

THE BIBLE: A STORY THAT MAKES SENSE OF LIFE

Andrew Ollerton

London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2020
ISBN: 978-1-529-32700-7 | pp. 339, £14.99

The Bible Series: Experience a Better Story multi-media resource (The Bible Society, 2020).

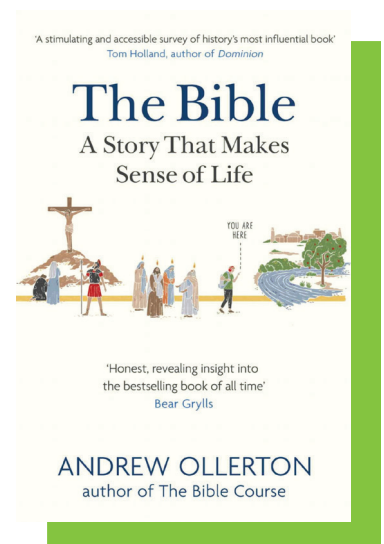
Jargon-free and assuming no previous knowledge of the Bible, the book is written for inquisitive non-believers, people taking the first steps of faith, and mature Christians alike. The verse 'All Scripture is God-breathed..' (2 Timothy 3:16) drives Andrew Ollerton's certainty that the Bible offers unsurpassed wisdom and truth that makes sense of our lives and offers us vital guidance. He traces the Bible's story through the book's six themes: Origins, Exodus, Exile, Messiah, Spirit, and Hope. He explores our human search for meaning, freedom, peace, love, community, and ultimate destiny, through the Bible's narrative.

Each theme has been divided into 'mini-chapters' which can be used for daily reflection over a week, including a passage from the Bible and a short challenge to apply the content. The use of illustrations, often taken from the author's family life, to which everyone can relate, draws the reader in and enables the Bible to come alive here and now.

Although the book stands alone, it is the series book for 'The Bible Series', a free, downloadable, multi-media resource designed for whole church use. There are materials for children (pre-school to KS 3), older teenagers and adult groups. In our church, the adult mid-week house groups used the resource weekly in January/February 2021, coming together, via the Zoom platform, for worship with songs, illustrated scripture readings, a video talk including testimony, and reflection in small groups.

The Bible Series was well-received, and weekly participation remained high; one person commented 'this is one of the highlights of my week'. Another said, 'it has brought the Bible to life for me and has very much got me thinking about the 'whole picture' ... and where I fit into the story ... we were not made by accident but for a purpose and relationship with God'.

Reviewed by Keith and Anne Marston, house group leaders, Isle of Wight Methodist Circuit



RESOURCE REVIEWS





THE RISE AND TRIUMPH OF THE MODERN SELF: CULTURAL AMNESIA, EXPRESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM, AND THE ROAD TO SEXUAL REVOLUTION

Carl R Trueman

Wheaton, Illinois, USA: Crossway Books, 2020
ISBN 978-1-43355-633-2 | pp 432, £16.99

In this important work, Carl Trueman seeks to address questions concerning the 'sexual revolution'.

Christians who embrace orthodoxy, seeking to recognise shifts in society, to make sense of those changes, understand context and develop an insight to negotiate these changes thoughtfully, will find this book helpful.

Engaging three thinkers, Charles Taylor, Philip Rieff and Alasdair MacIntyre, Trueman notes that society has moved toward an understanding of the self, shaped by an emphasis on individual fulfilment, which Trueman labels 'expressive individualism'. He develops this analysis by turning to the developing intellectual environment of the last three centuries through several thinkers, poets and cultural influencers. He makes the argument that where we are now has not happened in a vacuum.

Space does not allow a detailed review of how Trueman probes these philosophies, however he concludes they provide an environment in which people no longer understand themselves as made in God's image, but as those whose identity is endlessly pliable according to subjective desires and felt needs. Trueman states we live in a 'plastic' society.

Sexuality's central role is developed in part 3 of his book: utilising Sigmund Freud to discuss how, in a secular view, aspects of human personality and fulfilment are hidden, intuitive expressions of innate sexual desire. He develops this through the work of Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse. Trueman argues that sexual revolution has been 'baked' into Western culture over the last 300 years.

In two pithy statements Trueman crystallises his analysis:

1. 'Before Freud, sex was an activity, for procreation or for recreation; after Freud, sex is definitive of who we are, as individuals, as societies, and as a species' (p.221).
2. 'Once identity was understood to be sexual, then it was only a matter of time before sex became political' (p. 266).

