

Worship



Song

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From the Editor

We often speak of the “worship wars,” and may, if we are involved in its skirmishes, miss the joy of worship song in our own tradition because of the weight of the conflict’s burden. Over the years I have read a number of defenses of exclusive psalmody. While I have deep appreciation for this tradition and those who represent it within our own denomination, I have always wished to see a biblical argument for the place of biblically and theologically sound hymnody. Most of us can articulate our reasons for singing hymns, but have never written them down, or seen them composed by others. David Gordon deals with one important aspect of this argument in “The Israelites Were Not Exclusive Psalmists (Nor Are We).”

Alan Strange brings his own considerable appreciation of music, especially worship song, to bear on his review of Douglas O’Donnell’s, *God’s Lyrics: Rediscovering Worship through Old Testament Songs*. O’Donnell challenges the modern tendency to shallowness by simply looking at the kinds of worship song we find in the Old Testament.

The second part of “Democracy and the Denigration of Office” completes my argument for the three office view. I have sought to be fair to those who may disagree with some of what I have said. In the end I believe that we all want to preserve the priority of preaching along with the essential importance of the shepherding role of ruling elders.

I also offer reviews of a fine new presentation of the grace of God, often referred to as “the doctrines of grace,” by my friend and colleague Scott Meadows; and a very useful presentation of Presbyterian church government by Guy Prentiss Waters.

Francis Thompson has written many poems using the “she” to represent poetic inspiration. See if you can pick up the nature of the lament in this brief poem. He also alludes to Psalm 137:1, “By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.”

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

Servant Thoughts

Democracy and the Denigration of Office, Part 2

Gregory E. Reynolds

The Restoration of Church Office

No doctrine can be properly restored to the church's mind without careful definition. The three-office view is no exception. Distinctions made in the nineteenth-century debate are helpful in focusing the definition. In fact, it was the lack of proper distinctions that characterized the two-office theory for Hodge. The point at issue, he maintained, is

the nature of the office of the ruling elder. Is he a clergyman, a bishop? or is he a layman? Does he hold the same office with the minister or a different one? According to the new theory, the offices are identified. . . . This new theory makes all elders, bishops, pastors, teachers, and rulers. . . . It therefore destroys all official distinctions between them. It reduces the two to one order, class, or office.¹

The focus of the question, from an exegetical perspective, is clearly stated by Iain Murray:

The question which arises is how this Presbyterian distinction between 'ministers' and 'elders' is to be justified from the New Testament. Upon what grounds should such a title as 'pastor' be restricted to one if the word in the New Testament is descriptive of all elders?²

If presbyter is used uniformly in the New Testament to refer to a single office, then the distinction between the ruling elder and the pastor cannot be maintained. But, as Clowney cautioned:

In 1 Timothy 5:17, those who engage in rule are distinguished from those who also labor in the word and doctrine. Again, the fact that both groups can be called

¹ Charles Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), 128.

² Iain Murray, "Ruling Elders—A Sketch of a Controversy," *The Banner of Truth Magazine*, no. 235 (April 1983): 1.

πρεσβύτεροι [*presbyteroi*] by no means demonstrates that their office is identical.³

Hodge made a crucial exegetical point in recounting the essence of a debate he had with Thornwell:

This is the dilemma in which, as we understood, Dr. Thornwell endeavoured to place Dr. Hodge, when he asked him, on the floor of the Assembly, whether he admitted that the elder was a presbyter. Dr. Hodge rejoined by asking Dr. Thornwell whether he admitted that the apostles were deacons. He answered, No. But, says Dr. Hodge, Paul says he was a διάκονος [*diakonos*]. O, says Dr. Thornwell, that was in the general sense of the word. Precisely so. If the answer is good in the one case, it is good in the other. If the apostles being deacons in the wide sense of the word, does not prove that they were officially deacons, then that elders were presbyters in the one sense, does not prove them to be presbyters in the other sense. We hold, with Calvin, that the official presbyters of the New Testament were bishops; for, as he says, “[For to all who carry out the ministry of the Word it (Scripture) accords the title of ‘bishops.’]” But of the ruling elders, he adds, “[Governors (I Cor. 12:28) were, I believe, elders chosen from the people, who were charged with the censure or morals and the exercise of discipline along with the bishops.]” *Institutio, &c.* IV. 3. 8.⁴

