

*Book Reviews*

# Book Notes: Volume 1



by MICHAEL GEMBOLA

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The goal of the “Book Notes” column is to highlight books relevant to the tasks of pastoral care and counseling by providing summary, review, or commentary. The goal is not to include all relevant new releases but those that publishers send to us that I anticipate will be thought-provoking, be helpful, or merit constructive, critical engagement. My intention is to help orient those who counsel to what is available and assist them with purchases in a flooded field where it can be challenging to find the right resource.

My approach will be to work from what I learned from David Powlison (the *JBC*’s senior editor for more than twenty-five years). He believed that the Scriptures uniquely provide believers what they need to make sense of people and problems. He also read broadly, believing that many other resources were useful, given the right framework, especially when they provoke deeper engagement with biblical truth.

Yet trying for broader engagement comes with some risks. Powlison said that during his doctoral research on the so-called counseling wars,

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at times his engagement felt like being shot at from both sides. And where I seek to balance critiques across the spectrum, I also want to avoid the accusation of firing shots at anyone who isn't just like me. To guard against that potential, I am seeking to follow David Powlison's example of irenic engagement, of both having convictions and having relationships with people who have other convictions. It is easy to do one or the other, but there is wisdom in sustaining both in tension. I appreciated David's ability to hold his views in a way that allowed for personal relationships and engagement across the Christian counseling spectrum. That's not to say he was nonpartisan, or that he had equal energy for collaboration with both the clinical and the traditionally nouthetic conversation partners. His critiques could be strident, but over time, his body of work came to display a gracious spirit that I learned much from. He shared John Bettler's burden to read (and read fairly) a breadth of sources relevant to the calling of a pastoral theologian, which is how David sometimes spoke of himself.<sup>1</sup>

In this column, I am aiming for a similar breadth of Christian engagement. My goal is to be primarily informative and descriptive, though at times I will raise questions or counterarguments. My own biases, views, and idiosyncrasies will no doubt come through, but my commitment is to be as fair as possible. I will engage more with some books than others, and I will often highlight one or two representative chapters rather than seeking to summarize whole books, especially with essay collections.

A book's inclusion or exclusion is not an endorsement or criticism. Most books included below have been donated by their publishers for the purpose of review in this column. The books appear in alphabetical order by author's last name.

Let's begin.

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1. John Bettler was the original executive director of CCEF and the man who hired David.

### *Personality and Worldview*

J. H. Bavinck, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 208 pages.

Although his uncle Herman Bavinck is the better-known Dutch theologian, J. H. Bavinck (1895–1964) made contributions to missiology and theology in his own right. *Personality and Worldview* now appears for the first time in English, and though the original was published in 1928, in some ways it could have been written for today, especially in the force of its argument against relativism. The foreword by Tim Keller and editorial introduction by James Eglinton help us understand Bavinck in his context and the relevance and limitations of this book for today. The book is probably best suited for people with an interest in Christian philosophy, but the material was developed from a set of lectures for engineering students, so it has accessibility to a broader audience.

A key question the book addresses is to what extent worldview *is* psychology. When we read Freud, for example, are we hearing about psychoanalytic theory as a thing in itself, or are we mostly learning about Freud the person? Or can we ever really separate the system from the person? Can philosophers, psychologists, or any of us access and share a set of objective ideas, or are we just sharing our own subjective values and concerns? Is there such a thing as a worldview, or is it all just well-decorated memoir? Is it true that every author’s “arguments... [are] advanced [to] serve [his] personality’s right to continue existing” (p.27)? Bavinck says this is basically true, *unless* there is such a thing as revelation. “If there is revelation, however,... everything changes” (p.176).

Yet the existence of revelation does not mean truth is easy to find and hold on to. Because humanity runs from God, there is a loss of reliable knowledge and a suppression of his revealed truth. Therefore, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to transcend our own personality or perspective, which is what every worldview attempts to do. *Worldview* means seeking to create a map of reality that goes beyond the individual’s perspective (p.13). But can we get beyond the ideas of “my truth” and “your truth”?

The book answers this question and culminates in a biblical argument against relativism, with an interest in both the individual and the

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