

Book Reviews

Book Notes: Volume 2



by MICHAEL GEMBOLA

The goal of this column is to highlight books relevant to the tasks of pastoral care and counseling by providing summaries, reviews, and, at times, commentary. I hope to orient those who counsel to what is available by including new releases that are thought-provoking, helpful, or merit constructive, critical engagement. In a field flooded with books, I also hope to help them identify the right resource and decide what to purchase.

My goal is also to follow David Powlison's example.¹ He believed that the Scriptures uniquely give us what we need to make sense of people and problems. But he also read broadly, believing that many other resources were useful given the right framework, especially when they provoke deeper engagement with biblical truth. Of course, broader engagement comes with the risk of conflict. I want to avoid the accusation of firing shots at anyone who isn't just like me, while also aiming

1. David was senior editor of the *JBC* for more than twenty-five years.

Rev. Michael Gembola (MAR, LPC) is the executive director of Blue Ridge Christian Counseling in Roanoke, Virginia, and consulting editor for the Journal of Biblical Counseling. He is the author of the book Anxious about Decisions: Finding Freedom in the Peace of God.

for a breadth of discussion on topics related to congregational care and counseling.

My aim is to be primarily informative and descriptive, though at times I will raise questions or counterarguments. I will engage more with some books than others, and I will often highlight one or two representative chapters rather than summarizing whole books, especially essay collections. A book's inclusion or exclusion is not an endorsement or criticism.

With that introduction, here is Volume 2 of "Book Notes." I have reviewed thirteen resources and placed them into categories of topic and length. Within each category, the books are reviewed in alphabetical order by the author's last name.

THEOLOGY AND COUNSELING CONCEPTUALIZATION

Doing Asian American Theology: A Contextual Framework for Faith and Practice, by Daniel D. Lee (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 240 pages.

Essentially, theology is seeking to understand God and his answers to our questions. These questions can include: Who are you, God? Who are we? What is salvation? What should be the relationship between church and family or between church and state? In this book, Dr. Lee invites us to consider how our questions vary somewhat given the particular vantage point of our own people group. Lee is writing about theology in the Asian American community, but he is quick to emphasize that theology in context does not mean there is no such thing as universal truth (p.28–54). It does mean that understanding and consciously writing in a context, rather than seeking a neutral theoretical standpoint, is a humble and needed step for theologizing.

Lee's book is relevant as it teaches us to bring "our burning questions" to God's Word, including the practical theological reflection that pastoral care and counseling require (p.13). Not surprisingly, Lee's deeper contextual reflection was the result of his own personal life challenges. "The only way to write a new script for my marriage and later parenting would be first to learn and become aware of the scripts in my life" (p.7). Here Lee invites us to discover the cultural scripts we inherit and to learn

from the influential voices around us so we can bring these into our relationship with God. It is not to erase or glorify anyone's heritage, he explains, but rather "to analyze and engage...critically," sifting, sorting, and reshaping according to the ways of God (p.90).

This insight is important because we are shaped as much by what we react against as by what we pursue. Our ignorance of our cultural influences is no guarantee that we are not perpetuating them or that we are not being guided by our rejection of them (p.91). Lee speaks of these influences as *cultural archetypes* that are distinct from *stereotypes* (essentializing views of race), which are less careful and more harmful. This is but one of many examples of Lee finding a third way—speaking in fresh ways to old challenges. I often sensed while reading that it would not be fair to jump to conclusions about Lee's arguments but to follow them through to the end, because there was nearly always an approach of "on the one hand this, but on the other that." A good example is his evaluation of the benefits and limitations of the Black–White binary that understandably shapes so much of the racial discourse in the United States (p.145–68).

This book will repay readers who give it a careful study. Its style may best serve a more academic audience, but most chapters are accessible at a lay level. However, some background knowledge of the history of race in America will be valuable, as some readers may otherwise enter an argument mid-debate. And though the stated audience is Asian Americans, it can be profitably read more broadly. As Lee says, "All ministries who reach out to Asian Americans need to understand theologically to whom they are ministering" (p.8).

A Christian's Guide to Mental Illness: Answers to 30 Common Questions, by David Murray and Tom Karel Jr. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 256 pages.

The format serves the purpose in this well-written book. Clear takeaways, summaries, and short case studies at the close of each chapter make this book an excellent guide—one that brings clarity amid the complexities of mental illness. The summaries are arranged in this order: problem, insight, action, and steps. The authors' personal stories of suffering, or of

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