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Religious Education in Baden-Powell's Writings

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Abstract: Robert Baden-Powell is well known as the founder of Scouting, an educational movement that spread rapidly around the world after 1907. This article aims to analyse an aspect of his writings that has been little studied: the religious dimension. A deeply religious man, Baden-Powell recognised the presence of God not only in the Bible but also in nature. It is interesting that some of his convictions are now, almost a hundred years later, topical educational insights. Baden-Powell encourages all Scouts in the world to cultivate religious practice by saying: "There can be no atheist Scout". He offers concrete insights that commit the scout educator to take on the innate religious need that many young people express in a personal search for faith motivation.

Keywords: Baden-Powell; faith; nature; non-formal education; religious education; scouting

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1. Introduction

In the Italian context, there are numerous publications, mostly of a popular nature, dedicated to making the figure of Baden-Powell (1857–1941) more widely known. It should be pointed out that the founder of the Scout Movement did not delve into religious education with systematic reflections of his own, as he did with other subjects, but repeatedly returned to the subject, to which he showed great attention and an exquisite sensitivity, marked by his typical sense of concreteness. This historical and pedagogical contribution aims to offer a first approach to this often-neglected aspect, starting from a careful analysis of what emerges from those of his writings that are published in Italian. There are currently no statistics available on the spread of scouting in Italy. By 2024, there are expected to be about 190,000 scouts and guides belonging to the AGESCI ('Associazione Guide e Scouts Cattolici Italiani' [Association of Italian Catholic Guides and Scouts]), i.e., the main scout association in the Italian Catholic tradition.

The purpose of this paper is to offer a first approach to the dimension of religious education, a little-known and mostly neglected topic compared to other aspects of the Scout purpose and principles, based on Baden-Powell's writings published in Italian. From a methodological point of view, this study attempts to recompose Baden-Powell's reflections on religious education within an organic framework. It does not intend to be exhaustive and so is limited to an initial approach offering a first reflection that, in subsequent studies, can be compared with the contributions of other authors who were contemporaries of Baden-Powell or those who have subsequently addressed the topic. Furthermore, it will be possible to study how the scout educational proposal has been declined in various countries from a religious point of view.

The first scouting experiences, conducted in 1907 in England, soon spread rapidly around the world thanks to the publication in 1908 of the handbook, *Scouting for Boys* (Baden-Powell 1908). It should not be forgotten that scouting was viewed with much suspicion in Italy: there were numerous criticisms that it was of Protestant origin, as its

founder was the son of a Protestant pastor. The Catholic world, and in particular 'La Civiltà Cattolica', was raising doubts, perplexities and concerns. In short, the proposed study is not intended to be exhaustive, but to provide an initial reflection that can be compared in subsequent studies with contributions made by other writers who were contemporaries of Baden-Powell or those who have subsequently addressed the subject.

A careful reading of Baden-Powell's writings allows us to grasp a perhaps unprecedented dimension of his personality, that of an educator who was characterised by a profound spirituality that shines through and imprints the entire Scout educational proposal (Dal Toso 2007). Section 2 considers the invitation that he addressed to the scouts: read the book of the Bible and the book of Nature, learning to recognize God's presence there. Section 3 illustrates how Baden-Powell's religion permeates the Scout educational proposal and how, through Scout activities, it is possible to inspire faith in God in even the most educationally troubled boy. Section 4 provides some guidance on religious education. Section 5 contains some of Baden-Powell's reflections on non-denominational religiosity. Section 6 deals with critical and concrete points of reflection that commit the Scout educator to respond to the innate religious need that many young people express in their personal search for faith motivation. After hypothesising possible comparisons with other writers interested in religious education (Section 7), the article argues that Baden-Powell's focus on the religious dimension characterises the Scout educational proposal and would be distorted if neglected by the educator.

2. The Two Main Books: The Bible and Nature

The origins of Baden-Powell's religious spirit can be traced back to the upbringing that he received within his family: from his father, a Protestant pastor and professor of geometry at Oxford University, he learned a love for the books of the Bible, which he learned to read along with his other book, that of Nature, with the guidance of his mother. When she became a widow, she used to take her children on long exploratory walks in the countryside, awaking in them curiosity regarding animals and plants, and guiding them to observe and admire nature.

