

*Book Reviews***Book Notes: Volume 6**

by MICHAEL GEMBOLA

This column aims to highlight a few books relevant to the tasks of pastoral care and counseling by providing summaries, reviews, and some commentary. I aim 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 a whole book. A book's inclusion or exclusion is neither an endorsement nor a criticism. The six reviews below are in alphabetical order by the author's last name.

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***Solo Planet: How Singles Help the Church Recover Our Calling***, by Anna Broadway (NavPress, 2024), 304 pages.

Few Christian books are also travelogue, but Anna Broadway invites readers along for her journey literally and figuratively, sharing her experience of singleness and travel as a woman visiting the global church. This trip, spanning months, provided her research for the book in the form

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of interviews she conducted with singles from many denominations and cultures. Although the cultures differ significantly, there are commonalities in the vulnerability, questions, and struggles. Very different churches face similar struggles in integrating singles well and in providing wise congregational care.

The author is honest with some of the hard facts about singleness. There are demographic challenges, for example, when women in some places are seeking to marry one of the few Christian men around. Everyday challenges also arise, such as how to cook for one person and how to find a workable living situation that balances the cost of having your own place with the connection and unpredictability of living with others. There is the grief of receiving Christmas cards or attending events that serve as reminders that some are reaching milestones of life that others may never reach (p.37–40). She also insightfully writes,

In some cultures, a “dating” approach to friendship makes the challenge of busyness worse. We assume meeting friends requires a dinner or drinks out and spending money. We assume friendship takes disposable income and several hours of free time per visit. Viewed that way, many of us can’t see friends very often. (p.24)

In all these ways, the author captures the complexities of modern singleness, its hidden griefs, and some of the challenges of life that are common to all.

One benefit of the book for the church is that it enables us to better understand and minister to singles in their varied experiences. It goes the other way, too, encouraging us to receive what they bring to the church with their gifts.

Broadway evidences a faith steadied by her own wrestling with God and offers readers a simple plan for reflecting on each of the chapters: voicing grief and gratitude, taking steps toward connection, and giving to others. Some high points are the author’s finding a sense of vocation in the “I do” of baptism (p.42–43) and in the comfort of God’s heart to place “the lonely in families” (Ps 68:6).

The book is a longer journey than most Christian living books, but readers will mostly enjoy the ride if they like the travel notes about other places and cultures.

***How to Use the Book of Common Prayer: A Guide to the Anglican Liturgy***, by Samuel L. Bray and Drew Nathaniel Keane (IVP, 2024), 192 pages.

In this book, Bray and Keane highlight the wisdom, beauty, and staying power of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer (BCP)* in the Church of England and beyond. The *BCP* is a distillation of some of the best of the English Reformation tradition, originally designed for easier use, readability, and a consistent progression through the core teachings of Scripture.

Although individuals may use the Morning and Evening Prayers, they are primarily designed for believers to use to pray together. Individual pastoral care is not primarily in view in the *BCP*, but rather the corporate worshipping life of the church. There is a principle here for me and for others whose lives were shaped by a view of discipleship that prioritized the private disciplines: The norm of the Christian life is discipleship in the worshipping community.

The book provides historical context and a brief introduction to the *BCP* and guides readers in using its sections for corporate worship and for personal devotions. It also explains how the various services function in the life of the church, in baptism, communion, and how it guides and relates to Bible reading and preaching. To give one example of something useful, I found the authors' explanation of the lectionary to be immediately applicable (p.100). A common tendency for pastors is to explain every part of the worship service as it progresses. This impulse is wise, as we want the less initiated to know what is going on. Yet the set of readings for Sundays in the *BCP* has been selected in such a way that they require little explanation and can simply be read. This allows the sermon to be the primary exposition, and for the rest of the service to be edifying without requiring small lessons along the way.

The authors have made the case for preserving a special status of the 1662 *BCP*, which I can appreciate in a qualified way.<sup>1</sup> I see advantages to greater rootedness in our theological traditions. There is humility in

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1. The *BCP* exists in several editions. Some revisions occurred for theological and political reasons. A good example of a modern, evangelical revision was published by the Anglican Church in North America in 2019.

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