



The Air We Breathe

Glen Scrivener

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You are a goldfish, and Christianity is the water in which you swim', claims Glen Scrivener in his new book, *The Air We Breathe*.¹ Believing we've lost sight of just how radical the Bible's values are, Scrivener seeks to give his reader, 'a deeper appreciation for the values you cherish, and most of all, that you'll see the power and profundity of Jesus and his revolution.'²

Scrivener's three target audiences are 'the nones' – those unfamiliar with biblical teaching, 'the dones' – those who think they know Christianity and are hostile to it, and 'the wons' – Christians. Starting in Genesis and heading through to the 20th century, he unpacks seven core values which, he argues, originate from the Bible: equality, compassion, consent, enlightenment, science, freedom, and progress. It's deliberately Western-focussed, but Scrivener wants to make clear that this is not because 'West is best', nor because Christianity is a Western phenomenon (it's not). He doesn't shy away from the ugly parts of Christian history.

Scrivener is fast-paced and ambitious in the amount of ground he covers. His style is conversational and sometimes humorous. It's an easy page-turner, despite the weighty topics covered, and eye-opening to the profound impact that Christianity and biblical values have had in shaping the Western world. Scrivener paints a vivid picture of the ancient world, contrasting it with the radical beauty of Jesus' humility and servanthood. You can't help but be amazed by the way in which Jesus' compassion and upside-down order provides a basis for many of the values that society subscribes to today.

However, at times questions are unanswered or there is a lack of detail – the danger of moving too quickly is to lose nuance when each topic could merit a book of its own.

Scrivener isn't unique in his desire to uncover the immense impact that Christianity has had on the Western World – both Christian (Vishal Mangalwadi)³ and secular (Tom Holland)⁴ authors have explored the topic. Tom Holland's acclaimed book *Dominion* has long been on my reading list, and I've made a number of failed attempts to listen to it as an audiobook. So it was with great excitement that I picked up *The Air we Breathe* at a Christian bookstall – Scrivener makes the topic accessible for a much wider audience who, like me, might struggle to wade through meaty history books!

The final chapters are challenging for the unbeliever. Scrivener writes, '*Everyone is confronted with the absurdly improbable event: Christianity rose to life to have dominion over the world. Christians say: We have an explanation: Christianity rose to life because Christ rose to life.*'⁵

This book succeeded in lifting my eyes beyond the beauty of biblical principles to Jesus himself. It's a timely reminder of the subversive nature of his love for the unlovely. ■

REFERENCES

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4. Holland T. *Dominion: The making of the Western mind*. London: Little, Brown; 2020.
5. *Op Cit.* Scrivener