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Bavinck's "The riddle of life" (Book Review)

James L. Sauer
Eastern University

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Cassell, K. A., & Hiremath, U. (2013). *Reference and information services: An introduction* (3rd ed.). Chicago: Neal-Schuman. 510 pp. \$88.00. ISBN 9781555708597

Kay Ann Cassell teaches at Rutgers University, and Uma Hiremath directs the Ames Free Library (Massachusetts). This new edition highlights electronic resources and has added a chapter on ethics (including copyright law, censorship, and professional codes of conduct), contributed by Angela Ecklund. The volume is divided into four sections. Part 1 examines the fundamental concepts of face-to-face, telephone, and virtual reference interviews (email, chat, texting, instant messaging, and video-conferencing), as well as basic search techniques. In spite of the variety of modalities, basic reference skills remain the same, including effective consultation, expert selection, and excellent communication. The nine chapters of Part 2 cover the breadth of major reference resources (both print and electronic), ranging from comprehensive encyclopedias to niche atlases, from bibliographical databases to biographical websites. Each chapter includes a helpful listing of “recommended free websites.” An appendix itemizes resources recently commended by the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA). Part 3 addresses the internet as a reference tool, information literacy, readers’ advisory services (contributed by Cindy Orr), and reference services targeting children and young adults (contributed by Meghan Harper). Part 4 discusses the selection and evaluation of reference materials, the management of reference staff, and the assessment of reference services. Future editions could benefit by expanding the brief discussion of marketing reference services (pp. 396–397). The final two chapters consider Web 2.0 technology and the future of information service. Reference staff will face growing demands for technological mobility and personalized interactivity, needing to become both “high tech” and “high touch” (pp. 464–465). Cassell and Hiremath maintain that “finding answers” is the *raison d’être* of reference service (p. 51), and their own work provides solid answers to the basic needs of reference librarianship. Although the breadth of the volume particularly reflects public libraries, academic librarians will also benefit from the professional counsel offered by this work.

Reviewer

Paul Hartog, Faith Baptist Bible College & Theological Seminary

Bavinck, J. H. (2016). *The riddle of life* (B. Hielma, Trans.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 102 pp. \$20.00. ISBN 9780802873330

Mystery, paradox, spiritual antinomies, and the puzzling riddles of life have not always been the mark of those writing from a Reformed perspective. Instead, there has been a tendency toward systematic theological answers and far less dwelling on the poetic conundrums of human life. J. H. Bavinck (1895–1964), a Dutch

Reformed theologian, has written a cheerful apologetic for Christianity that evenly balances humanity's questions on the meaning life with a biblical answer that leads us towards Christ.

Johan Herman Bavinck, the nephew of the Reformed Dogmatics scholar Herman Bavinck, was himself a pastor, missionary to Indonesia, and professor of missiology. Written in 1940, this short readable apologetic begins with the simple childlike question: Why? Why do we look at the world with so many questions? Why are we astounded by the universe? How can we know anything at all? His short answer: faith. Bavinck argues that faith is the basis of all thought systems, whether Christian or secular. Faith helps explain the world's complexity, interdependence, and ecological connectivity. He terms this unity "the law of service": that everything has a connected meaning. Lifeless matter, plants, animals, and humanity all are designed to serve their purpose. Besides purpose, humanity suffers from the added problem of willful rebelliousness. Amidst this human brokenness, Christ comes to serve. Jesus offers the answer to where we have come from and why we are here. Christianity answers life's puzzles like reality's dazzling diversity, its unfathomable complexity, and its improbable providence. All this points to a Creator.

Our fallen nature does not obliterate our moral, inquisitive, and communal nature. Rather, life's meaningless mechanical existence is contrasted to a harmony that can only be found in Jesus. God plays out his divine "Chess game" for our redemption; while we struggle with our false gods of money, false honor, and pleasure. Our puny lives as pawns call forth cries for deliverance by this Redeemer Chess master. "When we "pronounce the word *sin*, then God responds by saying redemption" (p.62). Perhaps because of his missions background, Bavinck takes an excursus in comparative religions, contrasting Buddha and Islam to Jesus as the true redeemer.

Though written in the mid-twentieth century, this book wears well in large part due to its lack of theological technicality coupled with a clear, poetic, and human appreciation of life and its problems. This is a good apologetic title for book tables, small group discussion, intellectual witnessing, or a Christian college course. Its appeal is direct: life is a riddle, Christ is the solution.

Reviewer

James L. Sauer, Eastern University