

The Testimony of a Former Scout

[February 20, 1951]

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Recently, there has been a great deal of discussion in our church (Norwegian Synod) on the subject of scouting. I have read a number of arguments both for and against, and have heard many unwarranted assertions made by well-meaning individuals. However, I cannot remember whether or not any of these writers were scouts or former scouts. Therefore, I am writing this testimony with the hope and prayer that I may serve to clear up some misunderstandings and doubts. These are my firm impressions and convictions based largely on personal experience.

I am a former scout. By no means does this imply that I am an authority on scouting, and that I now speak as an expert on this whole question; however, scouting was rather dear to my young heart. I was eager to advance myself, and by the time of my induction into the army, I had become a Junior Assistant Scoutmaster and a member of the Explorer detachment, a senior scout group. During my entire military service I kept in close contact with my scout troop, intending to return to scouting after the war. However, the post-war confusion and the necessity of completing the work for my college degree forced me to postpone and eventually cancel my scouting plans.

First, let us agree that scouting does have many commendable features. We have all read in our newspapers how boys have saved lives with a little first aid learned in scouting. We ex-GI's have used such things as first aid, knot tying, morse code, mapping, and so on, in our military training. Almost every day we can see the effects of scouting. This helps us to appreciate the purely civic elements of scouting. But the basic purpose of scouting is to train for good citizenship and to build character.

Now, the leaders of scouting "maintain that no boy can grow into the best kind of citizenship without recognizing his obligation to God." They also recognize "the essential part that religion must play in character building." If they mean the Christian religion, we agree. But, what religion do they mean?

Let us try to look back a bit. (It looks to me as though the leaders of scouting had two avenues open to them.) They could have developed a program completely free of any religious elements, concentrating instead on such free-time activities as hikes, camps, first aid, signaling, and the like. Such would be a marvelous program contributing to physical health, and the emotional stability and adjustment of youth.

On the other hand, scouts could also attempt to train for the best kind of citizenship, and to build character. But as we have seen, this requires a religious program.

Apparently, scouting chose the latter avenue, since one of the four basic policies and principles adopted early in the history of the Boy Scout movement was to emphasize religion. Therefore it has been "one of the fundamental policies of the Boy Scouts of America . . . to develop reverence to God." Furthermore, scouting "is specifically pledged to encourage reverence and faithfulness to religious obligations." Then, when we realize that the "religious emphasis of the Scout promise and Law" makes "the picture of scouting complete," we see how much religion has been slipped into scouting, especially since the oath and law make up an essential part of every step of scouting. Scouting has religious prayers. Scouting even has scout chaplains. Scouts are expected to consider their scout dues as "a part of stewardship training," just "like Sunday School collection." But notice, doesn't all this make scouting look like a religion?

Scouting is a general religion, purposely made such in order that it may cross denominational lines. In fact, since scouting is not limited to Christian denominations, the name of Christ is deliberately left out. As a result, scouting is a Christ-less and deistic religion—a non-Christian faith.

Like all religious groups, scouting has its doctrine. This fact is not too apparent to most of us, since scouting does not outwardly display the usual features of a religious group. The scout religion is not so organized in its public worship as is our Lutheran Church, nor is it so precise doctrinally. In fact, scouting often seems like only a program for leisure time. However, with careful study, one can discern a definite religious teaching and worship. Let us examine a few characteristics of this scout religion.

The doctrine of scouting, like that of all religions, includes a god. It is not the Triune God whom we Christians confess and worship. They call their god the scoutmaster. In my troop we youngsters offered a benediction to him at every meeting just before we went home. In addition there is an official scout table-grace in which scouts ask this “great scoutmaster” to bless their food. I can also remember other ceremonies, such as initiation and court of honor, which included religious rites and prayers to this “great scoutmaster”.

Many individuals have called the whole system of scouting a mere moral code; however, if we examine the doctrines of scouting carefully, I think you will agree with me that it is more than that. From my own experience I have come to the conclusion that scouting amounts to a laboratory course for teaching the un-Christian doctrine of work-righteousness—the earning of one’s way to reward, including heaven, by good works. Let us see if you will not agree with me.

