

# Latimer Book List – July 2022

This is a summary of recent books read by Martin Davie, compiling his evaluations and the commendations of others. In this edition:

Author	Title	Martin's opinion
Ryan T Anderson and Alexandra de Sanctis	<i>Tearing Us Apart: How Abortion Harms Everything and Solves Nothing</i>	The authors set out the enormous harm they believe that abortion has caused in the United States – not just to the unborn children or the women involved, but also to society, families, the practice of medicine, vulnerable communities, the rule of law, politics, and culture. Detailed, evidence-based study.
Os Guinness	<i>The Great Quest: Invitation to an Examined Life and a Sure Path to Meaning</i>	A fascinating and thought-provoking description of the journey towards faith, explaining the importance of thinking seriously about the meaning of life, and considering the various stages that lead from a search for the meaning of life to becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. Highly recommended, especially for serious intellectual enquirer.
Craig Keener	<i>Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels</i>	A vast, detailed, scholarly study of the practice of writing biographies at the time the NT was written, and what we can learn about the historical reliability of the Gospels as a result. Few will read it cover to cover, but exceptionally useful starting point for the serious student.
Brant Pitre	<i>The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ</i>	A superb, clear, accessible book addressing the reliability of the Gospels and what they tell us about Christ by Roman Catholic scholar, Pitre. Buy it, read it, share it and give it away.
Carl Trueman	<i>Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution</i>	<i>Strange New World</i> provides the resources of Trueman's major study, <i>The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self</i> , in a concise and accessible format. It enables Christians to understand the world we live in and to learn how to live well in it. Vital for ministers, students, Christians to read, understand and live out.

Ryan T Anderson and Alexandra de Sanctis, *Tearing Us Apart: How Abortion Harms Everything and Solves Nothing*, (Regnery Publishing, 2022)  
ISBN 978-1-68451-350-5, £25.27 (e and audio editions also available)

#### Overview:

Ryan Anderson is the President of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington DC and the author of a number of highly regarded books and articles on ethics, religion and public policy including *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment* and *Truth Overruled: The Future of Marriage and Religious Freedom*. Alexandra DeSanctis is a visiting fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center. She is a widely published journalist whose writings cover politics, abortion, the pro-life movement, elections, and religion.

In their new book they join together to set out in detail the enormous harm they believe that abortion has caused in the United States. As they explain their introduction, their view is that:

While it's essential to focus on the unborn child – whose death is the gravest harm of abortion – there's much more that needs to be said, because abortion harms far more than the child in the womb. The case against abortion is far more comprehensive. Abortion harms every single one of us by perpetuating deeply rooted falsehoods about what it means to be human. Abortion attacks the humanity and value of the child in the womb. Abortion strikes at the bond between mother and child, turning it into a conflict between adversaries and a justification for violence, a relationship not of love but of antagonism and mutual destruction. Abortion corrupts the relationship between man and woman and rejects the responsibilities that mothers and fathers have to their children and to one another. Abortion cuts at the fabric of marriage and of entire families, harming mothers, fathers, siblings, and grandparents.

Abortion distorts science and corrupts medicine, pretending that the child in the womb isn't a human being at all and the tools meant for healing can rightly be turned to killing. Abortion perverts what it means to live in a justly ordered political community with laws that protect all of us – and in a society where our laws say that some human beings don't deserve to live, we are all at risk. Abortion leads to a particular devaluation of unborn children diagnosed with illnesses or disorders in the womb, as well as a devaluation of girls in parts of the world where sons are more highly prized. It undermines solidarity with the poor, the weak, the marginalised, people with disabilities, and anyone on the periphery of life. It allows those in power to deem certain lives expendable, allowing people to eliminate 'populations that we don't want to have too many of,' in the words of the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Abortion has been a disaster.

Anderson and DeSanctis develop their argument in eight chapters.

In Chapter 1, they 'make the case that the most fundamental harm of abortion is to the unborn child' and 'refute a number of justifications for abortion, including claims that the child in the womb is neither a human being nor a human person.'

In Chapter 2, they 'address the argument that abortion is a boon to women, allowing them to participate in sex and the economy on equal footing with men.' They argue that in reality 'Abortion has not solved the problems that supporters claimed it would, and even on its own terms it has not been the cause or even the condition of increased educational or workplace success for women.'

In Chapter 3, they 'document the ways in which abortion has exacerbated inequality, perpetuating racial division and social stratification.'

In Chapter 4, they 'consider the ways that legalized abortion has corrupted our medical system, leading medical organizations and a significant number of doctors to lie about the biology of life and use their expertise to kill rather than cure.'

In Chapter 5, they 'outline the history of the Supreme Court decisions that created the legal landscape perpetuating abortion' and why those decisions were mistaken.