Thus, Baden-Powell learns that two great books speak of God: the Bible and Nature. He feels that he is part of a vast universe, he feels the strong communion that binds him to Nature and makes him capable of living in harmony with it, but above all, he manifests himself as a person with remarkable sensitivity regarding the sacred and a deeply contemplative spirit. With awe and gratitude, he is able to look at the works of the Creator with ever-new eyes, full of admiration. Faced with the splendour of Creation, he is able to pause; he learns how to remain silent and takes time to savour and enjoy the infinite beauty of the universe, which sends him back to its author, God. With this kind of attitude, man understands his littleness and recognises God as his Creator, with whom he can feel in more intimate contact.

Two recommendations are made to the Scouts: to read the ancient and wonderful books of the Bible and to observe and study that of Nature through the beauties of Creation. Since the wonders of nature exert a great fascination for children and young people—who are naturally inclined to religious discourse—Baden-Powell advocates the need to help them cultivate a taste for beauty by learning to open up to the vast horizons of the universe, so that they can recognise God's presence there. In fact, observing the life of Nature, God's temple, is the best preaching method to help bring them closer to Him, who is also present in the human body, which is His masterpiece to be guarded and developed, thanks also to those talents that He has entrusted to mankind. Baden-Powell believes that "If the simple elemental religion of Nature were more generally used in the first opening of the child's

mind to religion, in place of the theology that neither appeals to nor is understood by him, the result would be very different" (Baden-Powell 1921).

These indications were also referenced by Pope John Paul II:

> Your founder, Baden Powell, loved to point out the two great books that you must always know how to read: the book of nature and the book of the Word of God, the Bible. This is reliable and fruitful advice. By loving nature, living in it and respecting it, you learn to join your voice to the thousand voices of the woods that praise the Lord; immersed in nature, you continue to celebrate your moments of prayer and your liturgies, which will linger in the hearts of the young as unforgettable experiences. By cultivating your tradition of love and study of the Bible, you will always find new paths and ways for an original and effective catechesis, as part of the Italian Church's catechesis and marked by the wealth of symbols and occasions that are valuable to scouting. (Paul 1997)

3. Scouting and Religion

Baden-Powell is convinced that religion is the fundamental factor that pervades Scouting and affirms the possibility of being able to bring faith in God to even the most educationally problematic child through Scouting: "I have been asked to describe more fully what was in my mind as regards religion when I instituted Scouting and Guiding. I was asked: 'Where does religion come in?' Well, my reply is: 'It does not come in at all. It is already there. It is the fundamental factor underlying Scouting and Guiding'" (Baden-Powell 1926). Then, he specifies: "There is no religious side to the Movement. The whole of it is based on religion, that is, on the realisation and service of God" (Baden-Powell 1926).

Here, it is written that "Scout activities are a means by which the worst hooligan can be led to nobler feelings and faith in God can be born in him" (Baden-Powell 1919, p. 45).

After all, according to Baden-Powell, "The boy is naturally inclined towards religion, but it is necessary to educate him critically and gradually" (Baden-Powell 1963, p. 315). He repeats: "The boy is naturally inclined to religion, but to instruct him in the points which may appeal to the adult has often the result of either boring him off it or of making him a prig. A sure way to gain his wholehearted realisation of God is through Nature study, and of his Christian duties through the Scout's practice of good turns, etc". (Baden-Powell 1951, p. 243).

Convinced that it is necessary to give a religious basis to life, Baden-Powell suggests:

> If you are really out to make your way to success—i.e., happiness—you must not only avoid being sucked in by irreligious humbugs, but you must have a religious basis to your life. This is not a mere matter of going to church, of knowing Bible history, or understanding theology. Many men are sincerely religious almost without knowing it and without having studied it. Religion, very briefly stated, means:
>
> Firstly: recognising who and what is God.
>
> Secondly: making the best of the life that He has given one and doing what He wants of us. This is mainly doing something for other people.
>
> That should be your belief, not as a matter of thought for Sundays only, but as one to live up to in every hour and every phase of your daily life.
>
> As steps towards gaining these two points and avoiding atheism, there are two things I would recommend you to do.
>
> One is to read that wonderful old book, the Bible, which, in addition to its Divine Revelation, you will find a wonderfully interesting story-book of history and poetry, as well as morality.