Some defenders of the three-office view, such as Thomas Smyth, held that ruling elders were never referred to in the New Testament “under the term presbyter or elder, which always refers to the teacher or bishop solely.”⁵ Like Calvin, he found his warrant for the office of governor or ruling elder in passages such as 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Romans 12:8. He understood passages such as 1 Timothy 3; 5:17; Titus 1; Acts 20 as referring only to ministers of the word. On the other end of the exegetical spectrum of three-office defenders, Samuel Miller understood the above passages to refer to both offices together. Miller, nonetheless, clearly held the three-office view.⁶ In fact, Hodge declared himself to be in complete agreement with Miller as to the nature of the ruling office, only differing with him in the method of establishing its biblical warrant.⁷ Exegetical uniformity is not required in order to base the view clearly on Scripture.

Hodge summed up the three-office position robustly:

³ Edmund P. Clowney, “A Brief for Church Governors in Church Government” (unpublished paper, 1972), 15.

⁴ Hodge, *Church Polity*, 130. (Battles's English translation in the Library of Christian Classics is substituted for Hodge's quotation of Calvin in Latin.)

⁵ Thomas Smyth, *Complete Works of the Reverend Thomas Smyth, D.D.*, ed. J. William Flinn (Columbia, S.C.: R. L. Bryan, 1908), 4:26.

⁶ Samuel Miller, *An Essay on the Warrant, Nature, and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder, in the Presbyterian Church* (New York: Jonathan Leavitt; Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1831), 28.

⁷ Hodge, *Church Polity*, 129.

This is the old, healthful, conservative doctrine of the Presbyterian Church. Ministers of the word are clergymen, having special training, vocation, and ordination; ruling elders are laymen, chosen from the people as their representatives, having, by divine warrant, equal authority in all Church courts with the ministers.⁸

Much study of this question needs to be carried out by Presbyterians. The integrity of the offices of both ruling elder and minister is at stake. And while we need to take seriously the warning of Thomas Smyth that our devotion does not “terminate on the outward form, order, ministry or ordinances of any church,”⁹ we must not forget that the proper biblical form of office will best serve the Lord who ordained it. This is true of both offices.

The 1941 edition of the *Form of Government* of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church began the chapter “Of Ministers”: “The office of the minister is the first in the church, both for dignity and usefulness.” But this phrase was deleted from the chapter describing the office of minister in the 1978 revision, as an accommodation to the two-office view. The chapter title was also changed from “Of Ministers” to “Ministers or Teaching Elders.” Interestingly the sentence remains in the chapter on “Ordaining and Installing Ministers” (23.8, 14). However, its omission in the description of the ministerial office is unfortunate because ultimately the centrality of preaching is at stake. Calvin said it well: “God often commended the dignity of the ministry by all possible marks of approval in order that it might be held among us in highest honor and esteem, even as the most excellent of all things.”¹⁰ It is not the privilege of persons, but the dignity of God’s Word which is being upheld. Egalitarianism, lacking any real conception of office, tends to see all official distinctions as tools of oppression. A biblical servant, however, will see such a distinction as a tool of ministry and himself as an instrument of God’s grace.

The three-office doctrine also preserves the ruling function of the eldership. As both Hodge and Clowney pointed out, the two-office view creates a gap between the clergy and the people. As every faithful minister knows, the oversight of the flock is impossible to maintain alone. The three-office position allows ruling elders to focus on the application of what the minister teaches from God’s Word. The three-office position, rightly understood, alone preserves the true dignity and effectiveness of the ruling office.

Only a careful distinction of offices will ultimately preserve the proper functions of each. Historically, the two-office scheme leads to the disappearance of the ruling elder and the atrophy of lay leadership. In some circles, the teaching function has been demeaned, but this seems to be the case more where the “no-office” idea prevails, as in Brethrenism. When everyone is a minister, no one is. The egalitarian impulse, by its very nature, erodes the idea of office to the great harm of the church.