One of the first things a scout learns is the scout oath. In this the scout vows, “On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country; to help people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight.” Concerning oaths, Jesus said that we are not to swear by anything, not even our head, much less our honor. (Matt. 5:22-21) Instead He said, “Let your speech be Yea, yea; Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one.” Don’t our youngsters in scouting learn an oath which has more than the yea, and nay in it?

However, the sad part of this oath is that the emphasis is on the individual. The scout promises that he will do his duty to a god, obey the laws, and keep himself morally straight. In confirmation we Lutherans learn that we are dead in trespasses and sin. We are completely unable to do our duty to God, to keep the Law, and to keep ourselves morally straight. Instead, we learn that the Holy Spirit has “called us through the Gospel, enlightened us by His gifts, and sanctified and preserved us in the true faith.”

The benediction we scouts offered at each meeting went as follows: “May the great scoutmaster of all good scouts be with us until we meet again.” Since we prayed this benediction at the end of the meeting, I often thought of it as I walked home. In my boyish way, I used to wonder if I had to be good to have this great scoutmaster and if my efforts were good enough. These thoughts seemed to cloud over the fact that I do have a Father in Heaven, who does love me and is concerned about me, and who even sent His Son to die for me, whether I have been good or bad. However, since my scouting days, my Christian training has come into its own, and I now cling to the faith that I am a child of God because of the merits of Jesus who died for we, and not because of my efforts to be good.

Another thing a boy learns when he becomes a scout is the scout law. This law also fits into the work-righteousness pattern of scouting. One law frankly states, “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.” To see that the scouts obeyed this commandment our troop kept a church attendance record. We were required to state publicly whether or not we had attended church the previous Sunday. Lack of church attendance was not very pleasing, since the troop as a whole gained some type of recognition within scoutdom for good church attendance. Thus we scouts went to church, not necessarily because of a love and desire to hear God’s Word, but to make a better record for our troop.

Notice that one of the aims of this law is to teach the scouts to respect the religious convictions of others. You and I as Christians cannot compromise our faith by “respecting” the convictions of others. For example, we cannot respect the idolatry and Mary-worship of Roman Catholicism. We cannot respect the convictions of Roman Catholics in South America, France, Spain, and other Catholic countries when they believe that they must destroy all other churches, attack Christians, and kill missionaries. We cannot respect the conviction of a Jew or modernist when he says that Jesus is not God. Instead, we recognize the *right* of any individual to his convictions. He may even fight for this right. We may respect the *individual* but must only tolerate his convictions, recognizing that under our constitution he is free to worship as he pleases. This important distinction between toleration and respect is being ignored more and more in these days of social emphasis. Toleration is the Christian way—the true American way.

To teach this doctrine of respect; scouting has the boys of many different religious faiths worshipping and praying together often to this “great scoutmaster.” Of course this worship is not the main purpose of scouting. Yet apparently it is an indispensable feature, since scout authorities refuse to eliminate it. As a result of even a little of this compromising I know that religious differences are ignored, convictions are dulled, and religious fellowship becomes the accepted thin. This is contrary to the Word of God.

This scout doctrine of respect tends to teach that all religions are equal, and no particular one is the true religion. It teaches that all religious groups worship the same god, regardless of whether they worship Allah, the Jewish god, or Jesus Christ. The scout practice of respecting the convictions of others tends to blur the Triune God in the hearts and minds of our Christian boys as they confess a nondescript god (as represented by) the “great scoutmaster.” In this way the Christian convictions of our children are subtly undermined and the work of our Christian Church is seriously hurt. All this because scouting teaches our children to respect the convictions of others, especially when these convictions are a denial of the one and only Savior.

