

Charter Schools: Look Before You Leap!

Roy Hanson

This article, by Roy Hanson, director of Family Protection Ministries, appeared in *The Home School Court Report*, vol. xviii, No. 1, January/February 2002. It warns of a specific issue involving government encroachment that home educators should take seriously. But what is even more troubling, charter schools are only one concern among a growing number of similar political and social issues that ought to be a wake up call to Christians. I have written a short essay, "The Hijacking of Homeschooling," (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/hijack.htm>) that briefly addresses these problems.—PD

In California and across the nation, we are alarmed by the growing number of Christian home schoolers who are enrolling in charter school programs. Below is a summary of most of the reasons why we are concerned. This is based upon my full-time research and advocacy work in behalf of private home educators in California for the last 15 years.

The battle over home schooling in America for the last 20 years has been shifting from eradication of home education to growing attempts to control home educators and recapture them for public school programs (such as charter schools) where they are under the authority and supervision of public school officials. Nothing less than the future of home schooling and the freedom of parents to train their own children in God's ways are at stake.

Can education in a charter school be Christian?

A true Christian education means that all goals, rules and policies, staffing, student and adult relationships, structures of authority, methodologies, sources of funding and resources, activities, materials, and content of all subject areas must be consistent with a biblical worldview. In every aspect, the entire education system must openly glorify and please God through our Lord Jesus Christ. A thoroughly Christian education is expressed in an open, non-apologetic way—in writing, verbally, and in all actions—on the part of every participant.

Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven. (Matt. 5:16)

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31)

There are inescapable problems in this regard inherent in all charter school programs and all other public school programs.

Most states have either a state constitution or a statutory provision which prohibits any sectarian instruction in any public school program. In addition, federal law is very clear in prohibiting religious instruction in public schools that receive federal funding. Title 20, United States Code, & sect; 8066(1)(E) states,

The term "charter school" means a public school that . . . is nonsectarian in its programs, admission policies, employment practices, and all other operations, and is not affiliated with a sectarian school or religious institution.

Some charter school administrators have claimed that since parents are not employees of the charter school, parents can provide and use their own Christian curriculum. These administrators usually suggest that the parent not report any religious books being used, and not have their children make any references to religious doctrine, or Scripture, or Christ in any assignments being turned in.

What does this teach children? It teaches them to lie. (Luke 17:1-2) It teaches them a utilitarian mindset—that the ends justify the means. It teaches them to keep quiet about their belief in God and His Word and their hope of salvation in Jesus Christ when it suits their financial interests and convenience. On the other hand, using materials based on a worldview that isn't biblical teaches children to compartmentalize their life and to be dualistic in their worldview—to believe that God's Word does not speak to every area of life.

Excerpts from a letter by a California home schooling mother illustrate this issue:

We were promised funding and the freedom to establish our own goals and methods, as long as they were not doctrinal. We could teach

About the author

Roy Hanson is the director of Family Protection Ministries, which he established in 1986 to monitor the California state legislature for bills affecting home schooling families and their freedoms. God has used FPM (working closely with Home School Legal Defense Association and Christian Home Educators of California) to win dozens of legislative battles against a full-time, predominately non-home school friendly state legislature. Roy and his wife, Debra, home schooled their children from first grade through high school.

doctrine "on our own time" or use non-funded godly materials, only documenting the outcome not the method.

I was choosing to pull out of the private sector and place over our schooling efforts an authority that required me to separate God within our home. I would have been teaching our children a double standard: God is O.K. for home but not for our school. Since our school is in our home that standard would not have stood for God at all!

Strings attached—Increasing regulations

Many charter schools began with few regulations or with a lack of clarity or agreement on what the regulations are. Regulations are inherent and inevitable for several reasons, including stewardship accountability for expenditure of public tax funds and for the prevention and detection of fraud. Experience has shown that the direction is always from less regulation to more.

Some of the increases in regulation include:

- prohibiting Christian content;
- detailed written reporting of lesson content and work completed;
- placing the parent under the control of a certified teacher;
- specifying what subjects are covered and how;
- requiring standardized testing; and
- required regular contact with certified teachers to evaluate not only educational goals but more subjective things like physical, mental, and emotional health and signs of child abuse or neglect, possibly involving a home visit.

New legislation and changes in regulations continue to be proposed and enacted in charter school states.

Testing indirectly controls curriculum

In most states, charter school students are required to take the same tests that are required in all public schools. A few states may allow parents to opt their child out of the test, but, at some point, a charter school must prove to the chartering agency that its students are meeting academic expectations.

Politically correct thinking influences the content of standardized tests. This leads to a bias against objective truth and against a Christian worldview.

Teachers and program directors protect their jobs by "teaching to the test," that is—teaching the skills and content to be tested so their school or program will continue to receive federal and state funding. The tests heavily influence academic content—tests indirectly determine the curriculum!

Sends message: Parents unqualified

Every parent who turns to the government's charter school to help them provide their children's education sends the erroneous and dangerous message to legislators and educators that children cannot be successfully raised without the help of a government certified expert, and without the help of the state to pay for the resources they need. The louder this message gets, the harder it will be to keep the government from inserting itself in every aspect of families' lives.

Most public policy makers, public educators, and other professional groups see the parents as just one member of a team to prepare all children to be good citizens—"It takes a village" to raise a child. Charter schools fit in well with this government-as-parent / government-as-partner statist agenda for America.