⁸ Ibid., 130.

⁹ Smyth, *Works*, 4:26.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.3.8:1055.

The benefits of the three-office view are manifold. First, the parity of rule protects the church from tyranny. The minister does not rule alone. There is a balance of power—a system of checks and balances. As Miller noted, the ruling elder has “an equal voice. The vote of the most humble and retiring Ruling Elder, is of the same avail as that of his minister.”¹¹ Sietsma observed, “It must be remembered that office is the only justification and the proper limitation of any human exercise of power and authority.”¹² The three-office view brings this idea into its own. Egalitarianism allows power to fall into the hands of the domineering and gives voice ultimately to the loudest mouth.

Second, the three-office doctrine provides leadership. The minister, as a scribe of the Word, is a leader among the rulers. He is normally the moderator of the session, a first among equals. A ship cannot sail without a captain. As Geoffrey Thomas pointed out:

Where plural elders are in existence, the principle of single leadership is necessary. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we find leadership exercised by a committee with one man acting as a kind of chairman, although that is the consequence of the concept of parity among plural elders in many cases today.¹³

In preventing ministers from lording it over the elders, the two-office view tends to leave a vacuum of leadership. Smyth declared, “Ministers are like the head from which proceeds the stimulus, guidance, and direction, which are essential to the vitality, the activity, the dignity, and the harmony of the system.”¹⁴ Egalitarianism engenders lordship, not leadership.

Third, the three-office view allows the minister to focus on the ministry of the Word, unhindered by the multitude of concerns that only the group of elders can attend to with him. How many of the pulpits of our land suffer because of the inordinate demands made on a minister’s time? Jethro’s advice to Moses is as pertinent today as it was over three millennia ago: “What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone.” (Exod. 18:17–18). The apostles put this principle into practice in the calling out of deacons in Acts 6. Egalitarianism leads not only to tyranny but to burnout.

Fourth, this view allows for the proper and effective implementation of discipline, which the minister could not appropriately or practically provide on his own. Egalitarianism leads to moral chaos.

Finally, the three-office idea provides for the needs of all of the people. Miller beautifully depicted this full-orbed ministry:

¹¹ Miller, *The Ruling Elder*, 197.

¹² K. Sietsma, *The Idea of Office* (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1985), 15.

¹³ Geoffrey Thomas, “The Pastoral Ministry,” in *Practical Theology and the Ministry of the Church, 1952–1984, Essays in Honor of Edmund P. Clowney*, ed. Harvey M Conn (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1991), 78–79.

¹⁴ Smyth, *Works*, 4:28.

In every department of official duty, the Pastor of this denomination has associated with him, a body of pious, wise, and disinterested counselors, taken from among the people; acquainted with their views; participating in their feelings; able to give sound advice as to the wisdom and practicability of plans which require general co-operation for carrying them into effect; and able also, after having aided in the formation of such plans, to return to their constituents, and so to advocate and recommend them, as to secure general concurrence in their favor.¹⁵

There are several things which need to be done to promote a more biblical view of office in our churches. First, people need to be instructed about the nature and dangers of egalitarianism. Most people are unaware of the democratic assumptions that are part of the fabric of the worldview in which they have been nurtured as Americans. To the extent that these assumptions are unbiblical, church officers, especially ministers, must foster the transformation of people's minds, so that they will not be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:1–2).

Second, pastors and elders need to encourage each other to fulfill the ministries to which God has called them. This means that each must be aware of the biblical requirements, duties, and limits of the offices of pastor and ruler. In particular, each must understand what is specifically expected of them in the local congregation. The strengths and weaknesses of each officer should be openly discussed in the privacy of the session. Special strengths and gifts should be appreciated and cultivated so that the wide variety of needs in a given congregation will be met.