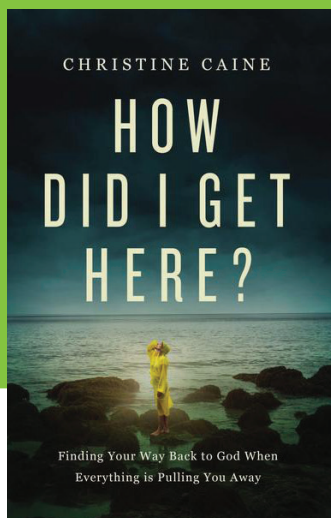
This book is important, with some sharp insights. It will certainly enable the reader to understand something of a context for our thinking.

While helpful and insightful, there is the danger that we can put sexuality into neat 'boxes'. Abstract theories and ideas are all very well and good; however, pastorally we should always remember that we deal with 'real' people and their own struggles and wrestling.

I commend this book while urging an openness to wider and perhaps a little more responsive thinking and pastoral response.

Reviewed by the Revd John Henry who is the Superintendent of Cleveland and Danby Circuit in the Darlington District. John's undergraduate and postgraduate work has been in Biblical Interpretation and ethics with a focus on 1 Corinthians.

MET's online event for the Methodist Conference this year featured an interview with Carl Trueman as well as with Baroness Cox and Nola Leach. The video is available on the MET website: MethodistEvangelicals.org.uk/videos



HOW DID I GET HERE?

Christine Caine

Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Books 2021
ISBN: 987-1-4002-2656-6 | pp 207, £10.99

Christine Caine is a wise and engaging author - she is great for following on social media where she often drops nuggets of hope and encouragement.

This 207 page book is about the 'drift' Christians experience. Caine tackles her subject from an easily accessible angle, incorporating her own personal testimony to help us face the struggles pressing in on us all in this present age. She presents her message in a mix of story, comment, advice and caution while faithfully grounding all of the issues in scripture.

In the course of 'How Did I Get Here?', Christine Caine addresses nine situations in which we are most likely to drift from orthodoxy, from purpose and from Jesus. She sets out the premise for the book in Dropping - and Setting - Anchor and then progresses through measurable situations with which we can all relate. Each begins with 'you know when you've drifted when...' and then she puts up some of the key elements of our discipleship, counterpointed by that with which we have replaced them. For example, chapter 2 is about trust and control, chapter 5 concerns stopping praying and starting talking, chapter 6 is about stopping gathering and starting isolating and so on through to a conclusion that does not leave us in desperation but points towards 'let's ring the bells of victory'.

Caine writes with an engaging realism that is very relatable. She shares her own stories with humility and grace, unafraid to point out the humour and pathos of her own failures, which in turn help us to identify and grapple with our own issues as well as to being confident that they can be overcome.

For many Methodists who are thinking of 'ringing the bell' and giving up on the denomination, this maybe will add