In Chapter 6, they examine 'the political ramifications of those judicial decisions and the subsequent decades of our permissive abortion regime,' looking at how abortion became a politically polarised issue with and how the Democrats support for abortion has required them 'to deny the proper role of morality and religion in our politics.'

In Chapter 7, they argue that a widespread acceptance of abortion has corrupted the mainstream media 'making it far less likely that the truth about abortion will reach many Americans and disrupt their settled views on the subject.'

In their final chapter they:

...take stock of where fifty years of abortion have left our nation, and the work that still needs to be done. We suggest that pro-lifers remember that ending abortion will require a 'both-and' approach on a number of levels, not an 'either-or.' We need plans for shifting our laws and our culture, efforts to care for babies and mothers, work from state and federal governments – and we must do all this in ending the supply of and demand for abortion.

Martin's opinion:

Last month's decision by the United States Supreme Court to overturn the 1974 ruling that there was a constitutional right to abortion was widely covered by the media in this country. Normally, however, abortion is not a subject that is much debated in this country with abortion being much accepted as a fact of life, and now being available in Northern Ireland, which had been the last place in the United Kingdom where it was still prohibited. Among the Christian churches in this country, opposition to abortion is largely seen as a Roman Catholic peculiarity, with Evangelicals not generally being very keen to address the issue. This new book by Anderson and DeSanctis reminds us why this position needs to change. Although it is addressed to an American audience, what they have to say about the immorality of the practice of abortion and its dire consequences, not just for unborn children, but for the wellbeing of society in general, is just as relevant to a British context as to an American one. If you want to know what is wrong with abortion, why it 'harms everything and solves nothing,' and why the arguments in favour of abortion simply don't stack up, then this is the book to read. Evangelicals in particular need to read this book and then take action in the light of it.

Commendations:

O Carter Snead has written:

'Lucid, powerful, and penetrating ... an evidence-based case for how abortion in America has harmed children, women, families, the practice of medicine, vulnerable communities, the rule of law, politics, and culture. This is required reading for anyone who wants to think seriously about how to govern ourselves in this vexed domain and, more deeply, how to care rightly for one another.'

Os Guinness, *The Great Quest: Invitation to an Examined Life and a Sure Path to Meaning* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2022)

ISBN 978-1-51400-424-1, £13.48 (e edition also available)

#### Overview:

Os Guinness is a veteran Christian apologist and social critic. He is a senior fellow at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics and is the author or editor of more than thirty-five books, including *The Gravedigger File*, *The Dust of Death*, *Fool's Talk* and *Impossible People*.

The starting point for his new book, *The Great Quest*, is the observation that he makes in Chapter 1 – 'Invitation to an examined life' – that:

Compared with most people in previous times, many in today's generation are not only disinterested but unschooled in knowing how search for the meaning of life. The situation is as confusing and chaotic... to lasting relationships. Many of today's elites dismiss the very idea of the meaning of life as meaningless itself. As a result, the paths for the search are cordoned off, overgrown, and increasingly uncharted and unexplored.

However, Guinness says, questions about the meaning of life are ones that still matter.

How do we understand the realness of reality? Why do we prize human dignity or think that humans have equal worth when nothing about us looks equal? Where do we anchor our sense identity and purpose, and develop our understanding of right and wrong, and love? How do we pursue happiness? What is a successful human being? Why should we care for our neighbor and the 'other'? What does the shortness of life, and the inevitability of death at the end of it, mean for the way we live? These questions matter, and none of them can be answered without an underlying sense of the overall meaning of life. We need meaning like we need a name and a sense of our own identity.

In view of this fact, the purpose of his book is to help people to engage for themselves in 'the great quest for faith and meaning.'

In Chapter 2, 'Launch out for yourself,' Guinness notes that there are 'several reasons why many people don't bother to give serious thought to the meaning of life, and therefore end with an unexamined life.' There are 'diversions' – that is, 'busy entertaining distractions.' There is 'bargaining', the unkept promise that 'we will deal with the question later.' There is 'noise and interference from within our own lives or from our own past.'

He goes on to write:

...If you consider these three major types of obstacles – diversion, bargaining, and noise and interference – and others, and realise how common they are, you understand why there are so many people who don't care enough to think about the meaning of life.

Are you serious about an examined life? Many, if not most people today pride themselves on being open to life and to others, but it is harder to be truly open than many acknowledge, even to themselves. The search for faith and meaning requires openness, honesty, and courage, which means that the genuine searcher is an uncommon person – but so, too, is the uncommon prize over genuinely examined life.

In Chapter 3 – 'An adventure more than an argument' – Guinness explains that the purpose of his book. Is to 'chart the course of a thinking person's exploration of the journey toward faith and

meaning, and to do so by describing the overall quest and the key phases through which a searcher passes.'

