

The Reverend Jacques Sevin (1882-1951), father and soul of catholic scouting.

Father Jacques Sevin introduced scouting to the catholic world. Co-founder of the Scouts de France, he is today a bridge between the three branches of the catholic scout movement.

200 was the number of the Scouts de France at the moment of their foundation.

Dates : 1882 Born in Lille

1933 : Meeting with Baden Powell.

1920 : Founding the Scouts de France

1944 : Founding of La Sainte Croix de Jérusalem

1951 : Death at Boran sur Oise

2012 : Declared 'Vénérable' by Pope Benoît XVI.

Publications to be read.

Quotations

“The best home is the highway, provided that one does not march in ranks”.

“Lord Jesus teach us to be generous, To serve you as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to work and not to ask for any reward save that of knowing that we do your holy will”. (Catholic scout's prayer)

The scouts initiated by Rev RP Sevin

“Even if you have the most outstanding gifts, if you don't have love, you are nothing. Whatever your good works, your BA (the good deed a scout does every day) if you don't have love your scouting is hollowé (inspired by the 1st letter of St Paul to the Corinthians).

“Before everybody, on my honor I commit myself to pay you homage Lord Jesus and to love you more and more without cease, help me to keep my promise Lord Jesus”. Cantic composed by Rev. Sevin.

Appearing for the first time in 1907 and inspired by an idea of an English General, Robert Baden Powell scouting constitutes an original system of education which aims to develop together the physical, moral, intellectual, spiritual and religious aspects of an adolescent. It relies on a system of teams of 5 or 6 young people and emphasizes games, the development of individual responsibility and communing with nature. It is an appeal for every young person to accept responsibility towards himself and towards others and God.

The difficult establishment of scouting in France :

The arrival of scouting in France met with many difficulties. From 1911 were founded the Eclaireurs de France, an association with no religious affinities and the Eclaireurs unionistes de France, a protestant organisation.

In the French Catholic world, marked by a distrust of protestant Great Britain and traumatized by the recent disputes around the law concerning the separation of State and Churches (1905) and internal disputes concerning the place of the Church in the modern world, the inter religious dimension accorded to scouting by Baden Powell (1910, the Sillon crisis) is unacceptable.

In this troubled atmosphere, the Reverend's actions will succeed in making scouting credible while remaining strictly faithful to the principles of Baden Powell.

The Reverend Sevin, organizer and thoughtful visionary.

He organized the Scouts de France, a catholic scouting association of which he was a co-founder. The 200 members at its inception had become 25 000 by 1930. If he was not the sole reason for this success, much of it is owed to him for he was a remarkable organizer but also a profound thinker and visionary.

He confirmed his talent as an organizer by founding in 1923 the training camp at Chamarande, near Paris.

This was a centre for training both male and female leaders of Scouts de France inspired by the system created by Baden Powell. Well before our contemporary training seminars father Sevin understood the importance of this question for the future Scouts de France.

In 1922 he published the book *Le scoutisme [Scouting]*. In a very clear way he explains scouting. Father Sevin is absolutely faithful to the principles of Baden Powell while wishing to give them an added catholic dimension. For Baden Powell who is an Anglican, if scouting is to have a religious element, this should be left to individual interpretation.

So it is that Sevin came to add several extra elements to the scout law which he considered to be at the heart of scouting. This short text of 10 articles sums up the moral values of scouting.

The scout on his honour observes confidence, the scout is the friend of all. Father Sevin introduced an element of nature and the idea of God.

He also added to the text of the scout law three principles “ The scout is proud of his faith, the scout is a true son of France and a good citizen, the duty of the scout begins at home”.

In a certain way father Sevin 'religionised' the scouting of Baden Powell, imbuing it with a vertical strength.

The definite principles in the book *Scouting* gave a solid base to the Scouts de France which explains their success. In addition, the book inspired numerous scout associations throughout the world. Father Sevin also designed the Scouts de France emblem, the cross of Jerusalem together with the lily, symbol of scouting. He also wrote many songs, including the famous *Chant des adieux [Farewell Song]*.

These have contributed to the formation of a strong scouting culture. Above all, he took a text of Ignatius de Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, adapting it to become the scout prayer.

Several of Sevin's initiatives demonstrate his visionary character. He insisted on the mass at camp in the open air. In the twenties this was an absolutely original new idea and anticipated the liturgical innovation of the second Vatican council.

From 1927 he founded scouting for the physically handicapped. He was a pioneer of inter religious dialogue, encouraging from 1928 the creation of the *Eclaireurs israélites de France*, a French Jewish scout association.

Father Sevin, man of action, of humour and of compassion.

A man of action for he was never limited by fixed and immovable ideas of scouting. Man of humour as witnessed by his many songs. Man of compassion for he made the choice of total commitment to Jesus Christ.

In March 1933, following internal wrangling, Father Sevin was thrown out of the organisation of the Scouts de France, though he remained devoted to the association which he had helped to found. Some guide leaders profoundly impressed by his spirituality wanted to imitate him.

He founded in 1944 the congregation of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem which exists today in Boran-sur-Oise. It is there that he died on 19th July 1951.

Today, for reasons linked to his story and that of French Society, French Catholics scouting is made up of three great associations with different sensibilities : The Scouts et guides de France, the Guides et scouts d'Europe and the Scouts unitaires de France.

After some years of difficult relations there has been a considerable improvement. The Reverend Sevin is today a bridge and a link between them.

Jean-Jacques Gauthé, scouting historian, Scouts et Guides de France board of governors member.

Traduction : Jacqueline and Bob Street