have in the Scouting movement so apt a vehicle for Christian development. Scouting is vital in today's world as a unique opportunity for young people to grow in faith, life, and leadership.

The Boy Scouts of America has consistently stressed the necessity of the spiritual life for youth and the importance of dependence on God.

Though programs have come and gone as the Boy Scouts of America has responded to changing times, the recognition of this spiritual principle has remained constant.

On October 10, 1985, the national Executive Board of the Boy Scouts of America passed a resolution reaffirming the Scout Oath and the Scout Law as important precepts of Scouting. The resolution is consistent with the original principles of the BSA when it was founded in 1910. The Religious Relationships Committee, whose members represent all the major religions that are affiliated with the BSA, endorsed the resolution.

The BSA passed this resolution to reaffirm its commitment of "Duty to God."

The twelfth point of the Scout Law says: "A Scout is reverent."

More than half a century ago, the Boy Scouts of America and the Catholic Church drew up a plan of cooperation, which is still working well. The Church recognized Scouting as a program that provides rich, educational experiences and essential character enrichment. At the same time, the Boy Scouts of America realized that its vision demanded strong spiritual support, and the Church is the provider of this support.

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Youth ministry today demands a total commitment to youth, a commitment that must be totally Christ leading. Scouting, with its many programs and activities, can bring a Scout to a greater knowledge of God through nature and comradeship.

With the addition of a spiritual emphasis such as that provided by the Catholic Committee on Scouting on a local, diocesan, and national level, the local Scouting unit can have a program that will lead young people to Christ.

Scouting is basically an educational program and thus it is just as important to train leaders to work with youth as it is to train youth. Scouting under Catholic auspices must train youth to be good citizens and good Catholics (or members of whatever faith to which our Scouts belong). Adult leaders must be trained to do the job well.

To meet this need, the National Catholic Committee on Scouting developed the Scouter development program several years ago to help our adult leaders relate their Christianity to Scouting. To do the job effectively, our leaders must know what is expected of them, and so Scouter development trains them in the basic philosophy of youth ministry, with particular attention to the religious, vocational, and educational aspects. At the same time the spirituality of participants in the Scouter development program is given an opportunity to grow and develop.

A variety of programs exist to underline the importance of religion in Scouting. Through the Catholic Committee on Scouting, there are opportunities for weekend retreats for Boy Scouts and Varsity Scouts, days of spiritual activity for Cub Scouts, and special activities for Venturers. Religion and Scouting must relate to each other. They cannot be put into separate categories - Scouting for weekdays, religion for Sundays. Today's young people can perceive falsity easily. They seek God and want to find Him - not just on Sundays, but every day. And what a Scout learns in the troop program cannot contradict the principles of his faith. To teach him how to build a fire is of no value if he uses that skill to burn down other people's property.

Through the Religious Emblems program of the Catholic Committee on Scouting, a boy can learn how to put his faith and his Scouting together in an integrated learning experience. By working on the religious emblem for his age, a boy reinforces what he learns in the parish religious education program. This can lead to his selection of a religious vocation.

Finally, but by no means least in importance, the principles of the Oath and Law should be explained both from a Scouting point of view and from a religious point of view. If a boy does not live up to one of these points, it is the duty of the leader to point out the religious failing as well as the Scouting deficiencies.

The practical expression of Christianity is seen in the Scout slogan, "Do a Good Turn Daily." This should be stressed frequently so that boys do not lose perspective in what they are doing.

The Scouting apostolate is truly a most important aspect of youth ministry in our Church.

The Scout Oath and Law teaches a boy respect for authority, develops an attitude of service, and encourages the Christian way of life.

It is strongly recommended that:

- At a boy's Tenderfoot investiture ceremony he is given a copy of this interpretation of the Scout Oath and Law.
- At some time during his first 6 months in Scouting, he discusses with his parents the meaning and obligations of the Scout Oath and Law.
- Provisions are made during Scout Sunday observance for all members of the unit to rededicate themselves to the precepts of the Scout Oath and Law.
- At least once a year, each unit leader or Scout chaplain discusses with his unit the meaning and obligations of the Scout Oath and Law.
- During Scout Retreats and Days of Recollection, each member of the unit is provided an opportunity to "check his course:" to determine just how well he is living up to these precepts.

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THE SCOUT OATH

"On my honor I will do my best": Our honor is a quality we possess because of our dignity as human beings and children of God. Our "best" means to give all we have. It means to keep striving to do what we know is right, and in the Oath it means we will try to be good Scouts by fulfilling our Scout duties as expressed in the Scout Law.