He then goes on to make four points about what he is and is not trying to do as he does this.

First, he writes, 'my goal is to point you somewhere rather than to prove something to you. This is an invitation to consider exploring, so that you actually set out on the journey and do the searching for yourself.'

Second, 'this book is designed for thinking people and therefore not for everyone... This book is for those of you who wish to think for yourselves and to come to your own conclusions at the end of a thoroughly examined life.'

Third, 'I offer this guidance as one who reached his own conclusion, so I do not pretend to be completely impartial, and I am highly aware of the limitations of outside advice. The truth is that this book is no more than the equivalent of a brochure or a prospectus. A brochure may describe a place or an event attractively, but what matters is whether the reality matches the words. If it does, the brochure can be used and then scrapped. It has served its purpose.'

Fourth, 'both the strength and weakness of my description lie in the fact that it is a generalization. As a generalization, it is helpful because it is built on the experience of many people, and not just one or two. But it may also be unhelpful for the same reason. Based on the experience of many people, it may miss the uniqueness of the one person, the individual who is quite different.'

In Chapter 4 – 'It all begins with a question' – Guinness declares that:

The first phase of the great quest is a time for questions. A seeker is born when life raises a question that demands an answer, and a question that cannot be answered within a person's existing frame of meaning. They are therefore jolted into inquiring further than they have ever looked or thought before. The question is the making of a seeker. It creates awareness of the problem that requires an answer. Not merely questioned but called into question, people somehow know in their hearts that they are responsible to answer the question and solve the problem confronting them. They are being addressed as humans who are both able to respond and unable to ignore the challenge to respond. It is the very thrust and intensity of the question and the problem that creates and constitutes the seeker.

In Chapter 5 – 'Jump-starting the journey' – Guinness writes that there are an 'infinite number of ways through which seekers start on their journeys. There are probably as many ways as there are seekers who start.' However, 'three recur more frequently than any other.' These are 'the passages and seasons of human life,' 'the grand events of history and their impact on our lives and thinking,' and the personal experiences of people's lives which act as what the sociologist Peter Berger called 'signals of transcendence.'

Personal experience explains Guinness, acts as a signal:

...because it represents both a contradiction and a desire. As a contradiction, it punctures the limited reach of the world of the here and now and undermines the adequacy of what the person believed to this point. And as a desire, it points to something new. It arouses a longing for something surer and richer. Together, the power of the contradiction and the desire, the puncturing and the pointing, act to thrust a person out as a seeker.

In Chapter 6, 'A world of difference,' Guinness moves on to the second phase of the search for meaning, 'a time for answers.' 'Life has raised a question, the urgency of a question has called

someone into question, and they have set out as a seeker. What they are looking for is an adequate answer, an answer that satisfies the full challenge of the question.'

At this second stage in the quest there are 'three Cs of the search for an answer.'

First of all, this second phase is 'essentially conceptual.' This is for two reasons. It is because 'all the answers to be pursued, and all the answers to be considered, start out as ideas to be explored.' It is also because the search thus far has exposed some problem in their life or thinking and 'they now feel vulnerable. Once bitten, twice shy, so rather than plunging in and committing themselves to anything too quickly, they pursue their search by sending the mind ahead to do the searching while they guard the heart against any further hurt.'

Secondly, 'this phase of the search is ... critical. In its search for all-encompassing adequacy, this phase more than any other determines the success of the quest and the character and solidity, or otherwise of the eventual answer.' What the seeker has to determine is if a worldview is adequate in the sense of being one which 'encompasses all reality and leaves nothing out.'

Thirdly, 'this second phase of the quest is essentially comparative. There are many answers on offer in the modern world, many salespeople hawking their wares for the eager and the unsuspecting, so we have to compare.'

According to Guinness when we engage in such comparison, we find that:

...there is no question that the deepest, most enduring, and most satisfying answers to the meaning of life come from the families of faith – the great faiths, world views or philosophies of life within which people have lived down the centuries and across the continents. Nothing approaches these worldviews for comprehensiveness.'

This means that the question to be addressed in the second stage of the quest is:

Does any faith that you as a seeker may consider answer your questions? Does it do so in a way that switches on the light in the darkness and fits like a key in the lock, so that your path is lit up and your life offered a solid foundation for going forward? Contrast is the mother of clarity, but the goal and necessity at this stage is illumination and adequacy. The time for questions must issue naturally and find its resolution in the time for answers.

In Chapter 7, 'Checking it out,' Guinness moves on to the third stage of the quest. 'This third phase is a time for evidence. Yes, the faith in question may be illuminating, and its answers may appear appealingly adequate, but would believing it be warranted, or is the faith an attractive fiction?'