Third, a good working relationship should be cultivated among elders and ministers. This means developing biblical communication and conflict-resolution skills. The session must see itself as a team. This means that the individualist instinct must be suppressed in ministers and elders. Matters under discussion must be kept confidential. When decisions are made, the dissenter should keep his disagreement to himself unless it involves moral or doctrinal absolutes. Then the proper means of discipline should be judiciously used to deal with sin and heresy.

One of the greatest temptations presented by the democratic mentality is the idea that the ruling elder is a sounding board for congregational discontent or an agent for special interests. Smyth was aware of this danger already in the nineteenth century, when he warned:

Remember, however, that while you are the representatives of the people, you represent not their WISHES and OPINIONS, but their DUTIES and OBLIGATIONS, THEIR RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES, as these are laid down in those heavenly laws to which you and they are both alike subject, and which no power on earth can either alter, modify, abridge, or enlarge.

Because pride enhances this temptation he added, “Seek not popularity at the expense of fidelity.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Miller, *The Ruling Elder*, 311–12.

¹⁶ Smyth, *Works*, 4:31.

The idea, rightly emphasized by Hodge and others, that ruling elders are “representatives of the people” can easily be misused in order to pit the minister against the people, as if the pastor did not sympathize with their concerns. Frustrated preachers must not treat their elder as Absaloms. Annual sessional retreats, together with a wise and regular system of visitation by elders and minister, will do much to prevent such abuse.

The session must present a united front. This means that a wedge should never be allowed to be driven between a pastor and the elders. The pastor must be teachable and humble, never demanding his agenda. But it also means that the ruling elder must protect the pastor from the power of destructive criticism. Criticism itself is healthy, but the Devil, the original egalitarian, is a master at inspiring unjust criticism and using just criticism divisively to ruin churches and drive good men from the ministry. The wise elder will try to answer the criticisms and concerns of members on the spot or bring the matter directly to the pastor (with the critic, if necessary). It is crucial that elders support the pastor, especially when they disagree with him. Berghoef and DeKoster have an excellent section on this subject.¹⁷ This would be a superb book for sessions to work through together. Finally, ministers and elders will serve the Lord and promote the godly government of his church best by being servants of God and his people. The three-office view, by itself, will not restore true ministry to the church. Only if those who fill the offices have the mind of their Master, the mind of a servant (Phil. 2:5–11), will egalitarianism be kept at bay and the kingdom of God built. The individualist will use the office for his own personal fulfillment and thus denigrate the office. The servant will seek the glory of his Lord.

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¹⁷ Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster, *The Elder's Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Christian Library, 1979), 160–62. Cf. Lawrence Eyres, *The Elders of the Church* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1975), 17–18.

Servant Worship

The Israelites Were Not Exclusive Psalmists (Nor Are We)

by T. David Gordon

The Reformed tradition has been somewhat more hesitant to employ Christian hymns in worship than the Lutheran tradition. Ulrich Zwingli removed all music from worship entirely, so Calvin's effort to restore the singing of praise had to proceed somewhat cautiously. Calvin himself was not an exclusive psalmist: his Strasburg liturgy included musical settings of the Decalogue, the Apostle's Creed, and the *Nunc Dimittis*.¹ He was, however, a vigorous proponent of metrical versions of the Psalms, and the Reformed tradition has always been very friendly to such. Exclusive psalmody, however, is now a fairly small minority report of the Reformed tradition; Isaac Watts altered the Reformed tradition substantially on that point. I myself not only do not believe in exclusive psalmody, I believe it was an extremely late development in Christianity, and that not even the Old Testament saints were exclusive psalmists. What follows is an abbreviated discussion of the five grounds on which I conclude that even the Israelites were not exclusive psalmists.

