

# Journal of Education & Christian Belief

Vol 2 No 1 (Spring 1998)

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## Book Reviews

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*Religious Education – An Interpretative Approach*

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**William K. Kay & Leslie J. Francis**

*Drift from the Churches*

Reviewer: Adrian Brown (p.72)

**Priscilla Chadwick**

*Shifting Alliances: Church and State in English Education*

Reviewer: Enid B. Mellor (p.73)

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*'Nice When They Are Young': Contemporary Christianity in Families and Schools*

Reviewer: William K. Kay (p.73)

**Charles Birch & Lukas Vischer**

*Living with the Animals: The Community of God's Creatures*

Reviewer: Steve Bishop (p.74)

**Terence Copley**

*Teaching Religion: Fifty years of religious education in England and Wales*

Reviewer: Trevor Cooling (p.75)

**Michael Paul Gallagher, SJ**

*Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*

Reviewer: David I. Smith (p.76)

**R. Smith & J. Bradford**

*Children and Divorce*

Reviewer: Brian Wakemen (p.77)

**Kevin Nichols**

*Refracting the Light: Learning the Languages of Faith*

Reviewer: Arthur Rowe (p.78)

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*Immortal Diamond: Facets of Mature Faith*

Reviewer: Arthur Rowe (p.78)

**Basil Mitchell**

*Faith and Criticism*

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*Agenda for Educational Change*

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## Editorial

IN THE HEYDAY of educational philosophy in the seventies, it was fashionable to analyse key concepts – ‘teaching’, ‘learning’, ‘knowledge’, ‘education’ itself and many more – in the hope that this would solve, or dissolve, many of the problems we meet in thinking about education. That hope was not realised but an important distinction was brought to light between ‘knowing *that*’, ‘knowing *how*’ and knowing with a direct object, e.g. knowing Tom or knowing London.

The impression was given, and is still with us, that the kind of knowledge that was central to education was ‘knowing that’. ‘Knowing how’ or skills/competences were regarded as merely a matter of having a knack, a matter for training rather than education. Personal knowledge was admitted to have some importance but it was regarded as tainted with mystical notions of ‘I’ and ‘Thou’.

In contrast with this hierarchy of kinds of knowledge, the Old and New Testaments place a high value on knowledge involving loving relationship with the known and on wisdom with a strongly practical and whole-of-life ring to it. Indeed, in both parts of the Bible, the two are often explicitly linked together. Knowledge as theoretical abstraction is not valued in the same way at all in the Bible as it is in much of our contemporary view of education.

It therefore seems right that Christians thinking about education should give attention to the subject of wisdom. Studies of this important subject occupy significant space in this issue and take up not one but two articles.

Doug Blomberg’s article on the practice of wisdom sets out the contours of what he sees as a biblical alternative to rationalist accounts of knowledge. This is an account of knowing as historical, experiential, responsive to created order and open to mystery. It therefore introduces another very important kind of knowing: *knowing when*. It is linked with a view of teaching as an uncertain craft rooted in the concreteness of the situation, rather than as a passing on of the certainties of theory. Knowing, teaching and learning viewed in this way are more true to the Hebrew wisdom tradition rather than that of the Greeks which has had such an influence on western education.

David I. Smith takes up the account of knowing as wisdom that Doug Blomberg has developed here and in several other papers and he compares it with what another Christian educationist from another time and place, John Comenius, had to say about knowledge and wisdom. He finds significantly similar emphases in the work of both writers, both in their positive impulses and in the criticisms they make of contemporary rationalist accounts.

The many sub-themes dealt with in both of these papers call for extended study one by one. For example, the suggestion that wisdom is playful and what this alone could mean for our teaching and learning surely merits a whole paper in itself. Perhaps there is somebody out there reading this who could take this up!

Over recent years, annual ‘towards a Christian theory of education’ conferences at Stapleford House, the present home of this journal, have provided several articles based on conference papers. (Perhaps, in the light of the two papers in this issue on knowing as wisdom, it would be more true to the Judaeo-Christian tradition that the emphasis on theory in their title should be reduced!) The 1996 conference has led to a different kind of article and it did so in a different way.

It all started with a throw-away reference by Signe Sandsmark during the course of discussion of her conference paper (since published as ‘Is Faith the Purpose of Christian Education?’ in the Spring 1997 issue). Her reference to ‘vaguely Christian schools’ sparked a string of questions for Ken

Badley, another speaker at the same conference. This led to the involvement of six other Christian educationists, along with Ken and Signe, in an ongoing discussion of these questions. The result so far is published here as a paper on identifying Christian schools with contributions from eight writers in six countries and three continents. This is the result so far but, as you will see on pages 6 and 51, there is an opportunity for you to join the discussion on our web site. If you do not have ready access to the world wide web, you can post or fax your response to us. Selected responses may be published in a future issue of the journal.

We are grateful to the editor of *Christian Scholar's Review* and to Jim Schwartz for permission to re-publish here his paper on the three options he sees for Christians teaching in government-sponsored schools in the USA. The situation in state schools varies greatly from country to country but the three options outlined by Dr Schwartz will probably have their counterparts in most countries. We therefore felt it important that we make this article available to our readership. The option favoured in this article has interesting resonances with some of the things William Cox had to say in his article in the Autumn 1997 issue.

In another article in the Autumn 1997 issue, Elizabeth Ashton argued that much current practice in Religious Education in primary schools is based on theories that should now be discarded and that teachers should have much higher expectations of the potential of their pupils for understanding scriptural narrative. In the final article in this issue, William Kay and Richard Wilkins take up this point. They go on to discuss the teaching of reading and suggest that the Bible with its wide variety of types of literature has just the features that would help pupils to develop their reading skills.

A wide range of books of potential interest to Christians in education are reviewed in this issue. We have also included for the first time a brief section of book notes.

As we move into our second year under our new title and with our more international focus and new format, we have been greatly encouraged by responses to the journal that we have received from near and far, particularly from the UK, continental Europe and the USA. The demand has been such that it has been necessary for our publishers to arrange for a re-print of extra copies of both of last year's issues.

An important part of our vision is to make available to trainee teachers and educational researchers material which seeks to develop a Christian alternative to the dominant paradigms in thinking about education. A way in which readers could help in this is by encouraging college and university libraries to subscribe to the journal or, in these days when cash for subscriptions to periodicals is tightly budgetted in such institutions, by sponsoring such subscriptions. Please consider prayerfully whether you can help in this way.

***John Shortt***