In this third phase, writes Guinness: 'The prime focus now is the search for truth, and the vital role is no longer played by the imagination but by reason – serious hard-headed reason, reasoning, and the relationship of truth to reality.' This is because:

For thinking people, the only free, responsible, and final reason to believe anything is the conviction that it is true. Claims about truth should be therefore foundational for any faith that lays a claim to be rational and in accord with reality. Such claims should therefore be open for investigation to anyone who cares to examine them. This is emphatically the case with the Christian faith. With its bedrock beliefs in a God of truth whose word is truth and whose people are called to become people of truth, truth claims are all important for Christians. The Christian faith claims to be true in the sense that it aligns fully with reality. It is true in the sense that, if it is true, it would still be true even if no one believed it; and if it is false, it would still be false even if everyone believed it. The claims of the Christian faith are

always open to investigation, and no honest question is out of bounds. As Jesus said to his first disciple, 'Come and see,' or check it out for yourselves.

In Chapter 8 – 'The step toward home' – Guinness describes the fourth and final phase of the quest. He writes that:

This is the moment, and it usually is a moment rather than an extended period of time, when all the previous stages of the search come together naturally and completely. Just as a couple who have come to know each other choose to become engaged to be married, so the seeker's search leads to a choice and to an act of commitment that represents a step of faith for the seeker. In the light of all that has led to it, this choice is truly a step of faith and not a leap of faith, let alone a leap in the dark. The step is fully rational and not for a moment irrational, though it is also more than rational for an obvious reason: we humans are. The choice is based on a firm conviction about the truth and reality of the faith, but it is the choice made by the seekers as a whole person, so it is vouchsafed by the heart and the will and not only the mind.

He goes on to explain that:

The step of faith taken at this last phase is thoughtful and includes three important components. It includes *knowledge*, which has grown into *conviction*, and has now grown into *trust*. Faith includes knowledge because no one is asked to trust someone about whom they know nothing. It also includes conviction because they are not only attracted to what faith is about, but they have to become sure of its truth. And finally, it includes trust, for faith is not merely being convinced of something colour it is the entire person being committed to someone – God. This has a stunning consequence: never in our lives are we freer, more active, and more responsible than when we act on the decision to put our faith in God and set out on the journey home to him.

He also emphasises that according to Jewish and Christian understanding:

...the great quest is not only about our search for God, but about God's search for us. Jesus, for example, pictured God as a woman searching for a coin she had lost, and as a shepherd looking everywhere for a sheep that had strayed. His whole purpose on earth, he said was to look for those who were lost. He was like a doctor, he said, who was there for those who knew they were not well. The Bible is one long majestic story woven from a thousand smaller stories. But from the first question addressed to a human being, 'Where are you?', It is not so much the story of humanity in search of God, as the story about God in search of humans. It is the story of God's tireless quest to bring us back into a relationship with him as the source of life and meaning.

Furthermore, 'God, in whose image we are made, respects us as persons, so he will not invade our hearts.' As seekers, we have to choose to allow ourselves to be found by the seeking God who comes to us in Jesus. This means that:

The ultimate issue ... is how we respond to God's question, and whether God's 'Where are you?' is answered by our 'Here I am.' Whoever takes that step of committed faith, and sets out to be a follower of Jesus, joins us as a sister or brother and a fellow pilgrim on the long journey home. For while faith at the climax of the great quest may seem like a discovery, it is really a recovery, a return from exile and a homecoming. The call is in truth a recall.

Martin's opinion:

The *Great Quest* is a fascinating and thought-provoking description of the journey towards faith. It explains why it is important to give serious thought to the meaning of life, and the various stages that lead from a search for the meaning of life to becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. It also explains that there is a double search involved in that not only are we on a quest but so also is God. Our finding God is because God has first sought and found us.

This is a book that would be useful to give to a serious intellectual enquirer to explain why the search for faith is necessary and how it works. It would also be useful as a text-book for those engaged in apologetics and evangelism to help them to understand the various stages of the journey towards faith and how to assist people to move through them successfully. Highly recommended.

Commendations:

Shelby Coffey comments:

'This slim volume is a masterpiece. Guinness brings a breath-taking range of thought -to aim at the key question of life: What is the meaning of life, and how do we, individually, determine it? This is a summa and a gift to questing souls of all persuasions.'



Craig Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Eerdmans, 2019)

ISBN 978-08-0287-675-1, £45.00 (e edition also available)

#### Overview:

Craig Keener is Professor of Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in the United State. He has written numerous books and articles including commentaries on Matthew, John, Acts, Romans, I and 2 Corinthians and Galatians. He has also written studies on the veracity of the accounts of miracles both in the New Testament and in the world today.