The Lexical Issue

"The Psalms" is an unfortunate designation for this body of literature, because there is no secular equivalent in our speech to "psalms." For us, "psalms" are always "the canonical Psalms." Other terms could be used, and/or have been used, that might be more helpful. We could refer to them, as our Hebrew text and Jewish friends do, as "Praises." In the Hebrew Bible, the title to our "Psalms" is תהלים (*tehillim*) "praises." The Psalter also employs the term self-referentially in a number of places:

¹ For a review of the different emphases between the Lutheran and Reformed heritage on the matter, cf. Theodore Brown Hewitt, *Paul Gerhardt as a Hymnwriter and His Influence on English Hymnody* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918); Walter E. Buszin, "Luther on Music," *The Musical Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (January 1946): 80–97; James Hastings Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster 1968); Charles Garside Jr., "The Origins of Calvin's Theology of Music, 1536–43," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 69, part 4 (1979): 1–36; Christopher Boyd Brown, *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); John Barber, "Luther and Calvin on Music and Worship," *Reformed Perspectives Magazine* 8, no. 26 (June 2006). Consider also Hughes Oliphant Old's comment: "Luther was a talented musician, and he liked to sing the gospel as much as preach it. The Reformation produced a great amount of excellent hymnody. Luther left us several superb hymns that we still sing today, but he was not alone; a number of other Reformers did the same. In fact, the Reformation spawned a whole school of hymnodists. . . . Hymn singing is firmly wedded to the very nature of Protestant worship. We Protestants have as great a love for hymn singing as we do for preaching." *Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 321.

Ps. 22:3 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises (תְּהִלּוֹת, *tehillot*) of Israel.

Ps. 40:3 He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise (תְּהִלָּה, *tehillah*) to our God.

Ps. 51:15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise (תְּהִלָּתְךָ, *tehillateka*)

Ps. 65:1 Praise (תְּהִלָּה, *tehillah*) is due to you, O God, in Zion, and to you shall vows be performed.

Ps. 145:21 My mouth will speak the praise (תְּהִלַּת, *tehillat*) of the LORD, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.

Insofar as Psalms recount and celebrate the praise-worthy character and deeds of God, they are properly called “praises.” In my handy little volume by Rabbi Avrohom Davis, *The Metsudah Tehillim*, which provides the Hebrew and English of the Psalter in parallel columns, Rabbi Davis says this: “Sefer Tehillim is often referred to as the Book of Psalms. A more precise translation of the word תְּהִלִּים (*tehillim*) is praises, the plural of the word תְּהִלָּה (*tehillah*). We should therefore refer to this work as the Book of Praises. The book was named because so many of its words express David’s praise of God.”² Indeed, the noun is formed from the verb הִלֵּל (*hll*), which means to praise or extol. So the Psalter itself does not refer to itself by a term that suggests a fixed or determined canonical reality, the way our expression “The Psalms” does. It refers to itself by the ordinary term for “praises.”³ I do not suggest that this evidence is conclusive, because the term could conceivably refer to a fixed group of praises. I do suggest, however, that the natural reading of the Hebrew permits a much more open-ended collection of praises than does our English expression “The Psalms” does.

Even more significant, lexically, is that some of the psalms refer to themselves as “prayers” (LXX προσευχή [*proseuchē*], ᾠδή [*ōdē*] or ὕμνος [*hymnos*]):

Ps. 17:1 A Prayer (תְּפִלָּה, *tehillah*) of David (LXX προσευχή τοῦ Δαυὶδ, *proseuchē tou David*)

Ps. 42:8 By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song (שִׁירָה, LXX ᾠδή, *ōdē*) is with me, a prayer (תְּפִלָּה, LXX προσευχή, *proseuchē*) to the God of my life.

² *The Metsudah Tehillim: A New Linear Tehillim with English Translation and Notes* (Brooklyn: Simcha-Graphic Associates, 1983), iii.

³ This designation of “praises” is somewhat imperfect, since nearly seventy-five of the psalms are more technically laments, and only about forty are what we would designate as songs of praise. But since there are seven different genres within the canonical psalter, perhaps “praises” is the most generic term that can be used for them.

Ps. 72:20 The prayers (תְּפִלֹּת, *tephillot*) of David, the son of Jesse, are ended (ἐξέλιπον οἱ ὕμνοι Δαυὶδ τοῦ υἱοῦ, *Iessai, exelipon hoi hymoi David tou Iessai*).