Not within civil government's God-given jurisdiction

God has established three basic social governmental institutions, each with its own mutually exclusive jurisdictions of responsibility and authority. They are family government, church government, and civil government.

God has assigned the responsibility and authority to raise and train up children exclusively to the family (Deut. 6:7, Eph. 5:22-6:4, I Tim. 5:8, et al.). On the other hand, God's ordained purpose of civil government is to restrain evil (Romans 13:4; I Peter 2:14, et al.). God also ordained that the family should get support for its needs in three ways: primarily through labor of the family, and secondarily through voluntary charity and inheritance. God did not ordain any separate

[The following appears as part of our agreement to reprint Mr. Hanson's article in its entirety.—ed]

Family Protection Ministries

Family Protection Ministries depends upon the gifts of its supporters. It is essential to the continued freedom of home schoolers in the Golden State that we all support FPM. They spot and work very effectively with legislation at a level that no one else in California does.

Contributions may be sent to:
Family Protection Ministries
P.O. Box 730
Lincoln, CA 95648-0730

Those who give \$40 or more per calendar year will receive FPM's Legal-Legislative Update newsletter.

institution for education or socialization of children. Nor did He ordain that families should receive financial support for these from civil government.

From God's perspective, what we call Christian "education" must be derived from the concept of discipleship, which incorporates training, instruction, and correction in accordance with God's Word. The care and discipleship (education) of minor children belong exclusively to the parents. God has not given us the permission to relinquish any part of our authority and responsibility to provide this for our children.

When we choose not to look to the government, but rather to take full personal responsibility for our children's education, we acknowledge the authority of God and His Word in our lives. We teach our children to honor God, His Word, and his ordained jurisdictions of authority and responsibility. We also teach them to be content with what God provides our family through our faith and diligent, obedient labors.

Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

Higher taxes and bigger government

There is big money involved in charter school programs designed for home schoolers. Major political battles are being fought over geographical turf rights for charter schools as they are lucrative moneymakers.

Two-thirds of the voters in the United States think that lower taxes would have the most immediate positive impact on them and their families.¹ Paradoxically, large numbers of people who claim to want smaller government, lower taxes and more freedom continue to clamor for their "fair share" in a plethora of government-subsidized programs. Each individual who chooses to participate in a government-funded program, like a charter school, creates a threefold demand on the government:

- a need for more money to pay for the goods or services they want;
- a need for more bureaucrats to administer the programs to provide those goods and services; and
- a need for financial accountability and laws to regulate the use of that money.

But I'm only getting my tax money back. Wrong!

Many parents argue that their taxes support public education and that they are justified in having that money pay for their own children's education. In reality, parents who choose charter schools increase the tax burden on their neighbors.

Most parents only pay enough taxes designated for education funding to cover about one-half of the public education costs for just one of their children.²

Threat to private home schooling

In my opinion, at this time, charter schools are the greatest threat to our home school freedoms and the heart and soul of the Christian home school movement.

First, compromise of freedoms and complacent dependency are inherent in receiving government funding. Charter school families have become just one more special interest group fighting for their piece of the government pie.

Private home schoolers are not a special interest group, in the sense that we do not go to the government asking for a handout. We are rarely asking for legislation. We are most often fighting to prevent the passage of laws that would infringe on the God-given inalienable rights of families. The perception of home schoolers in general by the public and state legislatures and Congress is being damaged by charter school "home schoolers" looking to preserve and expand their handouts.

Second, the vigorous recruitment of home schoolers into the growing number of charter schools in our state is having a disastrous effect on the private Christian home school movement and the organizations that support it. Several private home school groups have either gone under or have been taken over by charter school parents and leaders. Others have lost significant numbers and are having a tough time just surviving.

In June of 1997, Alaska enacted one of the best home school laws in the nation for private home schooling. However, at the same time, Alaska also enacted a charter school law. In just three short years, their statewide Christian support organization lost over two-thirds of its membership and attendance at their conferences dropped

drastically. Their organization is a shell of what it once was. The influence of the private home schoolers in their Capitol has also been negatively affected since this group is now seen as a shrinking minority compared to the now larger charter school home school community.

Third, as the number of private home schoolers becomes smaller than those enrolled in public school programs, we will see a new attack upon the precious freedoms so many pioneering private home schoolers and organizations worked so hard to establish and defend. There is a growing attempt to marginalize private home schoolers as a radical and unreasonable element of a larger "reasonable" group that understands the need for government help and supervision by certified experts.

Conclusion

Every Christian parent being lured to a charter school by "free" services and money must seriously consider and understand the long-term consequences of his or her decision.

If we ask the government to provide what God has not ordained government to provide, we tell our children and the world around us that we do not believe our God is sufficient to meet all of our needs.

© 2001 Roy Hanson, Jr. Permission to reprint is granted if article is reproduced in a complete and unedited manner and the proper attribution given.

Endnotes

1 Fox News survey, "The Federal Budget: People's Chief Concerns, But voters say cutting taxes will help them more individually," Public Agenda Online, accessed 6 December 2001; available from http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/pcc_detail.cfm?issue_type=federal_budget&list=8. [This link no longer works—ed

2 Mary Schofield, "I Want My Money Back," The Parent Educator, Christian Home Educators of California, April/May 2000, 14-17.