Another law is: “A scout is clean: He keeps clean in body and thought, stands for clean speech, clean sport, clean habits, and travels in a clean crew.” Notice that this law has two ideas. The first is cleanliness of the body; the other is cleanliness of thought or spirit—definitely in a religious sense. I did not realize the second idea of this law, until it was pointed out to me by one member of the committee which was examining me for one of the stages of my advancement. Now, if scouting had used just the idea of cleanliness of body, no one could object. However, as the law stands there is even no implication of our mortal filthy human sinfulness, which Jesus said as “made clean by the word which I have spoken to you”. (John 15:3) Instead the scout learns as one of the 12 scout laws that “A scout is clean.”

Notice how the scout laws differ from our Ten Commandments. Our Commandments first of all show man his sin, since “through the law comes the knowledge of sin.” (Rom. 3 :20) Then they show the Christian how God wants him to live. The Christian obeys God’s Law out of love to Him.

On the other hand, the scout law is an integral part of the scout system of advancement, the scout method of providing the rewards for its doctrine of work-righteousness. Advancement

is a reward for fulfilling certain requirements, which includes the obeying of the scout laws. I can recall that, before receiving an advancement, I was quizzed point for point as to whether or not I had kept the scout laws. I presume I would not have received my next step in the reward of advancement had I not obeyed the scout laws.

It is clear that we Christians obey God's law out of love for Him, while scouts are induced to obey their law in order that they earn the reward of advancement. Would it not be easy for the young unsuspecting Christian child, in scouting to by-pass teachings of his church and apply this un-Scriptural work-righteousness theory to his own Christian faith? I know it is easy, because I feel that I did.

The fact that scouting has a definite and un-Christian religious doctrine is not noticeable to most people. During my several years of scouting I never suspected that I was being taught a religious theory. Even now I doubt if many leaders of scouting recognize that these theories are being taught. There are no organized classes. There are no statements made and presented as doctrine. Thus, one may ask why we make such a fuss and bother over such a seemingly obscure point. The reason is that our scouting youth is being taught un-Christian theories in a costly and deceiving manner. The scouts, their parents, scoutleaders and religious leaders do not realize the efficiency and effectiveness of these practical courses. The religious doctrines of scouting not only become the convictions of many scouts, but also the very basis of their outward life. Eventually scouts not only think these theories, but also do them. They do good, obey the law, and go through religious motions to merit praise and to earn their way further up in scouting. I cannot help but feel that such a sly system of spreading un-Christian teachings bears evidence of soon tampering by Satan himself.

Now we of the Lutheran Church have been told many times that the Lutheran Scout Movement was something new, something different. We have been told that scouting as provided by the Lutheran Committee on Scouting is perfectly acceptable to any Lutheran, and that a Lutheran Church can have full control over its troop. When I first heard it, I accepted it "hook, line and sinker." But soon I began to have my doubts. I began wondering just how this Lutheran Scout Movement was so different from the whole world-wide and un-Christian scout religion? They call themselves scouts. They wear the same uniform. They learn the same oath. They learn the same laws. They use the same hand book. They have the same system of advancement. They have scout camps. They have scout chaplains. They earn the same merit badges. The Lutheran scouts teach work-righteousness, and seem to out-do the scouts in this by giving a special and highly publicized badge called "*Pro Deo et Patria*" for doing something really good. I have seen the Lutheran scout manual and "it is the same old raven with new gravy". Lutheran scouts are encouraged to subscribe to national scout literature, especially the magazine, *Boy's Life*—an effective and uncontrolled way of spreading the un-Christian scout doctrine. Lutheran scouts even send dues to national headquarters! How can anyone say that the Lutheran scout movement is not part of the general scout religion?

Recently, I was told that my former pastor, who is of the Augustana Synod, once asked scouting officials if it would be required of a scout to go to a court of honor for special degrees. He was understandably worried because this court of honor is a district meeting for awarding the higher ranks and awards, and may be held in one of the many churches of the area. I went to a couple courts of honor in Congregational churches, and I think one in a Presbyterian church. Thus to obtain a coveted reward, the scout attends a religious scout meeting in a church which usually is not Lutheran. My pastor was told that his boys must go if they were to receive these

awards. Does it still seem as if the Lutheran scout movement is so far apart from the general scout religion?

