

Commentary

American Heritage: 'God' Is Not Optional

By Paul M. Weyrich
CNSNews.com Commentary
April 09, 2004

<http://www.cnsnews.com/ViewCommentary.asp?Page=%5CCommentary%5Carchive%5C200404%5CCOM20040409b.html>

When your daughter takes the Girl Scout Promise, should "God" be an option? The word "God" in the Girl Scout Promise has been optional for over a decade.

Contrast that with the American Heritage Girls Oath: "I promise to love God, Cherish my family, Honor my country, and Serve in my community." The promise is iron-clad.

The need for an alternative organization to the Girl Scouts of the United States of America (GSUSA) is becoming clearer to more and more Christian families since the revelation earlier this year that a local Girl Scout council in Waco, Texas, had forged a working partnership with a local Planned Parenthood organization. Angry parents staged a boycott of Girl Scout cookies, drawing national media attention.

When the Girl Scouts of the United States of America's CEO, Kathy Cloninger, appeared on the "Today" show to discuss the boycott, she said local Girl Scout councils are free to engage in alliances with Planned Parenthood despite its advocacy of abortion and sex education.

Anyone who turned on the "Today" show still believing that the Girl Scouts was an organization that adhered to the values of God and country would have had that illusion dispelled after watching Kathy Cloninger.

For some time, my colleague, Bill Lind, noting the many institutions that had jettisoned Judeo-Christian values as their anchor, had viewed the forming of counterinstitutions as a coming trend. He believed this would happen primarily on the grassroots level spontaneously, rather than top-down, because the institutions that are indeed top-down were those that had been corrupted.

All on her own, Patti Garibay, a local Girl Scout leader, had reached a similar conclusion, specifically about the Girl Scouts, over a decade ago when important changes were becoming apparent within the Girl Scouts.

Not only was mention of "God" becoming optional, but the organization had fallen prey to moral relativism. The 1993 Brownie Girl Scout Handbook stated clearly: "There is no 'right' way to live, look, talk, dress, eat or act." (In fact, the Girl Scouts' website last year stated that "Even if your troop is all of one faith, the Girl Scout meeting is not an appropriate place for prayers and hymns.")

Astonished and appalled at the changes taking place within the organization, Mrs. Garibay tried to make changes at the local level and faxed the national organization urging a return to the organization's traditional values. As she has stated, "It's more and more difficult to be a good leader if you are not able to express an opinion about what is right and what is wrong and have the freedom to share your faith. Girls need parameters and they have not been getting them."

Exasperated, Mrs. Garibay, now the Executive Director of AHG, together with her fellow parents in West Chester, Ohio established their own counterorganization called "American Heritage Girls."

American Heritage Girls makes clear that its philosophy "reflects the time-honored traditions of God, family and country" whereas, according to an AHG fact sheet, the Girl Scouts' own website in 2003 "reflects the ever-changing needs and interests of girls."

Stating an AHG troop in her local community with approximately 100 girls, Mrs. Garibay felt at the time that "the Lord had a big plan for it" and she appears to be right.

Currently, approximately 2,800 girls belong to AHG troops dispersed through 22 states, with more than 400 adult volunteers.

However, thanks to the powerful Christian and conservative media network that is now in operation, more and more parents are coming to learn about this positive, Christian-based alternative to the GSUSA. Dr. James Dobson discussed AHG on his September 25, 2003 "Focus on the Family" program. Janet Parshall's America American Family Radio, and Fox News have all featured the organization. Furthermore, the Family Research Council and Concerned Women for America have had good things to say about AHG.

One important decision that AHG has made is its refusal to accept either United Way or any government money based on the belief, as expressed by Mrs. Garibay that, "We could not stand for what we stand for if we did."

Mrs. Garibay has positive things to say about the Boy Scouts and she apparently feels a kinship with the organization, viewing it as one that has stayed true to its founding as an organization that honored God and country. Unfortunately, as has happened in too many important American institutions and organizations, once time-honored beliefs are often dishonored openly. The flirtation of the local Girl Scout council in West Texas is only one recent example of many.

For those who love Girl Scout cookies but do not want to prop up an organization that no longer cares about properly grounding American girls to become morally upstanding and patriotic young women, AHG has no nationally established program to sell a delicious snack.

The Cincinnati AHG sells Thanksgiving pies, but, as Mrs. Garibay likes to point out, the emphasis should be on the program rather than the product. The GSA, she argues, with its top-down organization, uses the cookie sales as a means to exist rather than a means to an end, which used to be properly preparing American girls for the responsibilities of adulthood.

At a time when many youth are seeking true guidance in their lives, the American Heritage Girls stands as an example of how committed Americans of faith in God and country can make a real difference, not surrendering to our soulless secular culture. This is an organization that is on the upswing and I think you can expect more to be heard about it in the coming years as more parents seek an alternative to the GSUSA.

If there is one wish that I have, and I suspect many other Americans would share, is that the AHG will no longer come to be viewed as an "alternative" organization but becomes the organization in a country that has regained its moral bearings and, therefore, many, many more parents will want their daughters to join. It's a wish we can pray will come true, the sooner the better.

(Paul M. Weyrich is chairman and CEO of the Free Congress Foundation.)