

*Book Reviews*

## Book Notes: Volume 8

by MICHAEL GEMBOLA

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The goal of this column is 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 full-length reviews start below and are in alphabetical order by author name. They are followed by a section called "Book Briefs," which provides a short introduction to several books that either were sent in by publishers or that I've recently read and want to highlight. Because I anticipate taking an indefinite break from this column, I take some time at the end to share a little of what I've learned during this time.

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***Building a Godly Home, Volume 1: A Holy Vision for Family Life***, by William Gouge, edited and modernized by Scott Brown and Joel R. Beeke (Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), 200 pages.

There are real benefits to reviewing an old book every so often, rather than just new ones. One is that you get other options for how to respond to problems that sound new. William Gouge's writing cuts through some present-day arguments that can devolve into partisan or binary approaches. I see this particularly in his writing on gender roles, self-love, and domestic violence. But first, a quick introduction to the author.

If there was a James Dobson of the 1600s calling people to focus on the family, it was William Gouge. Originally published in 1622 as the seven-hundred-plus-page tome *Of Domesticall Duties*, the republished version is divided into volumes on family life, marriage, and parenting.

Gouge compares the family to a "little church and a little nation," a nursery garden, and a school. It's a place of growth and learning, a little world that prepares us for the bigger world (p.20). As an investment this significant, the family is worth every parent's best efforts—and could absorb all our efforts. "If family duties be well and thoroughly performed, they will be enough to take up a man's whole time" (p.21).

**Gender roles.** When Gouge speaks of the time commitment of engaging well in family for a "man," in context he does not mean "person": He wants fathers involved. Gouge is no protofeminist, but he is also not arguing for the home as a domain for women exclusive of men. He is not depicting the post-industrial-revolution family: one with a breadwinning father away from home most of the time, entrusting the mother with household tasks and the children's moral formation. On the one hand, the book is more straightforwardly hierarchical than any modern marriage book I've read, but it doesn't fall into some errors that some popular Christian resources have made. For example, Gouge takes time to examine how the Christ-church metaphor does and does *not* apply to the husband-wife relationship, thus avoiding some of the semi-heretical moves that some recent authors have made to bolster their gender views by reworking the classical doctrine of the Trinity. Also, unlike some recent Christian writing on manhood and womanhood, Gouge doesn't believe women are to submit to men in general.

**Self-love.** Gouge organizes his writing verse by verse through the household codes in Ephesians 5, spending one chapter of teaching per verse. This means he spends an entire chapter on proper self-love (Eph 5:29). He explains what natural and spiritual self-love entails and how self-love can go in skewed or evil directions. Failure to properly care for yourself is also condemned. Gouge explains that when Paul says, “no one ever hated their own body,” he certainly doesn’t mean people never harm themselves (Eph 5:29). Rather, “no man in his right mind” does so (p.92). He’s clearly familiar with a range of disturbing self-harm practices that he names in a list. Gouge sees other forms of socially acceptable self-harm in some who are so stingy that they deny themselves simple pleasures and good food to hoard more money, as well as workaholics and students who don’t stop to rest (p.104–5).

Gouge offers a perspective different from the modern view of self-love, which sometimes regards the self as divine or assigns divine functions to it. People often speak of the self almost as if it were something external to relate to. So, for example, offenses against the self bring self-judgment, require self-forgiveness, and lead to self-acceptance, authentic self-expression, and the rest. But because that is not the context he’s reacting against, he also doesn’t fall into opposite errors. He speaks of the necessity of self-love in ways that Christian ministers often do not today, for fear of sounding overly therapeutic. It can be a hard sell in some church contexts to talk about proper self-love.

**Domestic violence.** Similarly, it can be a hard sell in some church contexts to talk about domestic violence or trends involving harsh husbands. I’ve sometimes run into difficulty when teaching if I use male pronouns to talk about this problem. The pushback from some has been to insist that women can also be violent and that I was wrongly targeting men and playing into secular narratives. In his context, Gouge felt no need to avoid that charge, so he’s free to say things like this: “Many wives by reason of their husband’s fury are in worse situation than servants, for those who will not hit a servant, care not what load they lay upon their wives.”<sup>1</sup> He had no difficulty calling bad husbands to account.

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1. William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home, Volume 2: A Holy Vision for a Happy Marriage*, eds. Scott Brown and Joel R. Beeke (Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), 189.

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