However, a Missouri Synod pastor just wrote me saying that he had been led to believe that scouting had undergone a reorganization in recent years, and that it is not acceptable to us. I had not heard of this reorganization and so I was happy to hear of it. I even wanted to find more about it. I figured that the best place was at the Lutheran Scout Headquarters which happens to be in Minneapolis. I even talked to the National Scout Director, a very nice gentleman named Holstad. He knew my father, and so we were old friends immediately.

I began by asking about this reorganization in scouting. However, he did not know any more about it than I did. I am now wondering just how real this reorganization actually was.

I next asked about the difference between general scouting and the Lutheran scout movement. He immediately assured me that there was no difference:, emphasizing the fact that there is no such thing as a “Lutheran scout”. They are all scouts, no more, no less.

Since that question was so easily answered, we started discussing this business of a Lutheran scout troop, or should I say, a scout troop in a Lutheran church, since there is no such thing as a “Lutheran scout.” Mr. Holstead showed me where scout authorities come and humbly say: “Here is a program adapted to the needs of the boy ...If you find that what we offer will help you in your youth program, take it and use it as you will.” So, I naively asked, “Well, then, if we can use it as we want, and if we do not like the oath and laws, we can always leave those things out and utilize the secular things such as knot tying, seamanship camping, etc.,?” But no. I was told that these are the very heart of scouting. They are scouting. Or, as the Lutheran scout manual puts it, these are the “soul of scouting, its vital principle, and its expression.”

Pretty soon I was all in a jumble. Scouting says, and even our Lutheran Church authorities say, we may use the parts of scouting we wish and then if we try to leave out the most objectionable aspects, we find out that we cannot. Scout officials say that “there is no Boy Scout authority which supersedes the authority of the local pastor and congregation in any phase of the program affecting the spiritual welfare of Lutheran men and boys in scouting,” and then on the other hand will not permit a troop that may try to leave out some of the scout work-righteousness doctrines. In the Lutheran scout manual, *Scouting in the Lutheran Church*, the Lutheran committee on scouting quoted scouting authorities as saying that “scouting recognizes the essential part religion must play—but for scouting to attempt to provide directly and immediately this religious element in the training of youth would be a presumptuous intrusion into the field and function of the church”; but, then on the other hand, scouting *has* intruded into the field and functions of the church by manufacturing a god, the great scoutmaster, suggesting prayers, and setting up a compulsory program of work-righteousness. Sounds like quite a mix-up, doesn't it?

Eventually, things began clearing up. It seems that scout troops in Lutheran churches are not to leave out any of this stuff. Instead, they are to “interpret” these things in the Lutheran way—to add something, to cover up. It seems that Lutheran churches are expected to take this program its entirety, and then try to say that the god mentioned in the oath and law, and other scout literature, including, I suppose, any mention of a god in *Boy's Life*, is our Triune God. Lutheran churches are to take the religious doctrines of scouting, and by some *hocus pocus* show our youth that the work-righteousness salvation scouting is really salvation by grace, through faith. That is, each Lutheran church is expected to supplement or cover up, which is just like trying to varnish over dirty woodwork. It just does not work—it still is dirty.

Let us see how a Lutheran pastor fares when he even tries to tamper with the doctrines of scouting. My former pastor, the one of the Augustana Synod, recently wrote me saying, "As far as lodge religions, including Boy Scout deism, is concerned, it no longer is even questioned among us. Most pastors take it for granted, and even train to serve the movement better. I still have no liberty to become chaplain of such world religiousness. I asked one of the Lutheran leaders in the movement if he would permit my boys, should I have a troop, to confess 'I will do my duty to God---*as revealed in Christ Jesus*'? But he replied that would not be possible. You could believe that in your heart but didn't need to say it. It would destroy the purpose of scouting that respects the convictions of others. I said that I did not require that Jewish scouts, or Universalist scouts, or others, would have to be less respected for their convictions. They would not be forced to say anything they did not believe. All I asked was that every Christian lad, and especially our Lutheran scouts, would have enough respect for their own convictions to declare them. No, it would be impossible, I was told. The issue lies just there. It is not possible to have more than one God. If Jesus be God, let us say so. If we do not have the conviction that He is God, then let us declare it honestly and say to Jesus, 'Get down from Thy throne at the right hand of God the Father'".