> The other is to read that other wonderful old book, the Book of Nature, and to see and study all you can of the wonders and beauties that she has provided for your enjoyment. And then turn your mind to how you can best serve God while you still have the life that He has lent you. (Baden-Powell 1922, pp. 176–77)

In summary, he reiterates: "Religion seems a very simple thing: 1st: Love and serve God. 2nd: Love and serve your neighbour" (Baden-Powell 1963, p. 231). On the methodological level, Baden-Powell specifies:

> Religion can only be 'caught', not 'taught'. It is not a dressing donned from outside, put on for Sunday wear. It is a true part of a boy's character, a development of soul, and not a veneer that may peel off. It is a matter of personality, of inner conviction, not of instruction. The actions of a very large proportion of our men are, at present, very little guided by religious conviction. This may be attributed to a great extent to the fact that often *instruction* instead of *education* has been employed in the religious training of the boy. (Baden-Powell 1944a, p. 58)

Baden-Powell takes up the issue of religious education. He states: "Religion can and ought to be taught to the boy, but not in a milk-and-watery way, or in a mysterious and lugubrious manner; he is very ready to receive it if it is shown in its heroic side and as a natural everyday quality in every proper man, and it can be well introduced to boys through the study of Nature" (Baden-Powell 1944b). And again, he suggests: "If the simple elemental religion of Nature were more generally used in the first opening of the child's mind to religion, in place of the theology that neither appeals to nor is understood by him, the result would be very different" (Baden-Powell 1921).

Analysing the situation of young people in his time, he perceives the existence of a religious need, to the extent that he states: "Among our young people today, there is a serious desire for religion, a religion that they can understand and put into practice" (Baden-Powell 1922, p. 195).

4. Guidelines of an Education in Religion

Baden-Powell's position is clear: "By religion, I do not imply the formal Sunday respect paid to the Deity, but the higher realisation of God as perpetually within and around us, and the consequent higher plane of thought and of action in His service" (Baden-Powell 1920).

Analysing in an acute and critical manner the pedagogical methods of his time, Baden-Powell notes that in catechism courses, the concern is to instruct rather than to educate; furthermore, religious formation often resolves itself into empty ritualism, into formal Sunday homage paid to the divinity and into functions that have no impact on daily life.

This is why many young people slip into indifference and their actions are minimally guided by religious convictions. Moreover, the decline in their religious attendance is due to a serious neglect of and lack of Christian formation, as they are unable to connect what they were taught in catechism classes, of which they have vague memories, with their own conduct in adult life. Hence, there is a need for religious education, a theme that could be summed up in the invitation addressed to Cub Scouts: "Drink the good air of God" (Baden-Powell 1931, p. 150).

Practical and concrete man that he is, Baden-Powell knows how to combine spirituality with action in an original and happy synthesis. In fact, he never succumbs to certain forms of mysticism or spiritualism, nor to the temptation to resolve everything by simply "doing", or operating. Scouting does not inculcate negative precepts in the boy he addresses, nor does it propose to him theoretical ideals or generic behaviour that have to do with an abstract concept of "doing good". At the methodological level, Scouting is characterised by the direct involvement of the boy in question, who actively commits himself through the Promise of doing "his best" to fulfil his duty to God. The Promise is a way of living with the

highest fidelity to God, which means not only relying on His goodness and never forgetting Him but also remembering Him in everything one does, doing His will by enacting, in a way appropriate to one's age and abilities, the ideal of loving one's neighbour in all circumstances during the short time one lives on this earth. For the Scout, putting the principles of Christianity into practice in daily life means being faithful to the Promise, keeping the Law and performing a good deed every day. The exercise of the latter leads to developing the habit of concretely doing something for the benefit of someone else, i.e., to encourage one's own readiness to help others in all circumstances and to internalise the attitude of making others happy, constantly overcoming the temptation of selfishness.

Baden-Powell repeatedly invites us to consider the urgency of doing good to others, immediately and without delay, performing all the good deeds that depend on oneself, as if there were no other possibility, even in the immediate future. This is the best way for the child to adopt a positive and active attitude and become a Christian not in theory but in practice.