Ps. 85:1 A Prayer of David (προσευχὴ τῷ Δαυιδ, *proseuchē tō David*)

Ps. 89:1 A Prayer of Moses, the man of God (προσευχὴ τοῦ Μωϋσῆ ἀνθρώπου τοῦ θεοῦ, *proseuchē tou Mōysē anthropou to theou*)

If we referred to these biblical psalms as “prayers,” since so many are addressed to God, would any of us consider being “exclusive pray-ers”? Would anyone seriously consider praying only the prayers found in the canonical Psalter?

Further, the term “psalm” (ψαλμὸς, *psalmos*), is not restricted in the OT to the collection that we would call the canonical Psalms. Other prayers and praises are referred to by this designation.

1 Sam. 16:18 One of the young men answered, “Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing (εἰδότα ψαλμόν, *eidota psalmon*), lit., “who knows psalm”), a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the LORD is with him.”

Note that, at this point in David’s career, he is “skillful in playing,” but has not yet written any of what we would later call “the Psalms.” So he did not know (εἰδότα, *eidota*) “the Psalms”; he knew how to play an accompanying instrument. Indeed, this is how the term is employed in Job, to refer to a musical instrument:

Job 21:12 They sing to the tambourine and the lyre and rejoice to the sound of *the pipe* (φωνῆ ψαλμοῦ, *phōnē psalmou*).

Job 30:31 My lyre is turned to mourning, and *my pipe* (ὁ δὲ ψαλμός μου, *o de psalmos mou*) to the voice of those who weep.⁴

Lexically, then, not any of the language employed in the OT suggests what our English “The Psalms” does, to wit: a *fixed* collection of prayers or praises. It refers much more openly, to lyrical music that may be accompanied with an instrument.

OT Songs Not in the Psalter

⁴ Pipes are indeed extremely old. Elena Mannes has an interesting discussion of a vulture bone flute found in Germany that is forty thousand years old: five thousand years older than the famous cave paintings in Chauvet, France. Even more remarkable, when archaeologists recreated one using a condor bone, the flute played the five-tone (pentatonic) Western scale perfectly, a scale used in “Amazing Grace” or “The Star-Spangled Banner.” So our preference for that pentatonic (later developed into the heptatonic) scale is not merely the result of enculturation; it is apparently wired into our DNA, and was wired so into our ancestors over forty thousand years ago. Cf. Elena Mannes, *The Power of Music: Pioneering Discoveries in the New Science of Song* (New York: Walker, 2013), and also her PBS Special, “The Music Instinct: Science and Song.”

As Douglas O'Donnell has documented, there are a number of prominent songs recorded in the Old Testament that are not in the Psalter.⁵ Two “songs of Moses” are recorded in the Old Testament (Exod. 15 and Deut. 32), the Song of Deborah (Judges 5), two of Samuel (1 Sam. 2:1–10; 2 Sam. 22), and the song of Habakkuk (Hab. 3). The Old Testament not only contains a record of these non-Psalter songs; it contains approval of those who composed and sang them. Yet the compilers of the five collections that eventually constituted our canonical psalms did not hesitate to omit them. Had those compilers thought that their collections would have been regarded as exclusive, they almost certainly would not have excluded such well-known songs. If a strict view of exclusive psalmody were held, we would be permitted to sing the 150 canonical psalms, but not permitted to sing these six other songs that are recorded elsewhere in the Old Testament canon. The Israelites could have lawfully sung them (and did), but we could not.

Five Collections of Psalms

All students of the Psalms now recognize that what we call the Psalter was itself constructed of five collections of psalms that originally existed independently of one another:

Psalms 1–41 David Psalms

Psalms 42–72 Solomonic Psalms

Psalms 73–89 Despair over the Davidic Monarchy

Psalms 90–106 Mosaic Psalms

Psalms 107–150 A Coming King⁶

Interestingly, with almost no exceptions, these five different collections of praises did not contain the praises that were in the other four (psalms 14 and 53 appear to be the exception). If any one of the five had intended to be exclusive, we would not have had the other four. Indeed, the second collection suggests that it was/is complete: “The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended” (Ps. 72:20). But whatever “ended” means here (LXX ἐξέλιπον, *exelipon*, Hebrew כָּלָו, *clw*), it did not mean that an entire canon of exclusive psalms ended, because over seventy-five more followed it. The only thing that “ended” here was one of five collections of praises; but the ending of that collection did not exclude the other four.