Now I wonder if the leaders of our church realize the inconsistencies in what they are saying? They claim the scouts are not a religious organization, but then include and recommend many of the religious features of scouting. They claim the individual church may take of scouting what it wills, when scouting does not permit the church to leave out some of the worst parts. In the Lutheran scout manual we are told that under proper guidance, the Boy Scout program may be successfully integrated with the program of the church; but then the church cannot even bring the name of Christ into the scout oath. In addition, Lutheran leaders have contributed to the un-Lutheran doctrines of scouting with the special "*Pro Deo et Partia*" reward. Lutheran leaders have informed us that the Lutheran scout movement is something separate from the general and deistic scout religion; but Lutheran Scout headquarters has a different story. Our Lutheran leaders have tried to sell us on the idea that there has been a recent reorganization in scouting, and that now scouting contains nothing objectionable; but the news of this big reorganization has not reached the National Lutheran Scout Director, as yet. In this Lutheran Scout manual, *Scouting in the Lutheran Church*, we learn that the annual fee each scout must contribute to the national scout organization merely goes for the administration of the National Service organization. But in all the general scout literature, I notice that every scout is paying for both the administration *and extension* of scouting. Has there been a deliberate attempt at covering up something? Is someone trying to hide the fact that each scout of the more than 1900 troops in the Lutheran church must not only pay for the administration of scouting, but must also help extend this deistic religious faith? It is hard to believe that this is the product of our church leaders.

I hope that I have not painted too black and complicated a picture of scouting. That is not my intention. All I have tried to do is show the simple fact that scouting has its religion and that it is illogical for our youngster to be members of two churches. He would not think of trying to belong to a Methodist church and still retain our Lutheran membership. So also, it is rather illogical for our boys to be both scouts and Lutherans at the same time. Our boys should be taught not to "two-time" in this way.

Also, I have tried to show that scouting is a religion which deliberately leaves out the name of Christ and teaches a philosophy which is other than Christian. I believe that our

Lutheran church should obey Christ's command and "beware of false prophets" (Matt. 7:15)—and not take them in as it is now doing.

Is it not obvious that scouting has no place in our Lutheran church? How can we permit, encourage and support such a non-Christian outfit as the scouts? As a former scout I ask you to examine this whole question. Both you and I realize that scouting has many fine features. But does it deserve a place in our church any more than the Masons, the Catholic church, or any other "do good" religious group?

I do not pose as an authority on scouts, nor as a theological expert prosecuting scouts. This is not a deep essay. It is not profound. It is not especially long—I could have, written much more. I have merely written some of my present evaluations of the impressions I gained from scouting itself. Thus, this is the genuine simple testimony of a former scout.

I have not tried to "slam" scouting, as it may seem. In fact I really appreciate many of the things I learned in scouting. But, I feel that it is my Christian duty to testify to others of religious aspects of scouting, and the apparent inconsistencies of our church leaders who advocate scouting. I believe that despite the many fine features of scouting, there is no other course open to our church than to rid itself of this cancerous growth. As Christians we cannot be satisfied with this compromising, covered-over scout program of the Lutheran church. We have tried over and over again to have scout authorities change their program so that we may be able to use it. However, since these past dealings with scout officials have brought only "half-way" changes, if any at all, we have no other choice but to develop our own *Christ*-centered youth program that is established by Lutherans, developed by Lutherans, led by Lutherans, and therefore would contain only true Lutheran theology. Surely, our Lutheran church has the resources for establishing such a program. May God grant us the courage and initiative for setting up our own God-pleasing, Christ-centered, truly Lutheran youth program.