Building on the work of previous scholars such as Richard Burridge and Richard Bauckham, Keener's book *Christobiography*, first published in 2019, is a detailed study of what we know about the practice of writing biographies at the time that the New Testament was written, and what we can learn from such study about the historical reliability of the Gospels.

After an introductory chapter, the book is in five parts.

Part 1, 'Biographies about Jesus' (Chapters 2–5), explains that the idea that the Gospels are biographies was generally accepted until the twentieth century and is widely accepted again today; looks at the development of the writing of biographies in the ancient world; explores what sort of biographies the Gospels are; and considers what a first-century audience would have expected from a biography.

Part 2, 'Biographies and History' (Chapters 6–9) looks at the use of historical information in ancient biographies; what degree of historical accuracy was expected in an ancient biography; why Luke Acts is a mixture of biography and history, and on the use of sources close to the events both in ancient biographies and the Gospels.

Part 3, 'Testing the Range of Deviation' (Chapters 10–11), gives case studies of biographies from the period of the Gospels and looks at how they reflect both dependence on prior sources and a degree of literary flexibility in making use of those sources.

Part 4, 'Two objections to Gospels as Historical Biographies' (Chapters 12–13), argues that the presence of miracle stories in the Gospels does not rule out their being reliable historical sources and that the divergences between John and the Synoptic Gospels 'appear well within the range of flexibility in both ancient biography and ancient historiography more generally.'

Part 5, 'Memories about Jesus: Memories before Memoirs' (Chapters 14–17) looks at how the study of human memory and of how memories are passed on should not cause us to doubt that 'the Gospels as ancient biography preserve substantial information about Jesus.'

Keener's overall conclusion is that:

The nature of historiography precludes the sort of certainty available in, for example, chemistry or mathematics. Most historians, however, do not abandon the historical quest in favour of epistemic nihilism. Even by fairly strict historical standards, we have considerable information. In contrast to many other world religions and traditions birthed before the printing press, the Christian religion has narrative biographies of its founder from within living memory of his ministry. Whatever one makes of their religious value, such narratives have rich historical value.

A generally positive default expectation does not by itself entail the belief that every story or idea in the gospels was transmitted accurately. Still less would it dispose us to view the reports

of Jesus sayings to be verbatim, since, with a few exceptions such as aphorisms, memory normally preserves the conceptual gist rather than the precise wording. But a generally positive expectation would mean that, in general, the picture we have Jesus in the Gospels – or at least those elements that we deem to be most reliable – reflects the essential character of the ministry of Jesus as understood by his first followers.

That may be as far as historical method can take us, but it certainly takes as much further than many detractors on a popular level (most conspicuously, the ‘Jesus mythers’), suppose, and probably further than some scholars who accept only the likelihood of multiply attested information suppose.

#### Martin’s opinion:

Keener’s work is vast, it runs to over 1,400 pages, and for the most part it consists of a running interaction with the views of a huge range of other scholars on the topics which he tackles. The ordinary reader and even the student just beginning their study of the Gospels will get lost in the detail of Keener’s argument and even the more advanced student is unlikely to want to read the book from cover to cover. Nevertheless, this having been said, this is an important study which has great value for two reasons. First, the scholarly thoroughness of Keener’s work and the encyclopaedic extent of his references to the work of other scholars means that it will prove an exceptionally useful starting point for students wanting to undertake their own studies of the subjects that Keener covers. He will show them where to begin. Secondly, Keener shows that even if we consider the Gospels simply as human historical artefacts, when we view them in their first-century context it is clear that they were intended to be biographies and that when they are viewed in this light there is every reason to believe that they give us a generally reliable account of Jesus’ life and teaching. The Christian, believing in the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, will want to say more than that, but Keener shows that even the secular student of the Gospels cannot reasonably say less. Keener’s work is one that relatively few people will want to buy, but it is a study that deserves to be widely known and widely used.

#### Commendations:

James Dunn declares:

“Christobiography is addressed to both scholars and students interested in Gospel and historical Jesus research and is, to say the least, a very impressive study. The Synoptic Gospels compare well with other ancient biographies as to the reliability of the information they provide. They told the same stories, but often without concern for details extraneous to their point. Not least of interest is the striking summary of the overlap between John and the Synoptics, showing that John is still a historical biography. There is a very helpful chapter on memory and the reliability of oral tradition in the context of Jesus’s ministry and his followers, given that it was understood as teaching. The strong and justified conclusion is that Jesus’s disciples would have learned and transmitted his teaching no less carefully than most other disciples the wisdom of their teachers. In short, the Gospels compare well with the other biographies of the time as to their historicity, and there is a strong historical probability that the Gospel memoirs have preserved the content and character of Jesus’s ministry and teaching. I cannot commend this careful and thorough study too highly.”

