

regarded in the modern secular world as self-evidently desirable in social organisation, but Dale is right not to assume that it must figure in a society founded on theocratic, or even generally theological, ideals. (Those of us who tend churches' legal systems find ourselves finessing e.g. Presbyterianism as 'a special kind of democracy'; but that is stretching the definition of democracy to avoid alarming people.)

The main weakness of the book is that the analysis tends to make the same points many times and does not suggest the lessons that could be learned by political science. In a £45 book with fewer than 120 pages of text (net of end-notes), more food for thought might have been expected.

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*WORLDS COLLIDING, CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS AND THE LAW* by REX AHDAR. Ashgate, Dartmouth, 2001, xii + 296 pp (hardback £50.00) ISBN 0-7546-2200-2.

The two worlds referred to in the title are what Professor Ahdar calls conservative Christians and liberalism. He describes conservative Christians as Christians with a particular mindset or attitude towards their faith and culture. They defer to, and endeavour faithfully to obey, 'authority'. For the Protestant conservative Christian, authority is Scripture, for the Roman Catholic conservative Christian it is Scripture and tradition. Conservative Christians believe in moral absolutes. They are restorationists: they seek to transform or restore society. They oppose the prevailing ethos or 'spirit of the age'. In contrast, Professor Ahdar describes the central tenets of liberalism as individualism, neutrality as to conceptions of the good life, confining religion to a person's private life, rationality, and belief in progress.

Until the 1960s the prevailing New Zealand culture was based on Protestant Christianity. Over the last forty years, New Zealand culture, law and government has embraced the liberalism ethos, at the expense of Christianity. How do the conservative Christian and the liberal, modernist 'worlds' co-exist? By and large, amicably. But in a number of areas the two worlds collide, in particular over the human rights movement, children's rights, and gay rights. Professor Ahdar considers the rights of parents to control the religious upbringing of their children, and to administer corporal punishment to them. He examines the right of churches to refuse to employ or to ordain homosexuals—a refusal which liberalism regards as archaic bigotry. He describes the New Zealand Church's recent challenge to the introduction of laws permitting same-sex marriages. In his conclusions, Professor Ahdar looks to the future, and argues that the ultimate security for conservative Christians' religious freedom (apart from God) is not the state, nor the judiciary, but lies in the hearts of people.

I found this a difficult book to read, for two reasons. It was not lack of interest, for I have considerable sympathy with the conservative Christian world-view, and I found the author's examples and his analysis on many points fascinating. No, my complaint is primarily the lack of sufficient assistance for the reader. Although there are some headings, it is difficult to see the overall structure of each chapter. Nor is there an index, so finding again any particular passage or argument is almost impossible. My second reason is that the book originated as the author's Ph D thesis, and he has not tempered his academic style of writing for the more general reader. An example, which I still cannot understand, is on p 57.

Dualism is a distortion since it superimposes upon the structure of creation the 'directional' question of obedience or disobedience. 'Dualism ... confuses structure and direction. Rather than seeing how the directional question runs through *all of life*, it identifies the direction with *particular parts* of the structure.'

While on the subject of errors, there are a number which should have been picked up on proof-reading: *ex hypothesis* for *ex hypothesi* (p 86), the word 'be' omitted from 'it seemed to [be] tilted in their favour' (p 164). But these are of minor importance in comparison with the lack of an index.

These complaints apart, the book's argument is compelling, though, like Professor Ahdar, I realise that I am seeing it from the 'inside'. He is preaching to the converted, so far as I am concerned. Just one example of Professor Ahdar's argument shows the fallacy of the liberal world-view. Without an index and re-reading several chapters I cannot find the page reference, but he points out that liberalism's claim to be open minded is flawed: the one thing liberalism will not tolerate is others who argue for absolutes. In other words, liberalism fails to be liberal when liberalism itself is at stake.

What really impressed me was the similarity between the conservative Christian and liberalism scene in New Zealand, with which I was not familiar, and the position in England, with which I think I am. What Professor Ahdar calls the Wellington world-view, i.e. liberalism, could just as easily be called the London (or any other major UK city) world-view. The specifically legal chapters, dealing with human rights, children's rights, and gay rights, refer to legislation and case law in New Zealand. One is familiar with the same arguments and issues arising in the UK.

In conclusion, *Worlds Colliding* has much to offer both Christians and lawyers, and is therefore well-suited to the readers of this Journal. But don't think of it as a light read.

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