

THE AIR WE BREATHE: HOW WE ALL CAME TO BELIEVE IN FREEDOM, KINDNESS, PROGRESS, AND EQUALITY

Glenn Scrivener

As someone who has had Tom Holland’s *Dominion* looking at me from the bookshelf for some years now, I was excited to read Scrivener’s condensed treatise (192 pages as opposed to Holland’s 624) of how, whether we recognise it or not, the West is built on the teachings of Jesus. He pulls apart the argument that what we hold dear – compassion, humanity, equality, rights – are just what we would expect, what we all know, what comes naturally to humankind. Whereas Holland speaks as a historian, Scrivener speaks as an apologist and evangelist. Scrivener writes for Christians and seekers alike, as well as those disaffected by the Church. He traces the development of a Christian world view back through the centuries, pulling at the threads of humanism, and rooting it in thoroughly Christian notions. He ascertains, ‘the God story and the equality story stand and fall together.’

He doesn’t flinch from the painful and catastrophic failings of the Church through the ages, but provides a balanced view, setting them in the context of the failings of humanity. It is not a light read in some ways, as Scrivener tackles many of the most horrifying episodes in human history: Crucifixion, gladiatorial games, child sexual abuse, slavery and the Holocaust. He also explodes the ‘progress’ myth. The book is approachable, engaging and hopeful as it charts the progress of Christian teaching and practice through society, from ancient times through the Enlightenment until today. Scrivener also examines where some secular ideas originated, and how they took root in the modern understanding of the world, undertaking some controlled myth-exploding along the way.

As an evangelist, the author cannot help but hold out the good news of forgiveness through Jesus for a world in which

judgement, condemnation, failure and shame are abundant and without redemption. He ends with a gospel exhortation to his intended audience.

There is much here to equip the church leader. In a church which has, to some extent, lost her confidence, this book is encouraging. With his characteristically clear-thinking analysis, Scrivener carefully pulls the rug from the secular-humanist myth and shows how society is immeasurably richer and more compassionate because of Jesus and because our foundations have been built on him. In the light of the Quiet Revival report, this book is powerful for helping to rebuild a culture of evangelism in our churches.

Review by Sarah Pix,
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