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Another example of the palpable duplicity in the Florida press. John Kirtley's letter to the editor and Ruth's original admission (on record) about his own child follow his insulting column from Friday.

Subject: Hypocrisy in the Tampa Tribune

[Voucher Vicar Headed Off By Appeals Court](#)

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(FRIDAY,08/20/2004 © Tampa Tribune)

You have to wonder whether there's something in the Bush DNA code that prevents some of these people from grasping Dick & Jane constitutional concepts such as separation of church and state. Gracious, since he assumed office, Pontiff Jeb Bush has seemed on a mission from God and/or Pat Robertson to turn this state into a theocracy to the extent of transforming Florida's public school system into a sort of Heritage Foundation madrasa.

It has been a cornerstone of Bush's governance of the state to pillage the public school system by awarding taxpayer vouchers to families to send rug rats to private, parochial schools even though it's illegal. At the same time, while public schools must adhere to a mysterious and constantly changing set of academic standards for fear of being tainted as failures, the very same private, parochial schools are held less accountable than Yasser Arafat. So much for that inconvenient governor's oath to uphold irritating things such as the laws of the state. In any event, Parson Bush induced his fellow travelers in the Florida Legislature to create a phony school voucher law with less legal standing than the Branch Davidians - and it was ready, set, go to the courts.

Silly Things

The Florida Constitution prohibits public money from being used to ``directly or indirectly" aid sectarian institutions. But when you think silly things such as the law don't apply because you're ``special," then you can trample over the Constitution like John Ashcroft using the Miranda rule as a doorstep.

While supporters of the governor's desire to recast public schools as Torquemada Light have been anointing themselves with precious oils, party pooper judges have been ruling against the vouchers. Once you cut through the legal mumbo-jumbo, the judges essentially have said: ``Are you nuts? You can't turn the school system into `The PTL Club.'" Earlier this week, an appeals court upheld a lower court ruling that vouchers for faith-based schools are wrong, wrong, wrong - and illegal, too! Next stop: Florida's Supreme Court.

First Vicar

To be sure, ``school choice" is a wonderful thing. There is no good argument that families should be barred from choosing the best public school for their children. There is certainly no dispute that parents should be free to choose a private, parochial school because they believe their children will get a quality educational experience. That choice should be respected - but paid for by the family, not by taxpayers.

Jeb Bush is the governor of Florida, not the First Vicar. His obligations are to provide the best public service to the state's residents, and foremost on that agenda are Florida's public schools.

The governor reacted to the appellate court ruling by whining that programs such as Bright Futures college scholarships, the McKay scholarships for special-needs children and private university funding would be at

risk. Noooooooooooo! First, there is nothing to prevent a student from using a Bright Futures scholarship at a nonsectarian private school such as the University of Tampa. At the same time, the court ruling did not affect the McKay scholarships.

At the end of the day, aside from the constitutional issues involved, why shouldn't private schools receiving tax dollars be held to the same accountability standards imposed on public schools? Wait a minute! No accountability?! No wonder Jeb loves vouchers so much.

Columnist Daniel Ruth can be reached at (813) 259-7599.

To the Editor:

In his column "Voucher Vicar" (8/20/04), Daniel Ruth says he's not worried, and neither should we be, that McKay Scholarships or Bright Futures Scholarships are threatened by the Florida Appeals court ruling that bars Opportunity Scholarships from being used at faith based schools. Why? "The court ruling did not affect the McKay Scholarships", says Ruth. No it didn't, but the next suit will—and the legal objection is identical. Over 14,000 special needs children will be forced out of schools that are finally working for them. Ruth says "there is nothing to prevent a student from using a Bright Futures scholarship at a non-sectarian school." Is he not troubled that a low income student won't be able to use one at Bethune Cookman?

In 2002 voters passed a mandate requiring all four years be given Pre-K. The taxpayers are counting on faith based schools to absorb the majority of these children. If it's not constitutional for a child to use a voucher to go to a faith based kindergarten, why is it fine to let them go to Pre-K at the same school? It isn't. Taxpayers will have to spend billions to build new spaces for the mandated Pre-K program if faith based providers can't participate.

Ruth says "choice should be respected, but paid for by the family". But Mr. Ruth, what if a family can't afford to move to a neighborhood with good public schools, or can't afford private school tuition? Would you consign them to schools that don't work for them? What would you do?

Actually I already know the answer to that question. In his column printed June 1, 2003, Ruth stated that after his son's teacher showed movies in class for most of the semester, he could take it no longer.

Ruth announced he was putting his kid in private school. I congratulate him for doing the right thing for his child. I just wish he had sympathy for those who don't have the financial ability to do the same thing.

John Kirtley

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