

Girl Scouting Today

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This committee's task was to examine the Girl Scout organization to see whether it has changed substantially since it was last studied in 1982 and again in 1991. While changes have taken place in the Girl Scout movement, this committee does not regard those changes as significant enough to allow the Christian to fully accept Girl Scouting.

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Membership requirements have remained the same. "Any girl who is 5 through seventeen years old or in kindergarten through the twelfth grade can become a Girl Scout in the United States... Every Girl Scout is expected to make the Girl Scout Promise and try to live by the Girl Scout Law." (Junior Girl Scout Handbook, p.13)

The Promise and the Law have undergone changes over the years:

Promise (1963)

On my honor, I will try
To do my duty to God and
my country,
To help other people at all
times,
To obey the Girl Scout
Law.

Promise (1972)

On my honor, I will try:
To serve God,
My country and mankind,
And to live by the Girl
Scout Law.

Promise (1996)

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.

Girl Scout Law (1963)

1. A Girl Scout's honor is to be trusted.
2. A Girl Scout is loyal.
3. A Girl Scout's duty is to be useful; and to help others.
4. A Girl Scout is a friend to all and a sister to every Girl Scout.
5. A Girl Scout is courteous.
6. A Girl Scout is a friend to animals.
7. A Girl Scout obeys orders.
8. A Girl Scout is cheerful.
9. A Girl Scout is thrifty.
10. A Girl Scout is clean in thought, word, and deed.

Girl Scout Law (1972)

- I will do my best:
1. To be honest
 2. To be fair
 3. To help where I am needed
 4. To be cheerful
 5. To be friendly and considerate
 6. To be a sister to every Girl Scout
 7. To respect authority
 8. To use resources wisely
 9. To protect and improve the world around me
 10. To show respect for myself and others through my words and actions.

Girl Scout Law (1996)

I will do my best to be honest and fair, friendly and helpful, considerate and caring, courageous and strong, and responsible for what I say and do, and to respect myself and others, respect authority, use resources wisely, make the world a better place, and be a sister to every Girl Scout.

The changes between the 1972 version and today's version do not change the essential meaning of either the Girl Scout Promise or the Law. The changes do reflect a greater emphasis on the responsibility of the individual and gender-specific language has been removed.

Girl Scout troops or groups may be formed anywhere. They therefore may or may not have affiliation with various types of organizations (e.g. churches, schools, businesses, synagogues, etc.). Each group must have one adult leader who has had training specified by the Girl Scout organization at the Council level, and one or more assistant leaders.

It seems that Girl Scouting is trying to appeal to the broadest spectrum of society possible, and while we applaud this effort at diversity, it does raise some areas of concern for the committed Christian.

God, religion and spirituality

The literature coming out of the Girl Scout organization states that the motivating force in Girl Scouting is a spiritual one. This, however, is never clearly defined. Each girl is encouraged to become a better member of her own religious group, if she has one. Each girl is encouraged to respect the values and beliefs of others. Each girl is allowed, and encouraged, to interpret the "God" of the Promise in her own way. Pluralism is encouraged. "Girl Scout troops and groups should reflect the diversity of socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and disability groups within the community."

And yet the Preamble of the Constitution of the Girl Scouts of the United States of America states: "We, the members of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, (are) united by a belief in God." From those words it is clear that, in its philosophy, God is an important part of this organization.

In practical terms, that importance manifests itself in the Promise. From the beginning of the organization (1913), the word "God" has been in the Promise and has always been used to represent "the spiritual foundation of the Girl Scout movement." (Cadette Girl Scout Handbook, p. 11) In fact, belief in "God" is one of the requirements of becoming a Girl Scout. While Girl Scout literature does not expressly state that atheists are excluded, that is the conclusion one makes: "Each individual decides if she can meet our membership requirements, which include making the Girl Scout Promise." (Chesapeake Bay Girl Scout Website, p. 1)

The Girl Scouts emphasize God, they require a belief in God, but they do not define who God is. Instead, they leave the definition of God up to the individual person. The national organization even offers this help: "If the word 'God' is not the most relevant word for a girl and there is any question about which word is most appropriate, you can work with her, her family, and religious leaders to find a substitute word or phrase to say. You will not find a list of appropriate substitutions from which to choose. The way a girl fulfills her beliefs is an individual matter and is not defined by Girl Scouting. You are not expected to judge the suitability of the word she has chosen." (The Guide for Junior Girl Scout Leaders, p. 6)

The quotation cited above is a 1994 publication and shows what efforts the Girl Scouts have made in helping girls define the "God" of their organization. A similar guidebook for leaders in 1986 had no such explanation, apparently taking the definition of "God" for granted.

