



The Girl Scouts' big rival

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In a column I wrote last week, I criticized the Girl Scouts of the USA for being something of a politically correct, pro-abortion, feminist training corps. Though local Girl Scout troops and councils may not necessarily reflect the moral relativism of the national organization, the fact is the Girl Scouts have ceased to be the consistently uplifting, character-focused bastion they once were.

Many parents have recognized that the Girl Scouts are not the right place for their daughters, and most recently, parents of nine Girl Scouts in Texas withdrew their daughters from their local troop upon learning that the Girl Scouts had awarded a recent Woman of the Year award to a Planned Parenthood executive. The Girl Scout ties to abortion have prompted a Girl Scout cookie boycott by Texas pro-life and Christian organizations.

Before desponding about the death of moral education for American females, consider that the Girl Scouts have a growing rival called the American Heritage Girls. I've known that the American Heritage Girls existed for some time, but I didn't realize how powerful a force they've become until I wrote my last column and received several e-mails from parents and leaders of American Heritage Girl troops around the country.

Kathryn Kristoff, a mother from Plymouth, Mich., wrote to me recounting her experience as a Girl Scout leader who discovered that a Girl Scout leadership manual gave Brownie troops the option of visiting Planned Parenthood to learn about health issues. "Needless to say, we were stunned and realized that we could no longer participate in Girl Scouts," writes Kristoff. A year later, Kristoff and other local mothers founded the first American Heritage Girls troop in Michigan. Kristoff likes to tell people that her troop is a "Christian version of the Girl Scouts."

Indeed, American Heritage Girls is a Christian organization, but it is not beholden to a particular doctrinal statement. It is non-denominational, meetings open in prayer, and it looks more like the original Girl Scouts of 1912 than the Girl Scouts itself does.

The American Heritage Girl Creed says, "As an American Heritage Girl, I will be: Compassionate, Helpful, Honest, Loyal, Persevering, Pure, Resourceful, Respectful, Responsible,

Reverent." There wouldn't be much of a difference between the American Heritage Girl Creed and the Girl Scout Law, but in 1972, the Girl Scouts removed loyalty from their Law, claiming it was outmoded and responding in large part due to the pressures of the feminist movement.

The American Heritage Girl Oath - "I promise to love God, cherish my family, honor my country, and serve in my community" - is quite similar to the Girl Scout Promise. But after the Girl Scouts of the USA decided in 1993 to allow atheists as members and leaders and to make "God" optional in the Girl Scout Promise, Patti Garibay, a mother and veteran Girl Scout leader from Cincinnati, tried everything she could to challenge the new policy. In 1995, Garibay realized that the Girl Scouts were not about to give up on political correctness. "The degradation was too deep," she concludes.

Not wanting to give up on the next generation of America females, Garibay came up with the idea for American Heritage Girls. "So often it is easier to curse the darkness than to light a candle," says Garibay. But American Heritage Girls "is a candle in our culturally depraved society."

Today, nine years after American Heritage Girls was founded, Garibay's greater Cincinnati area has several dozen troops and over 1,000 members. Across America, hundreds of troops have been launched and the organization is growing.

I'm convinced that the American Heritage Girls will become the Girl Scouts' big rival within the next few years. Parents and supporters of the Girl Scouts are just now beginning to understand that political correctness has pervaded the Girl Scouts of the USA.

I spend a lot of my time encouraging people to support the Boy Scouts, particularly as they are under attack in the culture wars. But this one's for the girls: If Americans want to combat political correctness in the moral education of young women, supporting the Girl Scouts is the wrong way to go. Instead, we should put our money and time behind American Heritage Girls.