The Religious Factor in Private Education

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Economists Danny Cohen-Zada and Moshe Justman of Ben-Gurion University wrote this "occasional paper" for the series produced by the National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education at Teachers College, Columbia. It turns out to be an extremely interesting if quite technical "political economy model of education finance and school choice in which parents who differ in the advantage they attribute to religious education choose from among public, private nonsectarian and religious schools." The analysis, says the authors, "[S]upports the implicit conclusion of the [U.S. Supreme] Court, that participation of religious schools in the Cleveland voucher program was essential for achieving its goal of helping low-income parents in a failing school district." That is partly because the voucher amount was too low to enable low-income parents to exercise choice in any way other than by enrolling their kids in parochial schools. But it also bespeaks a preference among many parents for a religious education for their children. "Larger vouchers would have reduced the share of religious schools in the [Cleveland] program, though they would still have attracted a majority of students." Strikingly: "If unrestricted voucher funding of religious education should be allowed, our analysis suggests that, holding the tax rate fixed, a majority coalition of religious and high-income households would prefer receiving an unrestricted voucher and having public education discontinued, to a public education system without vouchers." See for yourself at http://ncspe.org/keepout/papers/00055/981_OP53.pdf. —Chester E. Finn, Jr.