

For all practical purposes, the Boy Scouts of America is a secular organization. It is not appropriate for a secular organization to exclude members on the basis of their religious beliefs.

Argument: Non-theists hate religion and this is their attempt to remove God from the Boy Scouts.

Response: Removing God from the Boy Scouts is not the goal. Rather, persuading them to find a way to accommodate those whose convictions do not allow them to take an oath to God is the goal. Non-theists want to take part in the Boy Scouts just like other people. Our only goal is to be able to do this without having to lie about who we are.

Secondly, if non-theists are sometimes angry with religion, it isn't because they hate religion but rather because they oppose the abuses of religion. In fact, many moderate and liberal theists reject many of the same things as non-theists. They hate it when religion is used to promote intolerance and bigotry, when it's used as a tool for political oppression or the suppression of new ideas, when it's used to promote self-righteousness and the concept of absolute morality (theirs, of course)!

But most of all, non-theists get angry when they're told that they can't be the best kind of citizens, are morally deficient and are a bad influence on society.

Most non-theists have a "live and let live" philosophy - and some non-theists even like religion. Many are members of a Unitarian Church. Others accompany religious family members to church. For many non-theists, church is a place to find solace, meditation, and spirituality.

Argument: Most Scouting For All supporters are religious and they'll be offended if we support non-theists. We don't want to lose their support.

Response: Once people understand that the Boy

Scouts' treatment of non-theists truly is discrimination and a human rights abuse, they'll be supportive, even religious people! You can disagree with a group of people on an issue but oppose abuses against them at the same time.

The way to overcome this obstacle is through informing our members about the issue. With a better understanding, they are more likely to be supportive. Many people don't understand why an organization that is about hiking, camping, merit badges, etc., would even care what someone's religious beliefs are.

Summary: The bottom line is that there are no good reasons to keep non-theists out of the Boy Scouts and there are, in fact, a lot of good reasons to let them in. There are many non-theists who are law-abiding, contributing members of society and would be excellent Boy Scouts or Scout leaders. Many adults who would make good Boy Scout leaders are teachers, social workers, counselors, doctors or nurses. Through their careers, they have demonstrated their commitment to society. Shouldn't that qualify them to be leaders of any secular organization?

Once people have shown that they are of good will and have a commitment to society, why should anyone care what their religious beliefs are? By excluding non-theists, the Boy Scouts of America are losing out on a valuable resource that would, without question, strengthen their organization.

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ATHEISTS, OTHER, NON- THEISTS AND THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA



Darrell Lambert, Atheist, Eagle Scout, of the Chief Seattle Council, kicked out of scouting by the Boy Scouts of America for being an Atheist, November 2002

Atheism means without belief in God. Atheism accepts the natural world as all that there is. Atheists believe that there is no predetermined purpose and meaning in life, but that people must discover these things on their own. Atheists support the right to hold religious beliefs, but oppose religious behavior that is politically or socially predatory or harms innocent people.

Atheists believe that the way to achieve world peace is through hard work and friendship. They maintain a high standard of ethics through feelings of compassion, empathy, and sympathy.



S4A's Annual National Rally Recognizing GLBTQ Youth Week 2001, at the BSA national headquarters in Irving, Texas. Photo courtesy of Edward Mokrzycki, a Life Scout who was kicked out of the BSA at 17 for being gay.

Commonly Asked Questions About Non-theists

Although the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) is for all practical purposes a secular organization, it's leaders refuse to allow non-theists (atheists and agnostics) to be members or leaders of the Boy Scouts. The policy applies to both adults and children. While Scouting's focus is on hiking, camping, earning merit badges, ethics and citizenship, they also maintain that one must believe in God to maintain a high standard of morality and ethics.

While this is a commonly held perception, in fact there is no evidence to support it. In fact, some evidence even leads to the opposite conclusion.

Below are common arguments that are used to keep non-theists out of the Boy Scouts, with responses following each argument.

Argument: Belief in God is required in the Boy Scouts because it is written in the by-laws.

Response: This does not make discrimination against non-theists any more right than if it were written into the by-laws that you have to be white or Christian to be in the Boy Scouts. Scouting should be available to every American citizen regardless of religious beliefs. This country was founded on the principle of religious freedom and restricting membership on the basis of religious beliefs violates that principle.

Buddhism and Hinduism do not profess a belief in God in their doctrine and they are allowed to be members of the Boy Scouts of America; but the BSA excludes atheists and other freethinkers. The BSA's policy is discriminatory and biased against atheists and other freethinkers. This is demonstrated when it selects one particular group to exclude from its membership, while other members may also not espouse a belief in God in their teachings, but are accepted as members of the BSA.

Argument: It says right on the application form and the guide book that "you can't be the best kind of citizen without the obligation to God." The Boy Scouts have the right and the responsibility to maintain the highest moral standards for its members.

Response: To say that you "can't be the best kind of citizen without the obligation to God" is terribly offensive to non-theists and is no different from saying "you can't be the best kind of citizen if you're Jewish, if you're African American, etc." In addition to being offensive, it's just plain false. There is no research, data, or statistics to demonstrate that people with no belief in God are any more inclined towards immoral acts than anybody else. In fact, only 1% of the prison population professes no belief in God -- compared with 10% - 15% of the general US population. In addition, countries like Sweden and Germany have rates of atheism of over 40% and they have not "gone to Hell in a handbasket."

Being a non-theist just means that you interpret the Universe from a different perspective from most other people. Non-theists see the Universe in natural terms while believers see the Universe in supernatural terms. Neither perspective necessarily influences morality.

Argument: The Boy Scouts was founded on the principle of God and country. You can't expect them to abandon the cornerstone of their philosophy.

Response: No one is asking them to abandon this principle. We're merely asking them to accommodate those whose convictions do not allow them to take an

oath to God. The Girl Scouts also have an oath to God but they allow non-believing members to substitute the word "God" for a word of their choosing. Thus they maintain their duty to God while also accommodating nonbelievers and people of other spiritual beliefs.

Approximately 10% - 15% of US citizens do not profess a belief in God. This is too many people to keep out of the Boy Scouts. BSA leadership needs to be flexible and change with the times, as have most other youth organizations and indeed most scouting organizations in the Western World.

Argument: The Boy Scouts is a religious organization and has the right to require belief in God.

Response: The Boy Scouts is not a religious organization. This means that it is not supposed to be directed by any one religious belief, but embrace the diversity of its members. It is a youth organization that is supposed to embrace the diversity of beliefs represented in the American culture. According to the World Scouting Organization Movement, which is the mother organization of all scouting associations throughout the world, each scouting association must reflect the culture of the country it represents. Currently the Boy Scouts of America is representing and being directed by one segment of American society, religious fundamentalists. It also must be noted that there are no religious teachings and no prayers at troop meetings or on outings. If people do pray, it is voluntary and is not a required component of the Boy Scout program. Church attendance at outings is not mandatory. The Boy Scouts of America is not a religious organization and was never meant to be a religious organization. According to the 1916 charter, it should be up to the adult leaders of each scout unit to decide what values to teach its youth who come under their charge, not the BSA National office in Irving, Texas.