Regardless of religious denomination, the founder of Scouting intended to educate new generations in the love of God, which is expressed in service to one's neighbour. In every man, there is the spark of Love, which, if it is put into practice, grows more and more every day through service to others in small things as well as in big ones, which implies sacrificing one's own pleasure or convenience to lend a hand to those in need. Baden-Powell recommends that Scouts let Love guide their thoughts and actions. Furthermore, he is convinced that the more one dispenses Love to one's neighbour, the more one develops the "divine particle" that is in every man, i.e., the soul, until it becomes a part of God Himself. Thus, every man finds the happiness of being a player on God's team and the joy of paradise, here and now, on earth.

The most powerful weapon to successfully face all the difficulties one may encounter is Love. When faced with the uncertainty of carrying out an action, Baden-Powell invites the scout to turn to God and ask Him if He wants him to do it; he also suggests that the scout ask himself what Christ would have done if He had been in his place under the same circumstances.

No religious denomination rejects peace and goodwill, which are the fundamental aim of the training course proposed in Scouting and the highest form of civic duty: putting them into practice is a concrete way of realising the kingdom of God. Perhaps somewhat naively, Baden-Powell hoped that the Scout brotherhood, spreading with extraordinary rapidity in various nations, regardless of class, creed or race, would be a sure step in the desired direction, that is, of making the civilisation of Love prevail.

> To believe that Peace and Goodwill—instead of war and ill will—constitute the reign of God in the world is in itself a 'religion'. It is a religion to which all can subscribe, and one which no denomination will deny. Its practice is citizenship of the highest type.
>
> After all, are not these the tenets which are, and always have been, the underlying aim of our training in the Scouts? If you get them more fully understood and more widely extended it would be a direct and practical, if minor, contribution towards eventually bringing about the Kingdom of God in the world. [...]
>
> One man cannot hope to do much, but tiny individual coelenterata have built coral islands by co-operation in an ideal. It needs a highly optimistic acorn to start hopefully on producing an oak tree. (Baden-Powell 1939, p. 1)

At a time in history that was marked by the outbreak of world conflicts, Baden-Powell questions such tragic events: war stems from the fact that we neglect the bond of fraternity of the one human family by cultivating petty differences. Yet, in spite of the drama of

these unfolding events, he presents the Scouts with the utopian challenge to help develop peace by respecting others, because we are all children of one Father. In order to build the kingdom of God, with a repetitiveness that, at times, can even seem suffocating, he continually reiterates the urgency of educating the younger generations in goodwill and availability to others.

Baden-Powell's attitude is not pure naivety, obstinacy in achieving a goal in any way, stubbornness in realising a tenaciously pursued project, or an illusion of being able to save the world by engaging in a fight against windmills, but is instead an expression of profound trust in the possibilities inherent in an educational commitment, which he perceives can contribute to change and the improvement of the world, to achieve the realisation of the kingdom of peace and fraternity among men on earth.

In this task that he perceives as his own, Baden-Powell also expresses the opinion that Scouting is part of God's will. In fact, beyond all his expectations and subjective intentions, he interprets the development and spread of what might initially have been only a relatively important game worldwide as an evolution of human invention that God has used. The optimism that characterises Baden-Powell's personality does not consist of an attitude of superficiality or levity but stems from a profound spiritual dimension that, in the certainty that "For God we are, to God we go" (Baden-Powell 1926, p. 23), leads him to face human existence and even its conclusion with confidence and great serenity.

5. A Non-Confessional Religious Attitude

In scouting, there can be no division arising from the difference between religious denominations because the first objective is the active realisation of goodness. This is the perspective to aim for in the formation of scouts, who must have a religion in which the fundamental principles consist of loving and serving God and one's neighbour. Gratitude for what we have received from God is expressed in service rendered to others, towards whom Baden-Powell invites us to be helpful, generous and grateful.

Regardless of religious denomination, Baden-Powell intends to educate the younger generation in the love of God, which expresses itself in service to one's neighbour. In every man there is the spark of Love which, if it is put into practice, grows stronger every day through service to others in small things as well as in big things, which implies sacrificing one's own pleasure or convenience to lend a hand to those in need. Baden-Powell repeatedly urges Scouts and Guides to have love at the forefront of their thoughts and actions.

Furthermore, he is convinced that the more we dispense Love to our neighbour, the more we develop the 'divine particle' that is in every man, i.e., our soul until it becomes a part of God himself. Thus, every man finds the happiness of being a player in God's team, the joy of paradise, here and now on earth.