Brant Pitre, *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ* (Image, 2016)

ISBN 978-0-77043-548-6, £19.24 (e and audio editions also available)

#### Overview:

Brant Pitre is a Roman Catholic scholar who is Professor of Sacred Scripture at Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans. He is the author of a number of highly regarded books examining the Jewish roots of the teaching of the New Testament.

Pitre begins his book *The Case for Jesus*, first published in 2016, by recalling how he nearly lost his faith as a young student because of the scholars he encountered who declared that the Gospels were anonymous, were not based on eyewitness testimony and are historically unreliable, and that Jesus never actually claimed to be God.

Pitre eventually recovered his faith, and the purpose of his book is to show why the arguments that so shook him as a student were mistaken because the Gospels were not anonymous, are historically reliable, and do show that Jesus claimed to be God.

Pitre's book is in two parts.

In the first part (Chapters 1–7), he shows that there is no evidence that the Gospels were originally anonymous and that all the evidence that we do have, from the earliest manuscripts we possess, from the internal evidence of the Gospels, and from the testimony of the Early Fathers, indicates that the authors were known, and that those authors were Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All four wrote biographies of Jesus and Matthew, Mark and Luke were all written before the early 60s AD.

As Pitre puts it:

In essence, there are compelling historical reasons to conclude that the Gospels are not late-first-century end products of a long chain of anonymous storytelling. Instead, they are ancient biographies written by the students of Jesus and their followers, written well within the lifetime of the apostles and eyewitnesses to Jesus. As such, they provide us with a sound basis for investigating the historical questions of what Jesus did, what he said, and who he claimed to be.

In the second part (Chapters 9–13), he goes on to explain that when examined carefully, and read against the background of the Old Testament, the Gospels are clear that what Jesus said and did pointed to his not only being the promised Messiah, but also to his sharing the divine identity of the one true creator God of Israel.

To quote Pitre again:

In order to hang on to the theory that Jesus never claimed to be divine you have to eliminate the entire Gospel of John and what it tells us about who Jesus claimed to be; eliminate the passages in the Synoptic Gospels in which Jesus takes the divine name 'I am' and speaks as if he is the divine Son of Man; eliminate all the miracles in which Jesus does what only the God of the Old Testament can do; and eliminate all evidence that Jesus was both repeatedly accused of blasphemy and condemned to death for blasphemy because of who he claimed to be. (And that is to say nothing of eliminating the evidence that Jesus' tomb was actually empty, that he actually appeared to his disciples after the resurrection, and that he fulfilled biblical prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, the kingdom of God, and the conversion

of the gentile nations). In other words, in order for the theory that Jesus never claimed to be God to be correct, you have to keep eliminating all of the evidence that doesn't fit the theory.

Now, of course there is nothing to stop a person from trying to make all this evidence disappear. Lots of people do it. Some of them are scholars. But I for one can't. It just isn't good history. It makes far more historical sense to me to conclude that the reason that idea that Jesus never claimed to be divine has to eliminate so much evidence for the theory to work is that the theory is wrong. And not just wrong about the details. It's wrong about the big questions: how we got the Gospels, who Jesus claimed to be, and why it matters.

#### Martin's opinion:

This is an absolutely superb book that deserves to be brought, read, shared and given away. It is written in a clear and accessible style, it is grounded in first class scholarship, and it addresses the two really key issues about the Gospels – can we trust them and what do they tell us about Jesus. Many in the churches, let alone in wider society, are deeply confused about these two issues and Pitre's book is an excellent antidote to this confusion. It shows that robust historical enquiry tells us that we can trust the Gospels and that the Gospels tell us that Jesus was who the Christian faith has always said he was, God become incarnate for our salvation.

#### Commendations:

Michal Bird has written:

'Brant Pitre does a stellar job setting forth a robust and rock-solid case for Jesus. The sensationalistic claims of super-sceptics are exposed as a sham as Pitre provides a meticulous presentation of the evidence about the reliability of the Gospels, who Jesus thought he was, and what he means today. A balanced, sensible, and measured book that counters the spate of hyped-up conspiracy theories that do the rounds. An informative and enjoyable read.'

Carl Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Crossway, 2022)  
ISBN 978-1-43357-930-1, £16.50 (e and audio editions also available plus DVD and study guide)

#### Overview:

Carl Trueman is a theologian and Church historian who is Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies at Grove City College in the United States. His 2020 book, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, which traces the development of the understanding of the self that dominates modern Western society quickly became recognised as one of the most important Christian books published in recent years. However, it is a rather lengthy academic study and so, author Ryan Anderson emailed Trueman and 'suggested that he consider writing a shorter, more accessible version of the basic argument for non-specialists who would benefit from the essential narrative, to better understand the historical moment in which they find themselves, and to inform the work they do in ministry, culture, business, and, most importantly, raising the next generation.'

