

Journal of Education & Christian Belief

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Book Reviews

John Van Engen (ed.)

Educating People of Faith: Exploring the History of Jewish and Christian Communities

Reviewer: David I. Smith (p.153)

Khim Harris

Evangelicals and Education: Evangelical Anglicans and Middle-Class Education in Nineteenth Century England

Reviewer: Richard Wilkins (p.155)

Marie Parker-Jenkins, Dimitra Hartas & Barrie A. Irving

In Good Faith: Schools, Religion and Public Funding

Reviewer: John Sullivan (p.156)

Jill Ireland, Richard Edlin & Ken Dickens (eds.)

Pointing the Way: Directions for Christian Education in a new millennium

Reviewer: Chris Steed (p.158)

Sam M. Intrator (ed.)

Living the Questions: Essays Inspired by the Work and Life of Parker J. Palmer

Reviewer: Ron Sjoerdsma (p.159)

Debra Dean Murphy

Teaching That Transforms: Worship as the Heart of Christian Education

Reviewer: Robert J. Keeley (p.160)

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Editorial

IN THE FIRST article in this issue, Trevor Cooling explores the place of theological curiosity in lives that seek to be faithful to Scripture. He argues that, far from being a threat to faithfulness, curiosity is actually required in the person who seeks to live under the rule of biblical teaching and should therefore be promoted in the formation of Christian teachers. He bases his argument in a critical realist approach which is wholly committed to the search for truth but which recognizes the role of contextual considerations in, and the fallibility of, all human interpretations of truth. As he puts it, 'theological curiosity encourages Christians to ask the questions that prevent them from slipping into the complacency of assuming that traditional interpretations are necessarily the correct ones' (p.97).

Cooling's call is, on the one hand, an affirmation that it is right to be wholly committed to our most deeply held convictions and, on the other hand, an advocacy of curiosity as a Christian virtue that always seeks deeper and wider understanding and is open to the discovery that some of our beliefs need to be revised. Commitment and curiosity should go together in the lives of those who seek to be faithful.

Stephen Kaufmann introduces us in his article to the work of Charlotte Mason, an English educational reformer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Partly as a result of the popularizing of her views in the 1980s by Susan Schaeffer Macauley (a daughter of Francis Schaeffer), Mason's writings have become quite influential in several countries in the past twenty years both among home educators and in some strands of the new Christian schools movement. Kaufmann's focus in this article is on Mason's view of the role of the Holy Spirit whom she saw as the imparter of all knowledge, active not only in special revelation but also in general revelation. Kaufmann quotes Mason as writing about the need of a revolution in our thinking which leads us to 'conceive that dry-as-dust subjects like grammar and arithmetic should come to children, living with the life of the Holy Spirit' of whom the Bible says that he teaches us all things (p.113).

Writing independently of one another and from opposite sides of the Atlantic, Jan Gormas and John Westwell share a concern that not only arithmetic but the whole of mathematics teaching and learning should undergo something of a revolution. Gormas argues that mathematics has become exclusively focused on symbolic manipulation, a game in which all that matters is that techniques are learned that lead to the success of producing the right answer to the question. She calls for a revolution that recontextualises mathematics as a collaborative search for meaning within classroom learning communities that engage with its issues and applications. Mathematics teaching and learning that does this will help us to know God in new ways, she argues, and to take appropriate action for justice in his world.

John Westwell says that too many students find their experience of mathematics at school to be 'disengaging, disempowering and demoralising' (p.138). He aligns himself with those who are calling for a 'humanising' of mathematics teaching and learning and he points to a particular way forward in the recognition of the importance of story in human life and understanding. He tells the story of Florence Nightingale and her rose-diagrams and identifies three stories within the story: the human-story, the mathematics-story and the knowledge-story. He calls for collaboration among Christian teachers of mathematics to develop an approach that puts narrative at the heart of mathematics teaching and learning.

We hope you will find much of value within these articles and the reviews that follow them of six books on a wide range of subjects at the interface between education and Christian belief.

John Shortt & David I. Smith