It is interesting that some convictions are described that now, almost a hundred years later, are topical educational insights. Baden-Powell seems to be ahead of his time, with an educational proposal marked by an ecumenical dimension, expressed by the Scout fraternity, which makes no distinction between social classes or nationalities.

> "As regards religion, we are inter-denominational. We do not assume or interfere with the prerogative of parents or pastors by giving religious instruction, but we insist on the observance and practice of whatever form of religion the boy professes". (Baden-Powell 1951, p. 294)

In fact, Scouting does not defend the superiority of any religious creed over others but intends to promote a precise educational intentionality: to help boys fulfil their duty to God through living life to the fullest, with daily attention to their neighbour. This is a precise purpose that can characterise a 'successful' life. To embark on the road to happiness,

a religious basis must be given to life. Therefore, religion is a part of Scouting; it is the fundamental factor that pervades Scout education.

Baden-Powell addresses the issue of religious education in groups open to young people belonging to different denominations. Everyone is expected to belong to a religious group and should be encouraged to follow their own manifestations of worship. Although this is in different ways, all religions worship God. Each scout must be accompanied in the formation according to his own religion, bearing in mind that transversal elements, common to all religious expression, are the love of God and love of one's neighbour. The religious moment, which is open to all denominations, should be of interest to the boy and be on his scale, i.e., conducted in such a way that he can follow and understand it, and characterised by hymns, prayers and short speeches.

Even if it is not possible to go to church or to interdenominational units, in a manner suited to different spiritual needs, Baden-Powell recommends devoting a moment of the day to a simple prayer of thanksgiving to God, from whom one can also ask for the strength to serve.

The following invocation, written by Baden-Powell and known as the "international prayer", is interesting because it was designed for worldwide gatherings of scouts from different countries.

> Father of us all,
>
> We meet before Thee here to-day, numerous in the lands we come from and in the races we represent, but one in our Brotherhood under Thy Divine Fatherhood.
>
> We come before Thee with hearts grateful and gladdened by the many blessings Thou hast granted us and thankful that our Movement has prospered as acceptable in Thy sight. In return we would lay on Thine Altar, as our humble thank offering, such sacrifice as we can make of self in service for others. We ask that during our communion here together we may, under Thy Divine Inspiration, gain a widened outlook, a clearer vision of all that lies open before us and of our opportunity. Thus, we may then go forth with strengthened faith to carry on our mission of heightening the ideals and powers of manhood, and of helping through closer understanding to bring about Thy happier Rule of Peace and Goodwill upon Earth.
>
> Father, hear us. Amen. (Baden-Powell 2022, p. 43)

6. Some Further Analyses

In this timely analysis, it can be seen that Baden-Powell offers critical and concrete insights that commit the scout educator to take on the innate religious need that many young people express in a personal search for faith motivation. These no longer tolerate the scout being governed by dogmas but instead by the search for knowledge, faith, motivation and the fundamental principles themselves, rather than the various ritualised forms with which they have been disguised.

"We aim for the practice of Christianity in everyday life and dealings, and not merely the profession of its theology on Sundays" (Baden-Powell 1940). For Baden-Powell, religion does not consist of a formal Sunday homage or an outward garment worn on Sundays, but of an awareness of God, which is relevant to each man's life. Since the child is naturally inclined to religion, they must, therefore, be educated gradually and certainly not by dogmatic and theoretical instruction, nor by imparting precepts and notions of theology. A school-style lesson risks boring them, whereas they could be initiated into religious education, which cannot be neglected, through the study of nature, which, with its wonders, leads them to realise God the Creator, and, with good deeds and service, to express love for

their neighbour. This forms a simple basis for understanding whatever form of religion the child belongs to.

> "Too often we forget when presenting religion to the boy that he sees it all from a very different point of view from that of the grown-up. Nor can true religion be taught as a lesson to a class in school. It is appalling to think what a vast proportion of our boys have turned out either prigs or unbelievers through misconception of these points on the part of their teachers". (Baden-Powell 1918)

Baden-Powell offers concrete suggestions on how to educate scouts in prayer. A scout should pray at least every morning and evening and perhaps also at other times of the day, for example, to express gratitude and thankfulness for what one has received during the day. In this way, the scout can develop a communion with God that can last a lifetime.