⁵ Douglas O'Donnell, *God's Lyrics: Rediscovering Worship through Old Testament Songs* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2010).

⁶ All students of the Psalms agree with this numbering of the five collections, but the labels are obviously interpretive. I derived these labels from the persuasive argumentation of Mark D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007).

The Psalter Itself Grew

Our present canonical collection of “prayers or praises” developed over time. Not only did five separate collections develop separately, but the canonical psalms were written over hundreds of years. Psalm 90, for instance, is attributed to Moses: “A Prayer of Moses, the man of God” (προσευχὴ τοῦ Μωϋσῆ ἀνθρώπου τοῦ θεοῦ, *proseuchē tou Mōysē anthropou tou theou*, Ps. 90:1). Critical scholars may dispute the Mosaic origins of this particular psalm, but the general consensus, even among critical scholars, is that the Psalms, at a minimum, date from the original monarchy to the post-exilic era.⁷ As William L. Holladay put it, “Scholars who have worked on the Psalms in the last hundred years or so have detected within them the kind of variations of style and emphasis that suggest that they are the product of many poets and singers over many centuries.”⁸ At various critical moments in Israel’s history, laments, thanksgivings, or praises were composed to commemorate, bewail, or celebrate some new work of God’s judgment or deliverance. And indeed, more than one psalm was composed for most such occasions. A number of psalms, for example, recall Israel’s exodus from Egypt (e.g., 22, 44, 80, 83). During that process of composing psalms, one would have assumed that the process of composing such praises or prayers would continue as long as God continued to judge or deliver. If, therefore, Christians regard the cross as God’s judgment and the resurrection as God’s deliverance, we would surely expect prayers and praises to be composed to commemorate and celebrate (and lament) such.

The Psalter Commands Praising God for All His Works

If one reads the canonical psalms, it is not at all surprising to learn that they were composed over the course of many generations, because so many of the psalms command the people of God to praise and extol him for his works or deeds of judgment and deliverance. In doing so, such passages command God’s visible people to compose such songs in response to all of what he has done. Note in these representative passages the relationship between God’s acting and his people’s singing in response:

Ps. 9:11 *Sing praises* to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his *deeds*!

Ps. 13:6 I will *sing* to the LORD, because he has *dealt bountifully* with me.

Ps. 66: 1 Shout for joy to God, all the earth; 2 *sing* the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise! 3 Say to God, “How awesome are your *deeds*! So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you.

Ps. 67:4 Let the nations be glad and *sing* for joy, for you *judge* the peoples with equity and *guide* the nations upon earth.

⁷ Cf. John D. Telgren, “Dating the Psalms,” n.p.n.d.

⁸ Cf. William L. Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1996), 17–18.

Ps. 92:4 For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your *work*; at the *works* of your hands I *sing* for joy.

Ps. 95:1 Oh come, let us *sing* to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our *salvation*!

Ps. 96:1 Oh *sing* to the LORD a new *song*; *sing* to the LORD, all the earth! 2 *Sing* to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his *salvation* from day to day.

Ps. 98:1 Oh *sing* to the LORD a new *song*, for he has *done* marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have *worked salvation* for him.

Ps. 105:2 *Sing* to him, *sing praises* to him; tell of all his wondrous *works*!

Ps. 139:14 I *praise* you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully *made*. Wonderful are your *works*; my soul knows it very well.

These passages (and others like them) invite and command those who benefit from God's works to sing praises to him for such works. Both the non-psalter songs in the Old Testament and the 150 in our collection testify to Israel's obedience to the divine invitation. Generation after generation composed new songs of praise, lament, or thanksgiving in response to God's acts of judgment and deliverance. And, as I indicated above, they were not content to compose merely one prayer or praise for such acts; many of God's acts were celebrated by many compositions.

