



DESMOS

INTERNATIONAL LINK
OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN SCOUTS

LE LIEN INTERNATIONAL
DES SCOUTS ORTHODOXES

**ADDRESS OF CHRISTOS PAPAGEORGIOU, DESMOS PRESIDENT,
AT THE 3RD WORLD SCOUT INTER-RELIGIOUS SYMPOSIUM, KAMPALA, UGANDA**

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Dear Brother Scouts,

The group of topics that constitute the core of this year's World Scout Inter-Religious Forum has always been a theme most dear to me throughout my long scouting journey. It has been both a theme to reflect as well as live upon, and it is on a very humble note that I would like to share with you some personal thoughts and my general outlook.

There are many ways in which the topics of solidarity, reflection and celebration possibly interconnect. According to which of these three themes one would ultimately favor, different ways of interconnectedness might well appear, all of them fruitful, valid and useful. Yet, judging from my particular share of experience, I would like to address the issue from a special standpoint. That would be understanding reflection and celebration not only as "goods-in-themselves" but as means to achieving a goal. And that goal would be solidarity. I would have nothing to object to anyone that would point out the opposite view, namely that

solidarity is a prerequisite to reflection and celebration. I have the feeling that, given the profound interconnectedness of the topics, anyone's take on their respective hierarchy in value is legitimate. I sincerely do not view my own outlook as in one way or another privileged, but only as a different way to enlighten fundamental points which we all dearly share.

It has always seemed to me that reflection is a key characteristic of human nature, and it has deservedly been deemed high in the scout's values for that very reason. To reflect means quite simply to be elevated above the experiences of everyday life, in a stance where this very life becomes meaningful, well-viewed and well-ordered. I might commit an evil deed, yet what renders my doing evil (or good) cannot be honestly understood, unless I go back and forth to judge not only the immediate causes and consequences of my action, but its general meaning and deep connotations. I might for instance insult someone unwillingly. To reflect upon this means to judge my whole conduct so as to faithfully observe whether I was neglectful of my manners, or took for granted things that to my addressee are not, or whether I am rather prone to insulting even against my will. Quite simply, reflecting means to put your everyday life under the observant law of spirituality. Everyday life is exciting and spontaneous, yet it is only under the spell of reflection that it becomes meaningful and turns you into an existence well bounded to the bundle of experiences and relations that constitute our participation in the game of life. I mentioned spirituality not in random. Spirituality is the high-end of reflection. One cannot be spiritual unless he reflects, and the opposite is not entirely false. I have always thought that reflection follows an initial vocation to spirituality.

In scouting life we have all been granted many occasions to reflect. I doubt whether there is anyone to be called a Scout that has never used his scouting experience as a path to reflection. In a sense, scouting itself urges to praise everyday life but by slightly and elegantly transcending it. We were all raised to be scouts and the marks of reflection are well impressed within the most intimate levels of our personal lives. What I mean by this, is simply that Scouting is a means to reflect upon our everyday life. Through the complex of values and meaningful action that form the core of the scouting experience, everyone of us has been able to look common reality with a different and well enriched view.

On the other hand, celebration is again one key feature of human behavior. I have no knowledge of a culture that does not evolve around celebration. It may be a national holiday, a personal memory or a religious feast. No culture can exist or survive unless it forces its identity upon fixed points of reference, hope and memory. Yet celebration is not just about anniversaries, personal or public. To celebrate means more generally, to be happy about an event. Celebrations do not occur just because tradition bids them to happen, nor because it is plainly and usually being done so. I celebrate because I am happy. And I could be happy about nearly everything. But what I consider the most important characteristic of celebrating is its sociality. A man that celebrates on his own is perhaps a sad figure. Celebrating involves being alongside others. Celebrating means to share my happiness with others, no matter what the others would be.

Who would doubt the view that Scouting is a life-long celebration? Optimism and sharing are integral parts of the scouting life. A Scout is given many chances to celebrate. From its very beginnings scouting has been closely linked with celebration. Scouts organize meetings, journeys, camps, feasts and jamborees. Yet what I deem as its most vital feature is its unique ability to disseminate as well as invite. Scouts are not a closed group of people cut-off from the rest of the local or global society that surrounds them. Scouting aims to make other people celebrate as well as integrate different people to its very celebrations. A Scout does not celebrate just because he feels happy, but in order to make other people happy or invite them to his celebration. A man has plenty to celebrate about outside his scouting life. There, it could be all about himself: his marriage, his promotion, his winning the lottery. But within scouting, people celebrate not themselves but their bonds with each other and with the community surrounding them.