The founder of Scouting invites us to offer a thanksgiving prayer for the gifts received, a request for one's neighbour, an invocation of help in difficult tasks ahead. With great insistence, he reminds us to express our thanks to God. It is notable that Baden-Powell intends to use language that is accessible to children, concerned that they learn to pray and not merely recite prayers by heart with formal phrases that they probably do not understand because they mean nothing to them.

In order to initiate children into a personal dialogue with God, it is appropriate to accompany them when learning to pray, not to recite prayers, taking into account their issues with long and erudite supplications or formal phrases that are frequently recited by heart without understanding their meaning or understanding them only in small part. In addition, they should be urged to formulate prayers in their own words: gratitude for what they have received; a commitment to reciprocate with 'good deeds' done for others; and a request for help to remain faithful to their good intentions.

To promote a personal communion with God that can last a lifetime, Baden-Powell invites one to set aside a moment of the day to thank Him and ask Him for strength to serve. Insistently, Baden-Powell affirms the need to educate to express gratitude to God for His gifts and to thank Him for the benefits received, just as one would thank any person who gives us a gift. For example, some such occasions can be a good game, a pleasant day, a success achieved, or before and after meals. Another opportunity is physical activity: "If you mingle prayer with your exercises, you can, while looking up in this way, say to God: 'I am yours from top to toe', and drink in God's air (through your nose, not through your mouth)" (Baden-Powell 1931, p. 150).

Here is another concise and concrete indication proposed by Baden-Powell, who addresses young people as follows:

> Look higher above your daily grind or frivolities and think of what is more worthwhile. The most worthwhile thing that you can do is to serve God.
>
> You are not a parson—how then can you serve God? Well, it is open to every single one of you.
>
> We pray daily for God's Kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth.
>
> But it is no good praying without lending a hand to help.
>
> God's Kingdom is, as we know, 'Peace on earth and goodwill among men'.
>
> Just now the Devil's Kingdom is too prevalent: the rule of envy, hatred and malice of nation against nation, class against class, even creed against creed.
>
> This should not and need not be, if only men were all determined to be good-natured, tolerant, helpful and fair to one another. To be self-less instead of selfish.
>
> It is here that we all have our opportunity of serving God. Think it over in your Vigil, how best you can. (Baden-Powell 1928, p. 1)

When faced with a complicated task, or when faced with the difficulties that are certainly not lacking in life, Baden-Powell suggests asking God for help, who will give the strength to face it: "When you have a difficult job to tackle, ask God to help you to tackle it, and He will give you strength. But you must still do the tackling yourself" (Baden-Powell 1936, p. 169). And again, he repeats: "If you only strove in a world of difficulties to find God's help half as hard as you have been struggling to get breath when in the water, you would soon find Him" (Baden-Powell 1922, p. 179).

It might be interesting to check the extent to which Baden-Powell's suggestions have actually been implemented in the Scout training proposal for today's members, but there is no data on this topic, as this has never been the subject of research and verification. Another interesting aspect of research could be the religious inspiration that Baden-Powell received in his family, especially from his Protestant minister father: this is an aspect that has not yet been explored and one that probably affected Baden-Powell's personal spiritual dimension and his educational intention.

7. Authors Who Can Be Compared with Baden-Powell

Within the New Schools or Activism movements, nature has been rediscovered as an educational environment. Beyond the English context within which Baden-Powell operated, several authors can be mentioned. These were educators who reflected on the importance of a relationship with nature and the experience of spending time in the open air. The history of pedagogy, for example, includes Edmond Demolins (1852–1907), who founded, in 1899, the "École des Roches" in the countryside in the middle of a semi-wild park, surrounded by a stream, without fences: the children moved around in complete freedom. The school was equipped with a classroom–chapel for children of the Catholic religious faith, while Protestants were allowed to use the dining hall for their religious offices (Demolins 1901).

In Germany, Hermann Lietz (1868–1919) founded, in 1898, the first "Deutsche Landerziehungsheim", which was located in the countryside to realise the educational ideal of a healthy life within the great nature of God. Education took place in direct contact with nature, thanks to frequent excursions lasting several days, during which the young people would cook in the camp, bivouac by the fire and sleep in tents. In the last years of the 19th century, the Wandervögel (Wandering Birds) youth organisation was founded in Germany, inspired by Rousseau's 'return to nature', offering organised Sunday leisure time with excursions to the countryside and forests (Lietz 1910).

