

Book Review

Title: *The Air We Breathe*
Author: Glen Scrivener
Publisher: The Good Book Company, 2022 (p/b edn.), 232 pp

This very readable book, *The Air We Breathe*, was specifically bought for us by a good Christian friend, so highly did he recommend it. The author, Glen Scrivener, is an active media-savvy podcaster. His contention in this book is that many of the important aspects which we value in modern societies are actually Christian or due to Christians' impact through-out history and society – all ultimately deriving from Jesus' teachings. The potentially misleading (or provocative) title comes from the idea that Christianity effectively constitutes “the air we breathe”, in that it is all around us but largely unrecognised, much like the proverbial goldfish (probably) don't know what water is. This is not the message one gets from current media or much historical analysis.

Scrivener begins by addressing himself to three groups of people – the nones, the dones and the wons i.e. those who don't believe; those who have given up (Christian) belief; and those who are Christians, but are unfamiliar with this message (or who would like help countering this false narrative). He also borrows another author's acronym, that Christianity is WEIRD i.e. Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic – again countering the majority media narrative in claiming these things are generally good.

Scrivener then details in separate chapters seven qualities that most modern societies value, showing how these derive directly from Jesus' teaching or the action and social impact of Christians over the generations. They are: equality, compassion, consent, enlightenment, science, freedom and progress. Of course, the tragedy is that some of these are now thought to be in opposition to Christianity (eg. enlightenment and science) or which the Church has been reluctant to embrace (eg. equality, progress), when in fact the opposite is true.

Scrivener doesn't white-wash or excuse the failings of the wider Church in discussing these topics, but he does frame them in their historical context. Whatever the institutional Church's failings may have been, it has been Christians who pressed for equality of sex and race and the abolition of slavery in societies for which these values were not even questions at the time. Likewise, the chapter on enlightenment describes well how the scientific method resulted from Christian scientists motivated to understand God's creation, not in opposition to him – a well-worn but much less well-known story for those interested – and again, not the story usually portrayed.

Overall, this is an excellent book, appropriately supported by recent newspaper, internet, podcast and book references, and written in an easy and very readable conversational style. Well worth everyone reading, but especially so if you are disheartened by media discourse about values and/or the re-writing of much history; as a source of apologetics on the topics mentioned; or just as general encouragement about the vast improvements Christianity has made to human societies over 2000 years. Scrivener also provides a further reading list, and if you wanted to dive more deeply into some of these topics, I'd also recommend Tom Holland's *Dominion*, a similar and more detailed assessment from a *non-Christian* author.

JM April 2026