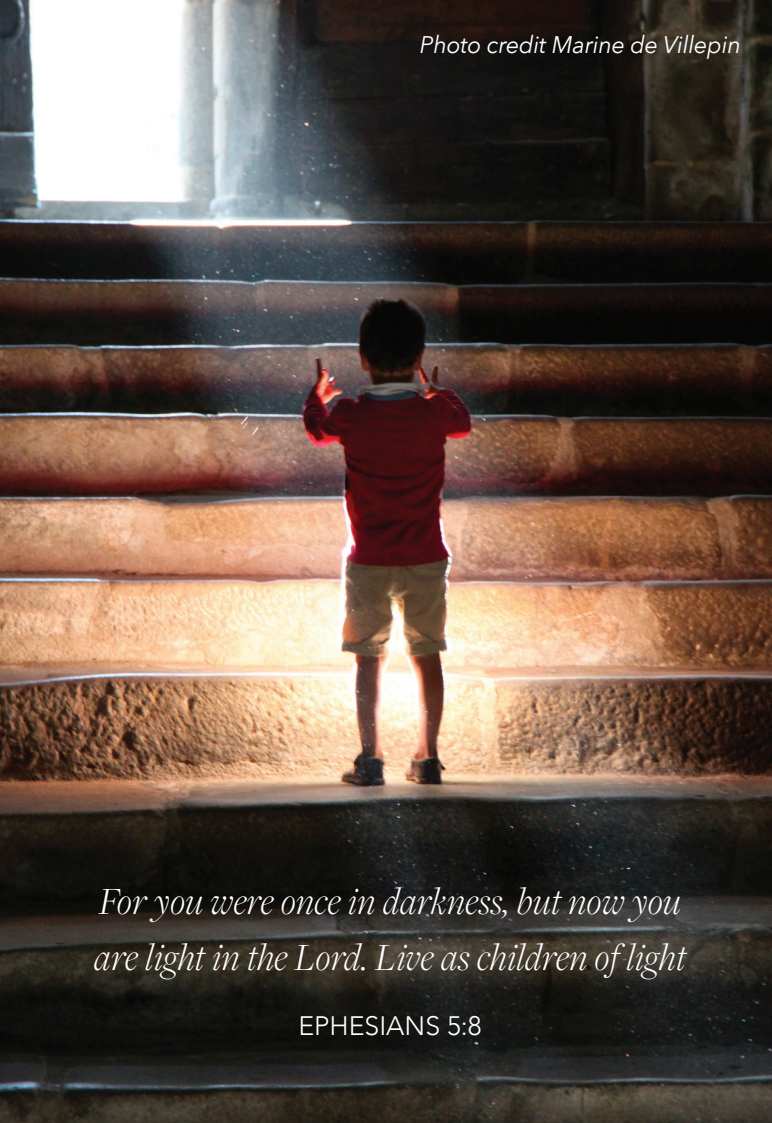
some understanding to how our church got here. I certainly recognise several traits from Caine's drift-list that have crept into Methodism's organisational structures and our local churches. I felt challenged to seek God's face and to press into scripture and prayer as I was reading. Being solution-focused and thoroughly relatable, Caine points us towards God and reminds us that: 'God knows the frailty of our humanity. He has been contending with it ever since the fall. He knows how effortless our drifting is' (page 7).

This book can be read a chapter at a time and would be suitable to discuss in a book group. Christine Caine offers 'How Did I Get Here?' with a cultural and timely relevance to all Christians and, I believe, is offering a prophetic word to us in the Methodist Church.

Reviewed by the Revd Catherine Hutton who is the Lead Minister for Epsom and Cheam Methodist Churches. She has a passion for building the church in discipleship for true evangelism, Scriptural holiness and missional engagement with the local community. She lives in Epsom with her husband Gavin, two sons - Aidan & Joel - and Rocky, the ministry Chihuahua. She is partial to a sparkly manicure and a good Marvel movie.



Photo credit Marine de Villepin



For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light

EPHESIANS 5:8



met | Methodist
Evangelicals
Together

MET SOUTH WEST CONFERENCE

The Radiance of Discipleship
28 - 30 January 2022

Livermead Hotel, Torquay

Further details available on
methodistevangelicals.org.uk/regionalevents

JOHN WESLEY'S HYMNS REDISCOVERED

Redemption Found



Praising God with John Wesley
An introduction to John Wesley's translations
of German Hymns



Redemption Found

Praising God with John Wesley: An Introduction to John Wesley's Translations of German Hymns by John M. Haley.

In this readable introduction, John Haley outlines the importance of the German hymn in John Wesley's journey that brought him to the experience at Aldersgate Street.

Available from 80 Days Publishing,
Edinburgh £16.50

Eternal Depth



20 John Wesley Hymns

with new melodies by Wendy Edwards Beardall-Norton
arranged by Christopher Norton



Eternal Depth

20 John Wesley Hymns with new melodies by Wendy Edwards Beardall-Norton (arranged by Christopher Norton).

The 20 new tunes in this collection were specially written for John Wesley's hymns.

Available from 80 Days Publishing,
Edinburgh £25.00

ETERNAL DEPTH OF LOVE DIVINE

John Wesley *Rediscovered*



Inspiring Hymns Refreshed for Today's Worship

GUEST VOCALS: SARAH LACY (EDEN'S BRIDGE)

John Wesley Rediscovered

Digital recordings of the 20 Hymns by the London Fox Singers

The digital music album of 'Eternal Depth'. Available on a variety of digital platforms, including iTunes, Spotify and YouTube. Performance backing tracks are also available: search 'Song title / Primotrax' in Apple/iTunes and all good on-line stores.