Having made these initial remarks concerning reflection and celebration, what I seem to be owing you is a look on the interconnectedness of reflection and celebration and their combined strength to serve as means for achieving solidarity. On a first look nothing seems more strange to reflection than celebration. Reflection is usually seen as a one man's show. I usually reflect when I have time to be a little remote from my immediate obligations and interactions and find time to think on my own. I then have the opportunity to place myself not as a subject but as an object of observation. However, that this would be a single-minded approach to the essence of reflection. When I reflect I don't indulge myself in a sterile thinking of my own self and nothing else. I rather place myself in a strict observance of my relation to other people, other values and mentalities and different priorities. I am trying to decide and follow my right attitude not egotistically but with regard to others to who I simply serve as an object. Reflection is the proper means to understand that I am not the centre of the universe and it simply serves me to place myself in the right place within this manifold of the sheer diversity and otherness that constitutes what we call everyday life. I reflect not in order to "find my true self", but in order to find the proper way to live with others. Reflection that does not proceed from everyday life back to everyday life is a dead-end.

Given this reciprocal character of reflection one can understand more clearly its sociality. And yet we understood sociality to be one of the fundamentals of celebration. And we also saw that true celebration as endorsed by scouting does not involve to celebrate things that relate to myself but occasions that reach out as well as invite different people. Now I sincerely think that a union of reflection and celebration is one of the corner-stones of scouting. Reflection and celebration are two ways to be immersed into the sociality of life. But the most important thing is to understand that these two ways may well interweave. In scouting life reflection is combined with celebration and celebration with reflection. In a way, I may reflect through celebrating and celebrate through reflecting.

And now we come to solidarity. According to a misunderstanding of the concept of solidarity, one shows his solidarity when he deems himself tolerant with people of his own group or ethnicity. A view that goes slightly less amiss, understands solidarity as the integration in my own group, people formerly belonging to a different group. Both views misunderstand solidarity in two crucial ways. The first view does not stress the point that solidarity deals with is judged to be different. The latter view stresses difference above unity, in that it shows solidarity to be nothing more than an opening-up of an undoubtedly closed circle. What I think the true meaning of solidarity is, is viewing all people as essentially different and then essentially same. This has always been a problem in modern thinking. Many people think that true ethics involves accepting everyone's individuality and difference. Other people think that true ethics springs from the acceptance of everyone as at bottom same and identical. Both views misrecognize the fact that they are in fact supplementary. One cannot see difference nor identity everywhere. True solidarity springs from the recognition that everyone is different yet all people can be valued as brothers and sisters despite their insurmountable diversity.

This point, in my view, is crucial to the understanding of the fundamentals of scouting. The Scouting Movement is not here to say that we are all different or all alike, but to stress both assertions. The true magic of Scouting is to render brothers people who don't only seem to be, but are in fact very different. Scouting does not aim to view all differences as only apparent but as real, and paradoxical as it may seem, to transcend this diversity into solidarity. I am your brother not because we are all of a sudden the same, but because I and you differ, we are brothers in difference.

Having stresses the closeness of reflection and celebration, it is not difficult to view them as means to achieving what seems to me to be one of the highest goods in life, solidarity. Through the combination of reflection and celebration, the scout is being prepared to a life of solidarity. And the true end of this preparation is not to be in solidarity with fellow scouts neither with scouts coming from different backgrounds. This is already something accomplished by scouting. The key to essential solidarity is to humbly place scouting within the diversity of global society. Scouting should not be viewed as one world-view among others within this sheer madness of globalization and universal diversity. Representative as it is of the wide religious and cultural differences now existing upon the Earth, Scouting should reflect and celebrate this difference in order to achieve world-scale solidarity: solidarity among its members and solidarity with all the society that surrounds scouting and is in many ways very different to its principles.

Our society has the tendency to change more and more and people become more different than ever. What is at true stake in globalization is that people have realized now, more than before, their deep differences. What we knew before was ourselves and our neighbours, yet now we have come to know so many different nations, religions, backgrounds and mentalities. So perhaps the key solution is not simply to tolerate or accept the fact that others differ. What is more fundamental and should be deemed high priority in Scouting is to reflect and celebrate in a way to bring forth the true meaning of solidarity: that of assuming your difference as my own difference. You are not alone in differing with me, I am at your side because it is I that differs with you. Difference and Identity, this is how understand reflection and celebration within the warm embrace of Solidarity. I have accomplished solidarity when I have reflected and celebrated your very difference.

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