Because of the ambiguity of the "God" of Girl Scouting, the national organization gives great latitude to the local groups in injecting whatever form and/or amount of religiousness they choose. Religious Recognitions, awards for participation in religious programs, are available, although not mandatory. Some religious groups provide materials and programs for the girls to follow. And the Girl Scouts cooperate with P.R.A.Y. (Programs of Religious Activities with Youth), an organization from St. Louis, in a series of Religious Growth Programs tailored for Protestant and Independent Christian Churches.

The "God" of Girl Scouts, therefore, is whatever each girl wants him to be. The time may be coming when "God" is no longer part of Girl Scouts. In a conversation with one of the directors of the Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida in Sarasota, Florida, the information was passed along that, at the last Girl Scouts National Council, there was a good deal of debate to remove "God" from the Promise. In the end, "God" remained because "we wanted to keep this a value-based organization."

In view of all this, it seems out of place for the Preamble of the Constitution of the Girl Scouts to say, "We, the members of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, (are) united by a belief in God." One wonders what unity can exist by such diversity. How different that "unity" is from the one Christians enjoy by a common confession of faith in the Triune God and in Jesus Christ as their Savior.

The unity of Girl Scouts is suspect, as is the spiritual foundation. The Preamble of the Constitution of the Girl Scouts also states: "We believe that the motivating force in Girl Scouting is a spiritual one." The only proper spiritual foundation of course is a Christian one, where the apostles and prophets are the foundation and Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). The spiritual foundation of the Girl Scouts, however, seems to be spirituality as defined by the dictionary: "sensitivity or attachment to religious values." The spiritual foundation of Girl Scouts is as ambiguous as is their "God."

Rather than trying to remove this ambiguity, the Girl Scouts actually promote it, because it is part of their goal of pluralism. "To live together happily in a country as diverse as America, members of the society need to take pride in their own cultural heritages while developing understanding, respect, and appreciation for the cultures, races, and religions of others. The American ideal is to become a pluralistic society. In a pluralistic society, people of different backgrounds live and work in harmony, joined by the common bond of being citizens of the United States. Valuing human life in all its diversity is at the core of pluralism. Living, working, planning, and solving problems together bring us closer to a pluralistic society. Diversity is like a mosaic of people of different sizes, shapes, colors, ages, religions, genders, and abilities who fit together side by side. Pluralism, however, is like a kaleidoscope where these differences interact with one another, form relationships, and become changed for the better." (Cadette Girl Scout Handbook, p. 12)

The Christian, while recognizing diversity in spiritual matters, cannot tolerate pluralism. It is one thing to "respect the...religions of others." It is quite another matter to recognize truth from error and to point out both. Girl Scouts fail to do that. In fact, a Girl Scout would be discouraged from doing that, because of the goal of pluralism and the desire to appeal to the broadest spectrum of people.

Teaching of values

The Girl Scouts present themselves as a values-based organization, with the Promise and the Law epitomizing those values. "The values expressed in the Girl Scout Promise and Law serve as the foundation for all the activities in the Girl Scout program." Values clarification is stressed and the individual is encouraged to periodically reevaluate her values with and under the guidance of the leader.

This attempt to teach values to girls without the motivation or foundation of the Scriptures must be recognized as futile and potentially threatening to the faith of a Christian girl. According to the *Guide for Junior Girl Scout Leaders*, the third fundamental goal of the Girl Scout Program is to "develop values to guide her actions and to provide the foundation for sound decision-making." (p.5) Values clarification exercises are included as a part of the Girl Scout program, and spiritual beliefs are included in a listing of what influences a Girl Scout's values. The goal is to help girls "develop a meaningful set of values and ethics that will guide her actions, foster an ability to make decisions that are consistent with her values and that reflect respect for the rights and needs of others, empower her to act upon her values and convictions, and encourage her to reexamine her ideals as she grows and changes." (p. 9)

While these may be admirable goals, we believe that the Christian's values are instilled by the Holy Spirit in faith that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world. His love for us is the motivation for how we conduct our daily lives. Our values are based on Scripture. They dare not change. Therefore it is of great concern to the Christian how an individual Girl Scout leader would guide her girls in developing and examining her values and beliefs, what the leader's personal values are, and to what extent she influences the individual girls in her group, especially if she does not believe as we do.

In summary

While much in Girl Scouting is innocuous, the underlying philosophy and operative principle will give the Christian cause for concern. Girl Scouting seeks to instill good values and habits in girls, but it does so without Christ and therefore conflicts with the biblical truth that Christ alone is the basis for a truly righteous life. Girl Scouting demands a belief in “God” and encourages the individual to define that “God” as she sees fit, thereby conflicting directly with the Biblical truth of the one true God. If the Girl Scout organization is taken at face value on the basis of its written documents, she will also be encouraged to establish her own values apart from the authority of Scripture and to not only tolerate but affirm others in their non-Christian beliefs. A belief in Jesus Christ alone as the only basis for not only a truly righteous life but also more importantly, for salvation, would not be tolerated. And therefore, the Christian still cannot fully accept Girl Scouting.

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