

<http://www.afa.net/journal/october/culture.asp>

AFA Journal

God-optional Scouts

Should Christians keep their daughters in Girl Scouts?

(Part one of a two-part series)

Ed Vitagliano, News Editor, AFA Journal
AFA Journal, October 2001 Edition

If there have been two institutions in our culture for which Americans have had only the highest regard in the past, they have been the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) and the Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA). Ten years ago, if you mentioned either one, most people would immediately think of young, trustworthy boys and girls learning how to safely build a fire on a camping trip or helping little old ladies across a busy street.

Now, however, the traditions of these two honorable organizations are facing an uncertain future. The BSA standard regarding homosexuality – “gays” are neither allowed to join nor serve as Scout leaders – has literally thrown the organization into a life-and-death struggle for survival, as pro-homosexual elements in our culture attempt to convince funding sources to abandon the Boy Scouts.

If the BSA is threatened from without, many of the traditions of the Girl Scouts are being chipped away from within. In GSUSA councils across the country, the original goal of character building is being covertly intertwined with more radical concepts.

God with an asterisk

The first public manifestation of this shift came in 1993, when the nearly 2,000 delegates to the Girl Scout National Council Session – representing the organization’s 331 Girl Scout councils – voted in favor of a major policy change concerning the Girl Scout Promise.

That promise had read, “On my honor, I will try: To serve God and my country, to help people at all times, and to live by the Girl Scout Law.”

However, by a 1,560 to 375 vote, the organization decided that girls would no longer be required to use the word “God” in reciting the Promise. While “God” would be kept in the Promise, girls could choose to invoke the Almighty in any way they wanted – they could say God, Allah, Buddha, or even the Great Spirit. Or, for that matter, they could say nothing at all. The word “God” would now be like one selection on a multiple choice test – except that on this test there really is no incorrect answer.

The GSUSA national leadership, speaking on its own behalf and through its hundreds of local councils, tried to calm parental fears. By the time the organization got through explaining its decision, the Girl Scouts

sounded almost noble: the politically-correct mantras of inclusiveness and diversity could be heard everywhere.

The Tumbleweed Girl Scout Council in Garden City, Kansas, for example, made clear in a letter that the GSUSA’s new policy gives “members of all religions the choice of using more appropriate wording for their spiritual beliefs and recognizes the diverse membership within Girl Scouting.”

Furthermore, the council said the decision was “an inclusionary measure. We want all girls, from every religious, cultural, racial, and ethnic population, to feel welcome and comfortable in Girl Scouting.”

Revealingly, on the current website for the Patriots’ Trail Girl Scout Council, which represents nearly 30,000 girls in the greater Boston area, the council has placed an asterisk beside the name of God, leading the reader down to the GSUSA explanation of its now eight-year-old policy. As one choice among many, the word “God” has been relegated to insignificance.

God replaced by a principle

The 1993 policy change that called for the acceptance of all religious beliefs – or even no belief – necessitated a dilution of religion into its lowest common denominator. As the Black Diamond Girl Scout Council in West Virginia said in a letter, “The belief in a spiritual principle is fundamental to Girl Scouting. The vote indicates that the organization’s delegates have strongly affirmed the spiritual foundation of Girl Scouting.”

To hear the Girl Scouts say it, the actual word “God” was irrelevant – only the “spiritual principle” matters. That’s the way spokeswoman Ellen Ach explained it to the Washington Times in 1993. She said, “God was just the word people used ever since 1912 [when GSUSA was founded], and that was the word that stuck.”

That’s a far cry from the reverence with which Christians have held the name of God, and a far cry from the sentiments of the Third Commandment, which says: “You shall not take the name of the Lord Thy God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

Once the holiness of the name of God has been replaced – once it has become “just the word people used” – then people feel free to attempt to replace God Himself with a “spiritual principle.”

This obviously creates other sticky wickets. The letter from the Tumbleweed council continued: “Our mission is to provide a program that will inspire all girls with the highest ideals of character, conduct, patriotism, and service, to become happy and resourceful citizens.”

These are all worthy goals, and it is true that the Girl Scouts have never been an expressly Judeo-Christian organization. However, pointing to the GSUSA’s “highest ideals” merely begs the question: Can a girl be inspired to develop character and proper conduct apart from Jesus Christ?