According to the Spaniard Andrés Manjón (1846–1923), integral education includes religious education, to which the "escuelas de l'Ave Maria" (Manjon 1962) contribute. Instead of a closed classroom, he recommends an open veranda on the green. In fact, most of the teaching in the garden school would take place in the open air, with its meadows and esplanades, its groves and pergolas and its fields for playing and working. Nature is "God's university", and the catechism is taught by giving life and voice to themes and situations in dialogue.

In his book *Theorie de l'education* (Laberthonnière 1901), the Frenchman Lucien Laberthonnière (1860–1932) distances himself from religious teaching based on mnemonic and formalistic practices, which leads to a faith lived as a passive habit that is imposed by the environment and circumstances. The educator is called upon not to make the pupil believe, but to help the child to encounter in a personal way the Christian truth – thus thereby fostering an inner commitment in the pupil.

Regarding Maria Montessori (1870–1952), from her vast body of work on the subject of religious education, the following books can be considered: *I bambini viventi nella Chiesa* (Montessori 1922), *La vita in Cristo* (Montessori 1931) and *La Santa Messa spiegata ai bambini*

(Montessori 1949). She considers that an environment must be adapted to the spiritual needs and direct experience of the child; therefore, the chapel, the liturgical furnishings and the rite of the Mass must be adapted to allow the child to participate directly in the religious experience.

Outside Europe, we can also mention Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862). He is best known for his autobiographical work, *Walden or Life in the Woods* (Thoreau 1894). It is a reflection on man's relationship with nature, in the light of his personal experience of surviving for two years in a cabin on the shores of Walden Lake. As far as the present day is concerned, it is impossible to ignore the experiments that have proliferated in the last ten years, especially those based on the Scandinavian model of "schools in the woods".

8. Conclusions

A reading of Baden-Powell's writings on the theme of religious education allows one to grasp the profound spirituality that transpired from his personal experience and that imprints the whole proposal of true Scouting. Certainly, what emerges is a profile not of a theorist but of a person animated by a very precise educational intentionality, of which some traits are unpublished or of which, perhaps, we still have rather reductive knowledge.

Only certain aspects are known, for example, his passion for Nature, while his sensitivity to the religious dimension of life is indeed very rich and profound. A careful rereading of Baden-Powell's works allows us not only to rediscover him as an educator but also to rediscover the primary scout proposal, which cannot be offered to boys in a reduced form, lest this betrays the spirit that inspires it.

In Section 2, the two great books about God are presented as the Bible and Nature. Section 3 discusses Baden-Powell's belief that Scouting activities can be a means of instilling faith in even the most troubled boy. In Section 4, Baden-Powell's writings are analysed with more specific reference to the Scouting method, also arguing that everyone should be educated according to their own beliefs (Section 5). In Section 6, several concrete indications related to the previous suggestions are presented.

Lastly, Section 7 compares the works of several authors and educators operating outside the English context, who lived between the late 19th century and the early 20th century. These figures reflected on the formative and personal significance of man's relationship with nature and the environment for educational purposes. It would be appropriate to further develop comparisons and conduct cross-analyses among these authors and pedagogists to deepen our understanding of Baden-Powell's legacy and to highlight the fruitful educational and formative aspects of nature experiences and environment-based teaching programs.

Against this backdrop, the educational proposal of scouting is aimed at all religious faiths, so much so that it excludes the possibility of a scout being an atheist. "No man is much good unless he believes in God and obeys His law. So every scout should have a religion" (Baden-Powell 1908, p. 231). In today's multicultural and multi-religious context, the subject of religious education is of great relevance to Baden-Powell's thinking: Scouting's educational proposal is open to the acceptance of all religious beliefs and guarantees respect for personal freedom of choice.

In light of today's secularised socio-cultural context, I would like to mention the problem of Scout associations that sometimes betray the original Scout proposal by not taking into account the spiritual dimension. A Scoutmaster is asked to make a choice of faith, and his role is to support their scouts as they mature in the Scouting process.

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