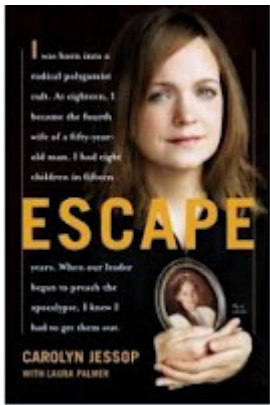


Review: Escape



I was lent this book by a friend who urged me to read it. I took it on holiday with me and read it over a couple of nights in a Canberra caravan park. It is a well-written (with ghost-writer help) autobiography of Carolyn Jessop, a young woman who was once a member of the polygamous cult, "Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints." It details her life growing up in the FLDS, her marriage at eighteen as the fourth wife of a fifty-year old man, and ultimately her escape from the community and the struggle for the custody of her eight children.

It is a gripping book, well crafted to keep the suspense going. It's a don't-want-to-put-this down story. My reaction was emotional – angry, sad, wistful etc.

The subject matter is, of course, disturbing. The accounts of spiritual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse while not graphic are described rather than alluded to. What comes through is this young woman's intelligence and tenacity. In the end, as she finds herself becoming free of the religious mindset that would keep her subservient we see her make use of her in-built ability to assess people and situations, to manipulate to survive, to balance the covert and the overt, until she is able to not just rescue herself but also her children, one of whom was seriously ill.

The books' blurb describes the situation:

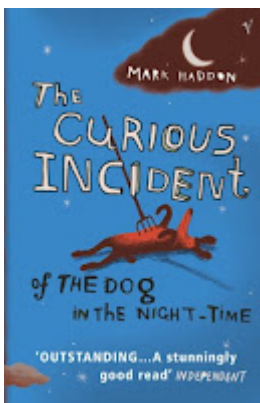
"Carolyn's every move was dictated by her husband's whims. He decided where she lived and how her children would be treated. He controlled the money she earned as a schoolteacher. He chose when they had sex; Carolyn could only refuse – at her peril... No woman in the country had ever

escaped from the FLDS and managed to get her children out too. But in 2003, Carolyn chose freedom over fear and fled her home with her eight children. She had \$20 to her name... in 2006 her reports to the Utah attorney general on church abuses formed a crucial part of the case that led to the arrest of its notorious leader, Warren Jeffs."

My gut reaction was "I want this woman to know Jesus, to know the love of God, the Truth that sets free rather than the Lie that so crushes and spoils." Despite the inevitable sensationalism that comes with a book that is mass-marketed we can tell that Carolyn Jessop is obviously a victim who has learned to fight a fight which she won. I pray for peace for her and her children.



Review: The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time



This book, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*, was one of my holiday readings. It was nice to read something light and "novelly" for a change, although this was not an idle pick-up-from-the-newsagent read. I was reading it for a reason.

The main (first-person) character in the book, Christopher, has high-functioning autism. It is the insight into this character that is the heart and soul of this book. The plot and everything else serves this end of helping us get inside

the autistic mind.

It is this aspect that intrigued me because our son, Samuel, has recently been diagnosed with very mild form of Aspergers Syndrome. Samuel is perfectly able to operate in normal social situations such as school and is a “normal” kid who occasionally needs help as he processes emotions and social situations. The Christopher character has a severe form which completely incapacitates his social and emotional ability. These extremes of Christopher help give insight into the subtleties of others.

The book is written as Christopher’s diary, written, we are told by Christopher, at the urging of one of his teachers at the special school he attends to help him deal with and process the fact that a neighbour’s dog has been killed. Christopher decides to follow his hero Sherlock Holmes (the title is a Conan Doyle quote) in being a detective to discover why Wellington (the dog) was killed.

