

# Scouts, Supremes, and Relativism

Paul Kengor

*Paul Kengor is associate professor of political science at Grove City College.*

**T**he U.S. Supreme Court recently handed a victory to the Boy Scouts and sanity. The court's decision, as well as its alignment, underscores many things about this country, our culture, and politics today. In particular, however, it speaks volumes about two items: the presidential race and the utter bankruptcy of modern liberalism.

The first of the two is straightforward. Those who say there is no difference between Democrats and Republicans, and specifically between a President Al Gore or a President George W. Bush, simply have no clue. Gore is going to appoint liberals to the bench and Bush will not. The next president will undoubtedly swing the balance of the Supreme Court, plus the other federal courts, in either a conservative or liberal direction.

Nowhere was this more salient than in the recent Supreme Court decision. The court voted 5-4 in favor of the Boy Scouts. Writing on behalf of both the narrow majority and common sense, Chief Justice William Rehnquist said that because the Scouts are a private group that seeks to instill its moral values in boys, the organization is free to bar those whose behavior or lifestyle conflicts with its message. "We are not—as we must not be—guided by our views of whether the Boy Scouts' teachings with respect to homosexual conduct are right or wrong," wrote Rehnquist, with a measure of honest impartiality that one can only wish might exist among the activists who typically dissent on his left.

Joining Rehnquist were justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Antonin Scalia, Anthony Kennedy and Clarence Thomas—all Reagan or Bush appointees. Rehnquist was promoted to chief justice by Reagan.

The dissenters were a who's who of the court's legislate-from-the-bench liberal bloc—David Souter, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, John Paul Stevens, and Stephen Breyer.

Of course, in the past, Republican presidents have made poor appointments to the bench. It was Eisenhower who picked Earl Warren. Bush, fooled by Senator Warren Rudman, picked Souter. Still, victories like last week's have a much better chance of continuing if George W. becomes president in November rather than Gore.

The second issue underscored by the decision is the shallowness and hypocrisy of modern liberalism. This was demonstrated convincingly in a quote on the case by Janet La Rue of the Family Research Council:

If the court had ruled the other way, it could have forced the NAACP to accept a Ku Klux Klan member, B'nai Brith to accept Catholics and the Knights of Columbus to accept Jews as members and leaders.

What about it? Doesn't this reality bother liberals on and off the court? Actually, probably not.

Let's assume the liberals on the court had won. What if, indeed, a KKK member, testing the new verdict and trying to cause trouble, attempted to join the NAACP but was rejected because the NAACP rightly felt the Klansman's views were not consistent with the group's message? Wouldn't this create a problem for liberals in light of their decision?

No. They'd merely alter their position. The inconsistency wouldn't bother them a bit.

Liberals are first and foremost relativists, in their views on culture, religion, and the Constitution. There are no absolutes. Truth is determined by the individual, based upon the ends he intends to serve. A fetus in the womb, for instance, can be either a "blob of tissue" or a "baby," depending strictly and almost magically on whether or not the mother chooses to abort it. If she declares it a baby, then the government should cover health care for both the growing fetus and the mother if she can't afford the costs. If she decides to abort, then Al Gore would literally entitle her to a Medicaid-financed abortion.

Such relativists believe that those who carefully heed the intent of sacred scripts like the Bible and Constitution are Neanderthals in desperate need of enlightenment. They view these documents, interpreted literally according to original intent, as obstacles to progress rather than sources of wisdom.

Liberal relativism on the Boy Scouts issue was displayed in an April editorial by the *Washington Post*. "The scouts' position is legally as well as morally wrong," declared the *Post*.

Really? Based on who's or what's definition of "morality?" The answer: the editorial writer of the *Post*. If there are no moral absolutes, then the *Post* writer is free to create them in his or her own image.

A ruling in favor of the gay scoutmaster, proclaimed the editorial staff, would "be the better" for the "institution of scouting."

(By the way, rest assured that the *Post* editorial writer would not send his or her young son on a weekend camping trip with an openly gay scoutmaster, just as liberals on Capitol Hill refuse to send their kids to public schools.)

This sense of self-righteousness without universal absolutes—and combined with their love of strong, centralized government—also enables liberals to happily employ the power of the state to coerce their views on others. While they accuse people on the right, particularly Christian conservatives, of "imposing their views," liberals are truly guilty of the charge. The Boy Scouts of America is a private organization with a code of values it adheres to. Those who join understand that code. The group has a right to its beliefs. This is America, founded on freedom. But liberals only care about rights when they serve their purposes. In the case of abortion, they'll go so far as to argue that an individual woman's "right to choose" supersedes another individual's right to exist. In the case of the Boy Scouts, liberals feel the scouts are wrong and must change. End of debate.

This next election matters. A Democrat victory will be a win for much more than just Al Gore.   Ω