

detail over seven chapters. Dawes' conclusion titled 'The Lessons of History' is a negative one, as he claims that 'there is no way of reconciling Christian claims to religious authority with the knowledge and methods of the discipline of history' (p. 368).

Why is this a terrific book? It is clearly written and Dawes has provided us with a helpful contribution to the question of the historical Jesus. In what is a very useful text book for undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as teachers, we are presented with an invaluable survey and critique of the history of biblical interpretation. Dawes helps us understand some very important thinkers but also confronts us with some wider questions, questions about belief in the twenty-first century and how we relate to the challenges of the seventeenth century. I cannot help thinking that we have largely forgotten the challenge to faith raised so long ago. It would seem that we live as though there is no serious challenge to faith.

We live, however, in a society that seems more and more interested in spirituality and God. People seem unconcerned or ignorant of the challenge to religious authority. Many seek meaning apart from the agnostic's world view. Others simply are not aware of the challenge to religious authority. In spite of discovery channels and documentary programmes on religious topics, people live and believe in spite of these challenges. Has Dawes' work fully acknowledged that religious authority has not been mortally damaged? Why do people still believe in God? Why do people pray and meditate? Why do people go on pilgrimages? The fact that people believe in spite of the challenge to religious authority is grounds for a response to the challenge of the seventeenth century. This would seem to lend a hand to dialectical theology: Theology is about 'God is God'. We are not open to the same language and grammar as others. 'God is God' is our epistemological cry. Attractive as this seems, people are not fully prepared to embrace all which that entails. Many turn to religion because they want a tradition where they feel they are someone. A tradition that gives meaning in a stressful and prosaic world. This supports the association between religion and ethics. Religion provides a way of life grounded in ethics. This is not to say that we need religion to be ethical, but for many a belief system provides an ethical system. These points might seem relevant to people who are not involved with theology and not appropriate to theologians. But is it not true that many theologians continue believing in spite of the crisis that the seventeenth century raises? We continue believing and ignore the crisis. Maybe that is all we need to do. In that sense the overall thesis that Dawes is concerned with is not really a big concern to theology and belief today.

Finally, Dawes does not engage with the third quest. This would seem to be a major omission. We are missing twenty or so years of scholarship. I would have been interested to have had Dawes' erudite reflections on this quest in the light of the larger concerns he engages with.

What is interesting is that this question, on the whole, is not done by the work of those who would claim to be theologians or philosophers. Many are interested in making Jesus relevant to our society. The loss of the eschatological Jesus to the wisdom teacher makes Jesus a figure that many will find attractive. The crisis of religious authority does not exist. 'If it works it's useful' is a saying that represents many in our society. And not 'is it scientifically verifiable'. This third quest is concerned with purely historical questions asked by many who are Christians. They are not concerned at all with the question of the challenge to religious authority. The historical task is also the 'faith seeking understanding' task.

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*Is World View Neutral Education Possible
and Desirable? A Christian Response to
Liberal Arguments (Paternoster Biblical and
Theological Monographs)*

Signe Sandmark

Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000, xiv + 182 pp.,
£19.99, pb., ISBN 0-85364-973-1

SUMMARY

As the title suggests, this book is primarily about education, specifically that of children. It is not intended as a thoroughgoing theological justification of any particular stance but investigates the claim that liberal education is value neutral. However, Sandmark goes further by asking whether, if such neutrality exists, it is a desirable basis for educating the young. She contrasts two cultural backgrounds, Norway, where state education is avowedly Christian and England, where the state's provision is largely liberal and secular. Following an introduction outlining this context, she presents an understanding of education from the perspective of her Lutheran worldview. She goes on to analyse the theories of two liberal educationalists, John White and Kenneth Strike and contrasts them not only with her own views but also with those of the Catholic writer Terence H. McLaughlin. Finally, she develops the idea that schools should be more explicit about their own basis and that in her view a well presented Christian education is the soundest base from which to work.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Wie der Titel besagt, geht es in dem Buch hauptsächlich um Bildung, insbesondere von Kindern. Es will keine tiefeschürfende theologische Rechtfertigung einer spezifischen Position geben, sondern untersucht die Behauptung, liberale Bildung sei wertneutral. Sandmark beschäftigt sich darüber hinaus mit der Frage, ob selbst dann, wenn es diese Wertneutralität gäbe, sie eine erstrebenswerte Grundlage für die Bildung von Kindern darstelle. Sie greift auf Erfahrungen in zwei Kulturen

