

School Vouchers or Religious Freedom?

by Michael G. Maness¹

What a hot potato! I have friends on both sides, and friends that are almost on the fence and will vote with their more informed friends.

Not all that is said is as clear as most would prefer. Though I lean right, my far-left friends think the far-right are nuts, and my far-right friends think the far-left are nuts—sometimes, no doubt, each think me nuts too.

The term “School Choice” is hard to ridicule, for it caters to lovers of “freedom,” and that is precisely the intention, while the religious element is almost always hidden, even purposely obscured.

When several Texas superintendents make \$400-500k a year, more than the U.S. president and three times the Texas governor, most of us wonder why any state tax money should go to those schools, where even the principals make more than the Texas governor.

When your child is bullied, School Choice sounds right. No good parent wants that and will do anything to protect their children.

When your daughter is forced to undress with a boy to stay in sports, most do not want any part of that school.

I recently read that a HS graduate sued her school because she could not read or write, though she did graduate—I think she should have standing in that court.

When parents are called “terrorists” for attending a school board meeting to defend their children against luridly graphic x-rated sex books—describing the very act in shocking painful liquid detail of many kinds of sex abhorrent especially to Christians—then, School Choice sounds like a necessity.

Good parents do not want their children bullied, sexed, or failing the 3Rs.

Yet “School Choice” is “School Vouchers,” where parents can opt in a variety of ways to receive Texas-taxpayer funding for private schools or even home schooling. Several ways are being forced throughout the Texas congress and nationally right now. That is, simply, Texas, other states, and some in the White House are trying to force taxpayer funds to help pay for a parent’s Christian private school. And unlike most, Texas is debt-free and has a surplus because of its grand business environment, which might mitigate some tension while the religious element remains incognito.

I believe someone offered an alternative to “School Choice” parents in relieving those parents from paying their own school taxes, but I do not remember much, other than such relief would not fully fund any good private school unless the parents already were very wealthy with taxes to match, and therefore did not need the relief in the first place.

Another answer is not practical for many. Most working parents do not have the time to get involved in their school boards to fight bullying, sexing, and low academics, which is the job of a good school board.

With the above, we have a hot potato that is not easy to dress and serve to everyone’s liking.

¹ Michael G. Maness, “School Vouchers or Religious Freedom?” *Tyler County Booster* (3-20-25): 4A & 5A. All news outlets and interested parties have the permission from me, the author, and from the *Tyler County Booster* editor Chris Edwards to republish this in their new outlets in print or online forums. If you do, please to me the honor of sharing with me place and date or online a link to Maness3@att.net.

The short version has now been published in several papers and online: www.PreciousHeart.net/School-Vouchers-Short.pdf

The politics are heated, and at this peculiar time in this decade of radical division, a far-left will not hold hands with the far-right on just about any issue—I get it—I truly do. Between them are folks like myself with friends in the middle or leaning. Therefore, those who have not been able to look deeply into the manifold issues, or who only watch CNN or Fox, when it comes time to vote, they will side with the friends they respect.

To that middle group and to those who lean left or right, to them I offer this.

I have been a champion of religious freedom for 30 years in several books and articles. Everyone claims they value religious freedom. Yet I documented how the far-right has grossly abused that in the prison system in several books and critically in my latest book, “When Texas Prison Scams Religion” (2024). In sum, when the state prison “buys faith from prisoners with favor” from desperate prisoners, that purchasing of faith diminishes the authenticity of the very faith favored, and at this time there are 18 other states likewise abusing!

In our Texas prisons, they are favoring Baptists more than any other single group, by far, and since 2011 they have veritably “ordered” the dominance of Protestant programming while covering up the cost to taxpayers and deceiving about religious neutrality. Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick has supported that Baptist dominance, as documented in detail in my book, as well as he has been ramrodding school vouchers.

School Choice vouchers are pushed almost exclusively—if not totally—by Christian legislators, because most of their constituents are Christians. Check that—“because” most of their constituents are Christian. And some find Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick a great Christian, which he might be, but many of us also see more of a politician forcing faith at state expense. That is a fine line my far-right friends might find offensive and far-left ones will resonate with, only Patrick is not the main driver, not fully—in my opinion—he is simply capitalizing on a far-right trend in evangelicalism.

While some have accused those like myself for being less than a Christian here, I would say many Baptists like myself revere the heritage of Roger Williams (1603–1683) who founded the first Baptist church in America and his fight for true religious freedom more than that of John Calvin (1509–1564) who ruled Geneva with an iron Christian fist—the latter many see more of in Patrick and his ilk than not.

That is, please be careful here. I am guessing there are not many—if any—Muslim or Buddhist or Communist private schools that ANY of the “School Choice” parents are wanting to send their children too. Think about that. Marinate on that. Then you will see through Patrick’s gloss that he has used in the prison system to the same devastating effect.

There is no question that Texas has great private schools, just as we all know that most if not all of them are Protestant and Catholic—very, very good schools. What the politicians are then knowingly or unknowingly doing—in Patrick’s case knowingly—is in fact forwarding of “Christian School Choice.” That is the real case, though often hidden and never written out.

Hang with me a minute. Flip this over. Do you as a Christian want your tax money spent on a Muslim or Buddhist or Communist private school?

If these measures are passed, we are talking about your tax dollars almost totally (if not totally) going to fund a Christian private school. Be that a Protestant, Baptist, Catholic school—among the best private schools in Texas—still, that is precisely what the Christian legislators are wanting to fund with everyone’s tax dollars, whether you like it or not. While there might be a Muslim private school, I will bet you a \$300 that not one Texas legislator was thinking of that. And if there were a chance that a lot of funding would go to a Communist “School Choice”

school—well, the Christians would not have that. If the Christians said “No,” that ends the discussion, and you see clearly now the larger issue.

Gosh, I do not want to write on this, because the majority of my best friends lean right and are on the far right, though on this, I think they are very wrong.

If we value of religious freedom—unlike the Texas prison “buying faith with favor”—then we believe that the authenticity of one’s faith is best forwarded when the state has no stake in favoring or in persecuting any faith. Read that again.

I do not want anyone coming to my church because of fear or favor, or belittled because they do not come. Nor do we want any citizen to feel afraid or feel like they are any less a citizen for any faith they choose, or if they choose no faith at all. Therein, when a person feels truly free to believe or not to believe, that is where the authenticity of faith best grows.

Do you support the freedom to be authentic?

I like private schools. Love our local private school. And I have the highest regard for those intrepid industrious homeschoolers—I truly do. And though I went through the public school in Los Angeles and then the culture shock of a small north Texas school, this piece is not a defense of one over the other. All of us want good schools for our children.

Yet, in closing, when you see “School Choice,” you now have here a portion of the rest of the story: that is another name for “School Vouchers” that is in fact and truth a kind of surreptitious cover up for “Christian School Vouchers.” I, myself, do not like my faith exploited to cover up like this.

There is very little left to this hot potato, when boiled down to its essence, skinned of political allegiances and the knots of differences removed.

While not as clear as we would like, the choice can be summed as a choice between “Christian School Vouchers” or an honest authentic value of “Religious Freedom.”

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See www.PreciousHeart.net/Seminary.

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