*Strange New World* is Trueman's response to that request. As he explains in the Preface: 'This short book is not a precis of my larger work, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, but covers the same ground in a briefer and (hopefully) more accessible format.'

The new book is in three parts.

Part 1 consists of Chapter 1, 'Welcome to This Strange New World,' In this chapter, Trueman notes that we now live in a world in flux in which, in Western culture, previously-held ideas about personal identity and sexual conduct (such as marriage being between one man and one woman) 'are now regarded as heresies advocated only by the dangerous lunatic fringe.' He then explains that this state of affairs has been brought about by a combination of expressive individualism, the sexual revolution and a changed social imaginary.

As he explains, expressive individualism is the idea that the prized virtue of personal authenticity is achieved by acting outwardly in accordance with one's inward feelings.' The sexual revolution is the change in sexual mores that has taken place since the beginning of the twentieth century, as a result of which not only are particular sexual acts such as extra-marital and homosexual sex now seen as acceptable but, more fundamentally, 'sexual acts in themselves are seen as having no intrinsic moral significance; it is the consent (or not) of those engaging in them that provides the moral framework.' The social imaginary is 'that common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.'

The rise of expressive individualism in combination with the sexual revolution has given rise to a new social imaginary and hence to the state of affairs in which previously held ideas are now rejected.

Part 2 consists of Chapters 2–5. In this part, Trueman traces the development of the state of affairs sketched out in chapter 1.

In Chapter 2 – 'Romantic Roots' – Trueman explains how the influence of the French philosophers Rene Descartes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau and of the artistic movement known as Romanticism led to the 'impulse in the modern world that tends to see sophisticated society as corrupt and to regard instinct, or that inner voice of nature, and possessing significant authority.' To put it another way, it is the inner voice of nature rather than external authorities such as society or the Church that is the source of moral truth.

In Chapter 3 – ‘Prometheus Unbound’ – Trueman describes how, while the thinkers and artists described in Chapter 2 affirmed the moral authority of human nature, Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche took the further step of arguing that:

...there is little or no moral structure to human nature. To be human is merely to be an intentional thinking agent. What we think and what we do is our business, as we are not answerable to any higher power or even to the authority of our own bodies. We can be whoever we want to be.

He also argues that in the work of Oscar Wilde:

...we find the classic, sophisticated example of what that might look like; the transgressive, sexual adventurer, for whom pleasure was an end in itself, and for whom aesthetics replaced the outmoded and repressive notion of an external moral code.

In Chapter 4 – ‘Sexualising Psychology, Politicizing Sex’ – Trueman further describes how the work of Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Reich led to the belief that the identity of human beings is to be primarily defined by their sexual desires and that oppression now means not only ‘being deprived of material prosperity or physical freedom,’ but not having one’s individual sexual identity affirmed by society and the individuals within it.

Finally, in Chapter 5 – ‘The Revolt of the Masses’ – he looks at how a variety of factors, including social and political developments, the influence of the ideas charted in Chapters 2–4, and the development of technology in general, and ‘cheap and efficient contraception’ in particular, have all tilted the modern world in a particular direction:

The collapse of traditional, external anchors of identity – perhaps most obviously those of religion, nation, and family – explains the attraction of the turn inward. The rise of technology feeds the notion that we can bend nature to our will, the world is just so much raw, plastic material from which we can take whatever meaning or reality we choose. The loss of sacred order reinforces this subjectivism, as Nietzsche anticipated in *The Gay Science*, and the notion that sexual freedom is central to a happy human life is made a practical option by contraception and part of our cultural imagination both by the pornographic industry and by the apparently authoritative claims of social science. And then there is the role of the elites, political, educational, cultural, and business, who have all decided both to repudiate the past and to press home the pathologies of the modern, expressive, sexual self with all the power available to them. The expressive self of the sexual revolution may not be necessary development; but all of these factors make it a most coherent and explicable one.

Part 2 consists of Chapters 6–8.

In Chapter 6 – ‘Plastic People, Liquid World’ – Trueman begins to set out the consequences of the history he has outlined in Chapters 2–5. In this chapter he explains that while humans have placed serious challenges in the past:

...the coincidence of two things makes our current moment in time a singularly challenging and potentially sinister one.

These two things are the plastic [i.e. completely malleable] conception of human identity to which expressive individualism tilts; and the liquefaction of the world around us with regard to the traditional frameworks (national, religious, familial, geographical, even physiological) by which human beings have previously defined themselves. That places us in a situation without obvious historical parallel.