zurück: Norwegen, wo die staatliche Bildung betont christlich ist, und England, wo die staatlichen Vorgaben größtenteils liberal und säkular sind. Nach einem einleitenden Teil, der diesen Kontext darlegt, präsentiert sie ihr Verständnis von Bildung in der Perspektive ihrer lutherischen Weltanschauung. Des weiteren analysiert sie die Theorien zweier liberaler Bildungsexperten, John White und Kenneth Strike, und kontrastiert diese nicht nur mit Sandsmarks eigenen Ansichten, sondern auch mit denen des katholischen Autoren Terence H. McLaughlin. Abschließend entwickelt sie den Gedanken, dass Schulen ihre eigenen Grundlagen expliziter darlegen sollten, und dass ihrer Ansicht nach eine gut präsentierte christliche Bildung die beste Arbeitsgrundlage darstellt.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet ouvrage traite de l'éducation des enfants. L'auteur ne vise pas à donner une justification théologique pour un mode d'éducation particulier, mais considère l'idée selon laquelle l'éducation libérale serait de valeur neutre. Sandsmark pose aussi la question de savoir si, à supposer que cette neutralité existe, celle-ci constitue un bon cadre pour l'éducation des jeunes. Elle met en contraste deux arrière-plans culturels, celui de la Norvège, où l'éducation offerte par l'état se veut explicitement chrétienne, et celui de l'Angleterre, où l'éducation dispensée par l'état est largement libérale et sécularisée. Ensuite, l'auteur présente une conception de l'éducation fondée sur sa vision du monde luthérienne. Elle poursuit par l'examen des théories de deux partisans de l'éducation libérale, John White et Kenneth Strike et les met en opposition avec son propre point de vue, mais aussi avec celui du catholique Terence H. McLaughlin. Finalement, elle plaide que les écoles devraient être plus explicites quant à leur cadre de référence et qu'une éducation chrétienne bien menée constitue le meilleur fondement pour construire.

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In common with many good books, Signe Sandsmark's work may not be read by enough of the people who really ought to read it, especially those responsible for influencing state education. Her experience of the Norwegian situation with its Lutheran tradition of two governments, the secular and the spiritual, underpins her analysis that Christianity can inform all areas of education, bringing with it the dimension of training servants fit for both domains, that is serving God and the State. She contrasts this goal with that of the liberal models, which view autonomy as the prime aim for education. Liberal autonomy, however, is shown to be atheistic because of its focus on the individual ruling their own life. Christian education can produce autonomous individuals who have chosen to submit themselves to God. If God exists, she argues, then this latter type is the true

autonomy.

She explains carefully how all education is inescapably encapsulated within a worldview. The difficulty with much that presents itself as liberal is that it fails to recognize this fundamental fact, believing itself to represent a position of neutrality, particularly in a pluralistic setting. This belies its non-neutrality, Sandsmark contests, for the fact that religion is portrayed as a personal preference made from a selection of equally viable options indicts the view as biased.

For those not familiar with a close analysis of liberal educational theory, her description of both White's and Strike's views may help enlighten as to the pervasiveness of these concepts. She helpfully separates these ideas into those which are liberal in quality, i.e. not fundamental; those liberal in their basis, thus more minimal in terms of underlying beliefs; and those which are liberal as alternative, i.e. not religious. As she explores the logical outcomes of these various shades of liberalism, the reader is left wondering how its obvious non-neutrality could go so easily undetected. Her explanation is that in liberal societies, such as England, the lack of an absolute point of reference for the education system leads to an inability to provide an accurate self-critique. At one point (p. 61) she proposes that, 'children always start from somewhere, in all controversial questions, only it is easier to see it when they are in a minority'. It is to that end that she concludes that if it existed a neutral education would not be desirable.

With respect to those who propose the possibility of an education that is both liberal and religious she maintains that the same problem exists. She raises the impossibility of teaching from a basis of neutrality treating all views as equal, when those responsible for the teaching clearly show a bias through their own worldview. Indeed, she makes much of the example set inadvertently by both teachers and schools in promoting any one view through their own lifestyle whilst still believing in their own neutrality. It is not intended to be a book about pedagogy but to me, as a practitioner within a Christian school setting, it provided food for thought about my own teaching practices.

The final chapter provides a cogent and responsible plea for a more honest approach to education in terms of its underlying beliefs. Liberal education does not deliver its claim of a blank canvas, nor should it be required to do so. If we are to have bias then let us be aware of it so that we can allow for it in our response to everything else. In this context, Christian education, it is proposed, has much to offer, especially in its focus of concern for others rather than the self-interest of some systems.

This book is highly relevant to the current debate surrounding faith schools, especially in the UK. Signe Sandsmark provides persuasive and sound comment to bolster the argument in favour of a Christian worldview in education.

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