

Editorial: Boy Scouts, cultural hegemony & transforming love

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The crackling sound you heard a few days ago was hell freezing over.

The Boy Scouts of America's National Council [voted](#) "to remove the restriction denying membership to youth on the basis of sexual orientation alone." Beginning in January, the Scouts will allow gay members.



Editor Marv Knox For 103 years, the Boy Scouts have represented one of the most conservative organizations in America. Congregations sponsor the vast majority of the organization's 116,000 troops. The BSA describes itself as "one of the nation's largest and most prominent values-based youth development organizations (that) provides a program for young people that builds character, trains them in the responsibilities of participating citizenship and develops personal fitness."

Small wonder, then, the whole nation took notice when the Scouts accepted gay members. This decision says a great deal about our society.

The culture war is over.

Now that Scouting is open to gay youth, how can anyone think conservative Christians are going to control our cultural conversation?

(We should take a moment to note the operative phrase in that sentence is

“conservative Christians.” All Christians do not agree about homosexuality. Indeed, it’s a pivotal issue in several Christian denominations, with serious people of faith taking opposing sides.)

2013 will go down as a pivotal year in the relationship between Americans and sexuality. More than votes on gay marriage, which are taken state by state, and Supreme Court cases, which are decided on narrow legal terms, the Boy Scouts reflect cultural change. Scouts are nationwide and grassroots. Their policy shift represents revised thinking at the local, even individual, level.

What’s next?

The Boy Scouts’ announcement left millions of Americans—conservative Christians among them—wondering about the future. To be certain, hundreds and perhaps thousands of churches will disband their Scout troops or disassociate from the national organization. Southern Baptist leaders see the Scouts’ gay vote as a golden opportunity to revamp its Royal Ambassadors missions program, which many Baptists thought died out long ago. Churches in other denominations will follow suit.

But honestly, that’s only a secondary issue. Here’s a bigger and more important question: How are Christians who believe homosexual practice is sinful going to behave in a society where they are a shrinking minority?

Such a question particularly is challenging for conservative Christians in Texas and across the South, where they enjoyed cultural hegemony for generations. That hegemony played out 25 or more years ago, but it’s become harder to ignore only in the last few years. Now, it should be obvious.

(Before we go further, an aside: Might doesn’t ensure right. Never has. Conservative Christians held the worst record on race relations. The “Bible Belt” states still routinely lead the way in teen pregnancy, child poverty and

illiteracy. For all their biblicism, conservative Christians own a sorry record for creating communities and providing state leadership that reflect Jesus' concern for the poor and disenfranchised. Oh, and they also tend to be dogmatic deniers of human responsibility for the environment.)

An effective minority

Conservative Christians tend to despair when they lose another battle in the culture war. It's time to get over it and start behaving as an effective minority.

Christians comprise minorities in many parts of the world where the church is growing most rapidly. Faith is multiplying because the Holy Spirit is working. And the Spirit is working through people who are untroubled by the fact they do not get to call the shots in their culture. In fact, harsh circumstances directly correlate to expansive growth.

Christians in developing nations and other locations where they are minorities are multiplying because they faithfully, radically and sacrificially demonstrate Jesus' love—especially for people who disagree with them and at times treat them harshly. Rather than attempt to dictate the norms of society and complain when they don't get their way, they act out the Good Samaritan's loving concern for their neighbor.

They risk their own comfort, their security and, in many cases, their own lives to demonstrate loving care for others. They don't depend upon voting their will upon others. They don't exert political or commercial power to get their way. In fact, they don't even try to get their way. They incarnate the gospel, enabling others to experience Jesus' love through their own sacrificial good deeds.

Transforming initiatives—stark acts of love and selfless service—proclaim the gospel so redemptively it cannot be ignored. If more Americans expressed their faith through love instead of dogma and judgment, the

culture just might take notice.

See reader responses to this editorial in our Letters section [here](#) and [here](#).