

Book Reviews



Joel R. Beeke and Anthony T. Selvaggio, eds. *Sing a New Song: Recovering Psalm Singing for the Twenty-First Century*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010. 196 pp.

The heart of the Protestant Reformation was not merely the recovery of the biblical doctrine of salvation (in the doctrine of justification by faith) but also the recovery of the biblical doctrine of worship. In our day, we have witnessed a renewed interest in Calvinistic soteriology; will a renewed interest in Reformed worship follow? If so, the recovery of canonical psalm singing will be an essential aspect of this Reformed resurgence. *Sing a New Song* is an effort to encourage the reclamation of psalm singing, addressing the topic through eleven chapters under three headings: (1) Psalm Singing in History; (2) Psalm Singing in Scripture; and (3) Psalm Singing and the Twenty-First-Century Church.

In the first section, the authors track the historical use of psalms in the church's worship. It was during the Reformation that the evangelical church reclaimed a partiality for the congregational singing of canonical psalms in worship. The Puritans even became advocates for "exclusive psalmody" (the singing only of inspired psalms in public worship) which held sway for several hundred years.

Joel Beeke examines "Psalm Singing in Calvin and the Puritans" (16–40). He notes, in particular, the development and influence of the Genevan Psalter. "No wonder, then, that in many parts of Europe, the term *psalm singer* became nearly synonymous with the title *Protestant*" (25). Beeke particularly notes the influence of John Cotton's important treatise *Singing of Psalms: a Gospel Ordinance* (1647). In this book, Cotton made the case for exclusive psalmody in public worship based on his interpretation of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians

3:16. Beeke adds, however, that Cotton “was not a strict advocate of exclusive psalmody” (33). He allowed for the singing of other inspired texts from the Bible in public worship and for singing uninspired hymns in “private houses” and “newly composed religious songs, but only in special gatherings” (33–34). Beeke adds that Benjamin Keach (1640–1707) proved “a ‘Puritan’ Baptist exception” to the rule in that he “introduced hymns, in addition to psalms and paraphrases, into English Nonconformist churches” (37).

Terry Johnson contributes a helpful chapter on “The History of Psalm Singing in the Christian Church” (41–60). He observes that “[t]he singing of psalms became one of the most obvious marks of Reformed Protestantism” (50). Johnson reminds readers that exclusive psalmody was the dominant practice of Protestant churches in early America:

The Reformed and Presbyterian churches in America were exclusively psalm singing for nearly two hundred years, from the Pilgrim fathers to the Jacksonian Era, as were the Congregationalists and Baptists (54).

The Anglicans had a three-hundred-year tradition of exclusive psalmody: “From 1620 to 1800, metrical psalmody dominated the American church scene” (55). The rise of hymns and hymnals led to the decline of psalm singing.

In “Psalters, Hymnals, Worship Wars, and American Presbyterian Piety” (61–77), D. G. Hart traces the decline of psalm singing. Hart notes, in particular, the influence of Isaac Watts’s psalm paraphrases and hymns as a major contributor to this decline. Presbyterians soon moved from the songs of Watts to the more “sentimental” songs of Methodists like Charles Wesley, so “Watts prepared the ground that Wesley tilled” (73).

In the second section, Psalm Singing in Scripture, the authors address the place of the canonical book of Psalms in the Bible and its significance for biblical worship. Michael LeFebvre’s chapter “The Hymns of Christ: The Old Testament Formation of the New Testament Hymnal” (92–110) provides a lucid discussion of the place of the Psalms within the canon of Scripture. He also examines the intentional shape and order of the psalms within the book of Psalms. The compiler “was not simply slapping together songs at random; serious and involved planning—and theological reflection—went into the compilation of the final Zion praise book. And it is a praise

book conscientiously formed in expectation of the coming son of David” (107). The book of Psalms then is the perfect hymn book for the church, since Jesus is “‘the singing king’ for whom the Psalter was prepared” (109). After concluding that the “the Psalter is designed for the Israel of Christ and the church should sing it,” LeFebvre adds:

But there is an orientation toward worship called for in the Psalter that is very different from what is common in the modern church. Often, congregations in the church today see themselves as the choir (the “performers”) singing praise to God (“the audience”). The Psalter calls us to refine this outlook: it teaches us to view ourselves as “a backup ensemble” singing *with a great Soloist* who is the primary “Performer.” It is the Son of David who stands as “the sweet psalmist” beloved by the Father. We, who enter into the Father’s delight in Christ, are privileged to join with Jesus in *His* songs as we sing the Psalms.... We need to learn, again, to sing the Psalms *with* Christ (109–110).

David P. Murray’s “Christ Cursing?” (111–21) provides a winsome defense of the propriety of the imprecatory psalms for Christian worship. Following Murray is Malcolm Watts’s “The Case for Psalmody, with Some Reference to the Psalter’s Sufficiency for Christian Worship” (122–44), which lays out the biblical case for exclusive psalmody. Of note is his argument that “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16) all refer to canonical psalms.

The articles in the third section, Psalm Singing and the Twenty-First-Century Church, address the use of the psalms in the contemporary pastoral ministry of the church. Derek Thomas’s “Psalm Singing and Pastoral Theology” (162–72) addresses the ways in which the psalms address the full range of the human spiritual experience. J. V. Fesko’s “Psalmody and Prayer” (173–83) notes how singing in worship is “congregational prayer” and how the use of psalmody deepens the church’s prayer life.

The collection of articles found in *Sing a New Song* is an excellent resource on the use of the canonical psalms in the sung praise of the church. In the past generation, we have seen the rise of “third-wave” inspired contemporary praise and worship music in evangelical churches; the result has been the so-called “worship wars” waged between those who prefer “traditional” music and those who prefer “contemporary” music. This book reminds us that what many

consider to be “traditional” church music (hymns), in fact, represents a relative innovation dating from the 1800s. In advocating the revival of psalm singing in the church, this book provides an impasse to the “worship wars.” Rather than “traditional” or “contemporary” worship, we can pursue “biblical” worship through the singing of psalms.

—Jeffrey T. Riddle



Paul Brewster, *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian*. Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010. 208 pp.

In the preface to this addition to the “Studies in Baptist Thought and Life” series, editor Michael Haykin notes that there is “a small renaissance” underway in the study of Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) (xv). Timothy George has called Fuller “the most influential Baptist theologian between John Bunyan and the present day” (cf. 65). Paul Brewster, a Southern Baptist pastor in Madison, Indiana, and a church historian who holds a doctoral degree from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, contributes significantly to this revival of interest in Fuller with this book, presenting Fuller as “a model pastor-theologian” (6).

Brewster begins his study by offering a helpful biographical sketch of Fuller, covering his early years, his conversion and call to ministry, and his productive years in pastoral ministry at Kettering, including his pioneer and longtime service as Secretary to the Baptist Missionary Society (8–35). Here and throughout the book, Brewster demonstrates a seemingly exhaustive familiarity with Fuller’s biographical material, from both primary and secondary sources, past and present.

He then proceeds to examine the theological method of Fuller (37–64), noting particularly his systematic evangelical Calvinism, in distinction from the “high Calvinism” of John Gill and John Brine. Like many of the new Calvinists in our own generation, Fuller was deeply influenced by the writings of Jonathan Edwards. Living during an age of Enlightenment and skepticism, Fuller upheld a high view of Scripture. He was willing to modify his theological system according to his interpretation of Scripture.

Brewster sees the doctrine of soteriology as the hub of Fuller’s theology (65–108). He emphasizes Fuller’s departure from the high