In a culture which increasingly distances itself from any concept of absolute truth – let alone Christian truth – should parents put their children in the charge of an organization that believes the Lord God Almighty

should be reduced to an asterisk, or a mere “spiritual principle?”

The Girl Scouts seem to revel in their belief that all religious concepts are equal. The actual GSUSA proposal that changed the policy in 1993 made this wonderful statement: “Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. respects the personal spiritual beliefs of each of its members. The Girl Scout Movement will be enriched by acknowledging and reaching out to the diversity of beliefs in our nation....”

For believers, however, this is simply not true. A Christian child is never “enriched” by exposure to false religious teaching. In fact, the Apostle Paul said that if any man – or even an angel – preached to Christians a different gospel, “let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8). Paul was not into teaching believers that the mere “diversity of beliefs” makes all beliefs equal.

No one is suggesting that every activity in which a child is engaged should be explicitly Christian. Few believing parents expect that their little tyke will be playing on a Christian soccer team, complete with the logo of a fish on their uniforms and post-game Bible studies at Pizza Hut.

But at what point does it become spiritually dangerous to place children into circumstances where their Christian beliefs are undermined? Most Christian parents would not send their kids to private tutoring lessons with the Dalai Lama or a Wiccan high priestess. Then why send them to an organization that virtually boasts that its religious ideas are “God lite?”

No right or wrong answer

As one might expect, shrinking back from a belief in God leads to a rejection of absolute truth, which in turn creates the quite mushy foundation of moral relativism.

In the Resource Book for Senior Girl Scouts, girls are told, “Ethical values are specifically related to your sense of morality – your notion of right and wrong.” These values “are influenced by your family, religious and spiritual teachings, your ethnic and racial heritage, your education, Girl Scouting, your peers, your community, and the world around you.”

No doubt it is true that a girl’s moral views are shaped by her interaction with a number of different institutions and individuals. In including itself in this list of moral seedbeds, however, the GSUSA admits that it will gladly accept the role of moral teacher.

So just what does the Girl Scouts teach girls? The Senior Girl handbook says, “The Girl Scout program is based on a set of basic ethical values. These values include a concern for others, honesty, fairness, citizenship, responsibility, and respect for differences. When making personal and group decisions, these ethical values can be helpful.”

At first glance, the list sounds harmless enough. A culture, when it has been cut adrift from such unpleasantries as sin and eternal judgment, is forced to rely upon relative versions of fairness, tolerance and other moral principles.

However, without a solid biblical foundation, ethical values like these can easily be transformed into something that is antithetical to biblical values. In fact,

these two particular Girl Scout values have apparently become the justification for the organization’s embrace of homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle.

Moreover, such ethereal notions are so generalized and undefined that they provide little, if any, moral usefulness. After all, if no one even knows what “fairness” means, then no one could possibly define “right” fairness and “wrong” fairness.

The GSUSA insists it is trying to help girls develop their “own decision-making strategies” when confronted with moral dilemmas, but the organization does so on a foundation of moral relativism – it is a girl’s values that should determine what is right for her.

The Brownie Girl Scout Handbook says: “Unique means different from everybody else. Differences among people are what make the world an interesting place. When different people with different ideas get together, they discover better ideas and better ways to do things. There is no ‘right’ way to live, look, talk, dress, eat, or act.”

Moral relativism may be the popular view in our current post-modern culture, but that is not the basis upon which Christian girls are supposed to make moral decisions. While respecting other people’s differences is certainly a worthwhile subject to discuss with children, the Girl Scouts go too far.

Christians believe that Holy Scripture in fact does address issues such as how we live, look, talk, dress, eat and act. And in most circumstances, the Bible indicates there is a “right” way.

Of course, no Christian should suggest that the Girl Scouts promote the Christian faith to the exclusion of all others. And, naturally, the GSUSA is free to do whatever it wants – and to believe in whatever it wants.

However, Christian parents might want to consider whether the values they are imparting to their children are being undermined when they send their daughters to Girl Scouts. If parents don’t care for the Girl Scouts’ “God-doesn’t-matter” attitude, maybe they should be looking for some other organization to help reinforce godly values.

After all, kids can pick up more than ticks and mosquito bites on a camping trip. They can also pick up the wrong idea about God.