

Boy Scouts on Slippery Slope to Accepting Atheists

On Thursday, delegates to the national convention of the Boy Scouts of America adopted a resolution to eliminate the longstanding policy barring “open and avowed homosexuals” from being Scouts (while maintaining the policy against homosexual Scoutmasters and adult volunteers).

This supposed compromise satisfies no one. Homosexual activists demand to be admitted to all phases of Scouting, while conservatives insist that being an “open and avowed homosexual” (not just someone who has privately experienced same-sex attractions) is inconsistent with the Scout’s oath to be “morally straight.” Giving an inch to the demands of political correctness will only put the Scouts on a slippery slope toward complete capitulation.

However, even the full acceptance of homosexuality throughout Scouting would not be the bottom of that slippery slope. There is another group that has been howling as loudly as the homosexuals about their exclusion from the Boy Scouts – the atheists.

The BSA’s Declaration of Religious Principle explains why unbelief is incompatible with Scouting:

The BSA maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God. In the first part of the Scout Oath or Promise the member declares, “On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law.”

Groups representing atheists, agnostics and other unbelievers have not hesitated to tie their own campaign against the Boy Scouts to that of homosexual activists. Austin Cline, writing

for an online agnosticism/atheism guide, complains, "It's disturbing that the media has focused on discrimination against gays, ignoring discrimination against atheists."

In January, David Silverman, the president of American Atheists, said, "If they are considering lifting the ban on gays, that's a good thing, that's progress. ... I would hope they remove the rest of the bigotry and admit atheists as well."

The Freedom from Religion Foundation declared in an action alert, "It should not be socially acceptable to exclude either gays or atheists. Talk about proof of who's on the bottom of the social totem pole in our culture!"

Homosexual activist groups, on the other hand, have not exactly returned the favor. Two of the leading groups, the Human Rights Campaign and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, have declined to endorse the atheists' parallel protests against the Boy Scouts.

The BSA's policy against homosexual Scouts and leaders was upheld in 2000 by the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled that the BSA is a private organization and need not accept members or leaders in violation of its own moral standards. Less well-known are the similar cases brought by atheists. The BSA successfully fought off legal challenges in the California and Kansas Supreme Courts, as well as in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit (the Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal of that decision).

Although Boy Scouts are not limited to any one religion, the Scouts actually give some fairly detailed guidance on how to be "reverent" and fulfill one's "duty to God." They include these:

- "Attend the church, synagogue, mosque or other religious organization of your choice."
- "Practice your religion as you are taught."
- "Pray to God or meditate reverently each day."

- “With your religious leader, discuss and write down two things you think will help you draw nearer to God. Do these things.”
- “[L]ead your patrol in saying grace at the meals.”

Just as homosexual activists insist that Scouts can be “morally straight” without being sexually straight, atheists apparently believe they can be “reverent” without believing in God. In particular, the FFRF denies that “belief in an unprovable deity has anything at all to do with ethical conduct.” Indeed, they claim the mantle of morality for themselves, with FFRF saying that “piety is often counterproductive of moral action,” and the American Atheists’ Silverman declaring, “Legally, the Scouts can practice bigotry. But morally, they shouldn’t.”

The vast majority of Americans believe in God and don’t consider it “bigotry” to do so – nor to choose certain private associations with people who share that belief. And if there is no higher being to provide a standard against, which one’s beliefs and conduct are measured, how can the atheists know with any certainty what is “moral” at all?

The slippery slope – from “morally straight” to homosexual to atheist Boy Scouts – is real. The Boy Scouts in the United Kingdom, who opened their tent flaps to homosexuals years ago, are now considering welcoming atheists as well.

The new “compromise” adopted by the BSA is an irrational and thus an unstable one. Whether through further administrative actions or a lawsuit, it is likely that the Boy Scouts will have “open and avowed homosexuals” as Scoutmasters and volunteers in the near future.

The atheists will not be far behind.

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Council of the Boy Scouts of America and first appeared in USA Today.