In the process he stumbles across truths about his family life that causes him to do the unthinkable and venture out alone on a journey to find a loved one. It is here that Haddon’s skill of getting us into Christopher’s head comes to the fore. Here he describes the situation in a train station:

*“And then I was at the bottom of the escalators and I had to jump off and I tripped and bumped into someone and they said ‘Easy,’ and there were two ways to go and one said **Northbound** and I went that way because **Willesden** was on the top half of the map and the top is always north on maps.*

*And then I was in another train station but it was tiny and it was in a tunnel and there was only one track and the walls were curved and they were covered in big adverts and they said **WAY OUT** and **London’s Transport Museum** and **Take time out to regret your career choice** and **JAMAICA** and **British Rail** and **No Smoking** and **Be Moved** and **Be Moved** and **Be Moved** and **For***

Stations beyond Queen's Park take the first train and change Queen's Park if necessary and Hammersmith and City Line and You're closer than my family every gets. And there were lots of people standing in the little station and it was underground so there weren't any windows and I didn't like that, so I found a seat which was a bench and I sat at the end of the bench...

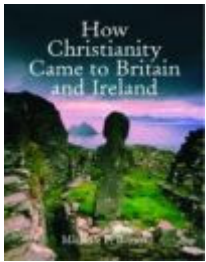
And then there was a sound like people fighting with swords and I could feel a strong wind and roaring started and I closed my eyes and roaring got louder and I groaned really loudly but I couldn't block it out of my ears and I thought the little station was going to collapse or there was a big fire somewhere and I was going to die. And then the roaring turned into a clattering and a squealing and it got slowly quieter and then it stopped and I kept my eyes closed because I felt safer not seeing what was happening..." (Pages 215-216)

Haddon uses devices such as Christopher's interest with mathematics (the chapters are the sequence of prime numbers) and maps and algorithms. He demonstrates how the completely non-intuitive Christopher interacts with a world that demands intuition. The ending of the book, with an appendix that is Christopher's full answer of a mathematical proof from his highly-valued A-Level exam, is cause for a wistful smile at a way of saying goodbye to the character to which you have been so closely attached for the whole story.

There is genius in how this book is written. That alone makes it worth the read.



Review: How Christianity Came to Britain and Ireland



I picked up Michelle P. Brown's *How Christianity Came to Britain and Ireland* while browsing at Koorong in my recent mood of getting back into some church history. I won't tell a lie – I bought it because it was cheap and had a bunch of pretty pictures and reminded me of one of my all-time favourite TV shows, *Time Team*.

Despite the pretty pictures I found it to be quite a dry exploration of British ecclesiastical history that presumed a lot of prior knowledge. Consequently it was hard to tie the detail into any broader narrative – to gain an overall picture of the history. Simple devices such as timelines or maps would have helped this problem and it is an indictment that they are not included. It as if this book was produced with the coffee-table in mind, under the assumption that no-one was actually going to read it, just browse it and look at the pictures.

Having said that, there were the odd gem to pluck out and savour. For instance, our diocese is currently considering the “minster” model or “hub” model as a framework for arranging ministry in this state. Often this is explained by talking about it's structure (central resourcing church, outlying ministry centres etc.) and so I was heartened to see the primary description of an “Anglo-Saxon Minster” as a “missionary church to the locality” (Page 32). That's something to pick up for my own context.

I appreciated the exploration of the so-called “dark-ages” of the post-Roman, pre-Norman (or at least pre-Augustine-of-Canterbury) era which are shown to be not so dark at all. The life of Gildas (Page 55) is an example. The influence of the Celtic church is considered in detail throughout.

I delighted in how the Celtic understanding of episcopal ministry was presented – primarily apostolic and missional. I was also intrigued in the organisation of the Celtic church not so much through geography but through networks or *parochia* of relationships between monasteries. There are many parallels here for today's context. I suspect there are many lessons to learn but I was not able to through this book.

In the end I was left wanting more. Having tasted this stale bread (involuntarily overdosing on an over-abundance of expositions of illuminations and the legacy of manuscripts and the like) I now need to find a decent presentation of the story of that time so that I can learn the lessons for now.