Today, the self is entirely plastic and the external world – right down to our bodies – is liquid, something that offers no firm ground upon which to build an identity. That no doubt helps to explain, for example, the catastrophic levels of depression and anxiety in the West which, on the whole, enjoys greater material prosperity and security that has been typical throughout human history. Yes, we are wealthier and healthier than our ancestors in the sixteenth and even the mid-twentieth centuries. But we don't know who we are anymore.

He also notes that the coincidence of these two things helps:

...to explain the power of newly emerging identities such as those offered by the LGBTQ plus movement. In the world where old identities are implausible other people still wish to belong, the most powerful narratives I'm the strongest communities could offer a sense of belonging and security that all human beings crave.

In Chapter 7 – 'The Sexual Revolution of the LGBTQ+' – Trueman considers the development of the LGBTQ+ movement as an outworking of the culture of expressive individualism in Western society. . He argues that this movement is an unstable coalition of groups with different agendas that came together in order in response to the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and because of a sense of shared oppression by a heteronormative society. He argues that the T-strand of the coalition is now being increasingly challenged by Lesbian and Gay people and feminists who feel that their sense of identity is called into question by the Trans call to do away with the biological distinction between men and women. Nevertheless, he says: 'these radical forms of expressive individualism, allied to powerful narratives of victimhood and oppression, are set to change all our lives.'

In Chapter 8 – 'Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness' – Trueman looks at the dramatic impact expressive individualism has had on 'how we think about life and liberty.' As he sees it:

Old notions such as the sanctity of life and the importance of freedom of religion and speech have been transformed, even inverted, by this new, modern self. And all this is because the notion of happiness with which we now intuitively operate is one where a sense of personal, psychological well-being is central. We might say that happiness is for each of us first and foremost an individual thing, resting on us being independent; all of the relationships must serve that end or be seen as oppressive.

This has led to the ironic situation in which:

...radical individual freedom has led to rather authoritarian forms of social control, from elementary schools that teach gender ideology to Ivy League schools that have abandoned traditional curricula, from workplaces that require sensitivity training on transgender issues to big tech giants boycotting states because of religious freedom legislation passed by democratically elected assemblies, from local school boards pressing ideological uniformity via the rhetoric of diversity to national governments broadening civil rights legislation to protect chaotic views of gender.

We now live in a 'strange new world,' in which 'freedom of religion, let alone freedom of speech, is now regarded by some (many?) as a problem for a free society rather than a basic foundation of the same.'

Part 3 consists of Chapter 9 – 'Strangers in this Strange New World' – in which Trueman sets out how he thinks Christians should live in the strange new world they now inhabit. He has six suggestions, (1) 'understand our complicity in the expressive individualism of our day,' (2) learn from the example of the Church of the first two centuries by fostering community life and 'offering a true vision of what it

means to be human being made in the image of God,' (3), 'teaching the whole counsel of God,' with the use of 'a good historical confession or catechism,' being 'a helpful place to start,' (4) shaping psychological intuitions through Bible-based worship, (5) 'recovering natural law and the theology of the body,' and finally (6) 'avoiding the temptations of despair or optimism.'

Christians, writes Trueman:

...need to prepare ourselves, be informed, know what we believe and why we believe it, worship God in a manner that forms us as true disciples and pilgrims, intellectually and intuitively, and keep before our eyes the unbreakable promises that the Lord has made and confirmed in Jesus Christ.

Martin's opinion:

Since New Testament times, the dual challenge to Christians has been to understand the nature of the world in which they live and learn to live well in it as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Carl Trueman's major study *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* has provided an excellent set of academic resources to help Christians to respond to this dual challenge in our day. *Strange New World* now provides these same resources in a more concise and accessible format. Each chapter of this concise version has a set of study questions and a separate and more detailed study guide and video lectures are also available.

What this means is that there is now a comprehensive suite of resources for Christians to use to understand our modern world and to think how they should live within it without either succumbing to despair, or being unrealistically optimistic that things are not as bad as they appear, or will suddenly change for the better. Christians need to understand the points that Trueman is making, and so theological colleges and courses need to incorporate the study of Trueman's resources into their curriculum, ministers need to study these resources and feed them into their teaching and lay Christians need to take time to understand them and think how they apply to their everyday lives. We do indeed live in a strange new world and Trueman can give us the information we need to think how to navigate it successfully.

Commendations:

Rod Dreher writes:

'At last, one of the most important books of the century is available in a more accessible format for the general reader! If you are confused about the moral and spiritual chaos overtaking Western civilization, and anguished over the seeming impotence of Christianity to stop the collapse, *Strange New World* is the book you absolutely must read. Here, in a single volume, is the best diagnosis of our cultural crisis. Anyone who wants to get themselves and their children and communities through this new dark age with their faith and sanity intact needs to read Carl Trueman's blockbuster.'

Martin Davie

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