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Scouting for Trouble

by Leon J. Podles

Scouting for trouble is the last thing that the Boy Scouts do, but like ticks and mosquitoes, political and legal troubles fasten upon them as they toil through the moral swamp that modern America has become. The Scouts have, to vary the metaphor, been a lightning rod for attacks by those who are outraged by the dominance of heterosexuality. Girls have sued to become Boy Scouts. Homosexual political advocates, who have not heard that there is no such thing as a culture war, have attacked the Scouts through the courts. If the courts fail to deliver the desired results, the activists use local governments and even big corporations (e.g., Wells Fargo, Levi-Strauss) to put pressure on the Scouts to change. Why have the Scouts, of all organizations, aroused such ire?

When scout James Dale went to Rutgers and became a leader of the Lesbian/Gay Alliance and defended homosexual activity in the *Newark Star-Ledger*, the Scouts declined to accept him as a leader. He, a true child of the trial lawyer age, went to court. The New Jersey Supreme Court decided that the Scouts must accept homosexuals under state anti-discrimination laws.

The Scouts appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States, which upheld the Scouts' right to freedom of association. Led by the *New York Times*, the party line then became that all support of the Scouts, if they continued to refuse to accept homosexual scoutmasters, should cease.

The Scouts have had a long-term battle with the Unitarian-Universalists, who wanted to change the Scouts' policy on homosexuality, but now state and local governments have joined the attack. Many levels of government have long offered the Scouts free or reduced rates for camping and have given them access to public schools for recruiting. However, these are being cut off. The State of Connecticut will not allow charitable donations by state employees to be designated for the Scouts, but will allow donations to be designated to Catholics for Free Choice, a Playboy-funded shell for pro-abortion agitators. Chicago under Mayor Daley (who received an honorary doctorate from my alma mater,

Providence College, which claims to be Catholic) has expelled the Scouts from the Chicago schools.

The Scouts do not want homosexual leaders for very good reasons. First, the Scouts simply want to uphold traditional sexual morality, even if the chattering classes have rejected it. Second, the Scouts have had a chronic problem with predatory pedophiles who want to enter scouting because it gives them access to boys in situations when they are away from their parents. There is probably a psychological distinction between true pedophilia (sexual attraction to prepubescent boys) and homosexuality. However, the molestation cases in which scouts (and some Catholic clergy) have been involved are really homosexual. The age of puberty is falling, and most boys involved in Scouts are sexually mature physically but not emotionally. Many 15-year-olds are 6-foot-2, have deep voices, and look like they could be twenty. Even if a homosexual scoutmaster were well intentioned, the constant association with boys would be a temptation for him.

His mere presence would also be disruptive. Camping and hiking require a degree of physical intimacy, and boys around the age of puberty suddenly develop an enormous modesty. A natural self-defense mechanism kicks in around the age of reason, and I wonder if the author of Genesis had this in mind when he remarked of Adam and Eve after the Fall that they realized they were naked. At one scout camp, we adult leaders noticed that the younger scouts had not bathed for several days, and we herded them to the showers. They insisted on wearing their jeans in the communal shower—while showering! Boys are very reluctant to touch each other, except to give an affectionate poke. Scout games teach physical trust and try to overcome some of this reluctance, because boys may have to carry an injured scout or grab him when he is falling. The presence of homosexuals in these situations would make it almost impossible to develop the trust that is necessary for group cohesiveness. Boys would always be on the lookout for innocent gestures that someone might interpret sexually.

Almost all men and boys see any indication of homosexuality as a threat to masculinity, and masculinity is the center of identity for almost all men. Becoming a man and staying a man is not simply a matter of physical growth: A boy must face physical, mental, and moral challenges before he can become a man, a father, and a community leader. Homosexual activists hate the Scouts because the Scouts are the biggest organization dedicated to turning boys into men, and this organization rejects homosexuality because it is incompatible with masculinity. Almost all men, including homosexuals, react violently to having their masculinity impugned, and the mere existence of the Scouts' policy impugns the masculinity of homosexuals.

The Scouts ground their moral principles in a belief in God. This theism (which is admittedly vague) has also been attacked in the courts by atheists and agnostics. Although not a church or religious organization, the Scouts ask their members to be

religious and moral, assuming that there is a common belief in God and morality underlying most religions. This theology may be questionable, but the practical results are good, as long as one does not make the Scouts his church (an error few fall into).

Both political parties claim to be in favor of using faith-based organizations to deliver social services, but the Scouts have been attacked and cut off from any government support precisely because they require religious and moral beliefs. Will the government use only religious organizations that are favorable to homosexuality? Will it insist that churches change their doctrines or proclaim these doctrines to be dead letters that have no practical effect? What will the increasingly pro-homosexual mainline churches do? The Methodists are divided; one organization upholds the Scouts' policy, another condemns it. How could an Episcopal church that celebrates same-sex unions continue to support a scout troop?

But of course, all these conflicts are imaginary. We have been assured that there is no culture war and that there is no homosexual agenda. These are but the scare tactics of right-wing fundraisers. The court cases never happened; no one is cutting off funding for the Scouts; all are at peace. There is no reason to arm for battle. If one side doesn't fight, there can be no war, just a quiet absorption of one side by another, like the host that succumbs to parasites.

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