"To do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law": Our duty to God and country means chiefly two things: obedience and loyalty. The duties we owe to the church, to our country, to parents; to one another, and to ourselves come from some command of God. The Scout Law sums up all the qualities a Scout should have and without which he cannot be a good Scout.

"To help other people at all times": Our Lord told us that love of our neighbor was like the first law of love of God. Early Christians were known by the love they had for one another. Real Christian charity or love prompts us to want to help others at all times. Our Scouting training will give us skills and knowledge that will put us in a better position to do this.

"To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight": Scouting offers us many opportunities to grow strong physically. To be alert and ready requires us to give special care to those two gifts of soul – intellect and will – that make us like unto God. "Morally straight" means we must try to know what is right and true, to love what is good, and to choose it.

THE SCOUT LAW

The Scout Law is really a definition of a Scout. Wearing the uniform alone does not make a Scout. In fact, the boy who keeps the Scout Law, even if he has no uniform, is the real Scout far more than one who wears the uniform but does not keep the Law. This is the Scout Law you promise to obey in the Scout Oath:

A Scout is trustworthy: Character is what a man is. Reputation is what people think about him. A youth of character is worthy of trust. No one is worthy of trust who does not recognize his dignity and the dignity of all men as children of God.

A Scout is loyal: Because our first loyalty is to God, a Scout is loyal to all to whom loyalty is due - his parents, his church, and his country.

A Scout is helpful: Christ has told us that the good turns we do for others will be considered as done to him. The reason we are helpful is that we see Christ in everybody. If our Lord was willing to die for everybody, a Scout certainly should be ready to render help. The whole Scout program gives us an opportunity to be helpful.

A Scout is friendly: The basis and motive of this point of the Law is Christian charity. We are all children of the same father, and brothers of Jesus Christ. Recognizing this, a Scout should be a friend to all, and a brother to every other Scout.

A Scout is courteous: A Scout should respect the image of God in everyone. The meaning of love as a Scout should be taken from the words of Christ himself: "I have come not to be served, but to serve."

A Scout is kind: This point of the Law refers mostly to animals. They exist for our use. They have life and feeling, and God has given them to us as a trust. As such, we must use them well, never abusing or mistreating them.

A Scout is obedient: Jesus Christ gave us an example of perfect obedience throughout his life. This will be a difficult point of the Law for a Scout to keep because it will mean discipline and giving up his own will at times. He should obey, not because the command pleases him, but because the one giving it has the right to do so, is someone in authority, and is right in doing so. Disobedience brought death and sin into the world. Obedience brought our salvation. Real victory comes from obedience - first to God and then to all he has placed in authority as long as they deserve our obedience.

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A Scout is cheerful: Joy should be one of the marks of a child of God. A Scout will have joy in his heart and manifest it outwardly by his cheerful manner.

A Scout is thrifty: Thrift teaches self-respect, making us unwilling to be a burden to others. Far from being a burden, we are able by thrift to help them. A Scout is deeply concerned with preserving our natural resources.

A Scout is brave: He can face danger even if he is afraid. He has courage to stand for what he thinks is right even if others scorn him.

A Scout is clean: He keeps clean in body and thought; stands for clean speech, clean sport, clean habits; and travels with a clean crowd.

A Scout is reverent: He is reverent toward God. He is faithful in his religious duties and respects the convictions of others in matters of custom and religion.

RELIGIOUS EMBLEMS FOR CATHOLICS

For Cub Scouts: Light of Christ & Parvuli Dei

A home centered program to help the Cub Scout learn about his faith through visits to places of interest.

For Boy Scouts and Varsity Scouts: Ad Altare Dei

A scripture study and project centered program based on the sacraments to relate the boy's Scouting life to his religious life.

For Boy Scouts, Eastern Catholic Churches: Light Is Life

Program based on the "God With Us" series of the Eastern Christian Formation Program to prepare a Scout to be an active member of his faith community.

For Older Scouts and Venturers: Pope Pius XII

A program to help the teenager learn more about his/her personal vocation as a Christian now and his/her career vocation later.

SPECIAL UNIT RECOGNITION

POPE PAUL VI National Unit Recognition:

An annual presentation to units under Catholic auspices that carry out a high quality Catholic oriented program.

Requirements include:

- Scouter development training
- Participation in a religious formation activity (retreat, day of recollection, etc.)
- Religious emblems participation
- Good turns to the parish and community
- Planning for increased membership
- Rededication and explanation to the principles of the Oath and Law

REFERENCES

1. *Scouter Development: Lay Apostolate Formation*, No. 16-147
2. *Pope Paul VI National Unit Recognition*, No. 16-169
3. *Religious Emblems for Catholics*, No. 16-436
4. *A Scout is Reverent*, BSA No. 33075