If the arrival of God's anointed was an occasion for singing in the psalter, how could humanity not compose songs for the advent and birth of God's Christ ("Come, thou long-expected Jesus")? If the Israelites sang laments when David's enemies drove him from the city (e.g., Psalm 3), how could Christians refrain from lamenting the Son of David's Passion ("O Sacred Head, now wounded")? If Israel sang when the exiled king returned to Jerusalem, how could we not sing when the crucified Redeemer returned to life ("Jesus lives, and so shall I; death, thy sting is gone forever")? If Israel sang songs to celebrate the ascension of David or Solomon to rule, how could it be possible that we would not also compose songs when the Son of David ascended to the right hand of the Father ("Crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne")? How could we possibly refuse to sing about such things? God disclosed himself much more supremely and definitively through his incarnate Son than he ever had before in any of his acts of judgment and deliverance in Israel; how could we possibly fail to sing praises for the greater and fuller act of judgment and deliverance in God's own Son?

New Testament Saints Are Not Exclusive Psalmists

The answers to those rhetorical questions are not difficult to find in the New Testament. When Jesus took on human flesh, his conception and birth were greeted by song (Mary's *Magnificat* in Luke 1:46–55 and Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis* in Luke 2:29–32).

If Calvin's interpretation of Acts 2:42 is correct,⁹ the earliest meetings of the apostolic churches included singing of praise that was not restricted to the Old Testament psalms. Paul's letters contain both an example of what is likely a Christ-hymn in Philippians 2,¹⁰ and Paul's instructions about singing in the congregation in texts such as 1 Corinthians 14:26: "What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation." While it is possible that the "hymn" here is an Old Testament canonical psalm, the context suggests that it, like the "lesson" or "revelation" contained New Testament truth. Similarly, Paul's comment in Colossians 3:16 virtually necessitates such an understanding: "Let the *word of Christ* dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, *singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." What the Colossians sang in their psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs were rich with the message/word about Christ. The songs recorded by the apostle John in the book of Revelation are never Old Testament psalms; they are always new compositions, and sometimes expressly Christological, referring to the slain "Lamb" (Rev. 5:9–10, 12–13; 7:10–12; 19:1–8), and one of which expressly juxtaposes the songs of Moses to those of the Lamb: "And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!'" (Rev. 15:3).

Indeed, even secular Roman sources of the period were aware of the Christian practice of singing expressly Christological songs. When Pliny the Younger reported to the emperor Trajan about professing Christians, he examined those accused with infidelity to the emperor carefully, found that many of them had never been Christians, and some only for a time, who then renounced their faith. But among those who had been Christians, Pliny's accusation included this: "However, they assured me that the main of their fault, or of their mistake was this: That they were wont, on a stated day, to meet together before it was light, and *to sing a hymn to Christ, as to a god*, alternately; and to oblige themselves by a sacrament [or oath], not to do anything that was ill."¹¹ Pliny received this testimony from their own mouth, and since, in his report, he was exonerating them, he was not attempting to include in his report anything incriminating. So the testimony is almost certainly authentic.

Conclusion

⁹ Calvin understood the ταῖς προσευχαῖς, *tais proseuchais* of Acts 2:42 to refer to the prayers both spoken and sung. As James Hastings Nichols put it, commenting on Calvin, "The second element in every meeting of the church is the prayers. These are of two types, said Calvin, spoken and sung. We must say something of each. It is significant that *Calvin discusses church music under the heading of prayer*." Nichols, 33 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰ "Philippians 2:2–5 is distinguished by the fact that it is perhaps the most illustrious example of New Testament Christ-hymns. It stands out as an ode sung to Christ in praise of Him and His achievement." Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians ii.5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), 294–95.

¹¹ Trajan was emperor from 98 AD until his death in 117 AD, and most historians date the letter from Pliny at ca. 110. But of course, the behavior narrated had been committed many years earlier, so the testimony probably refers to merely the second generation of the church. Already, by the second generation, the Christians confessed to singing hymns to Christ "as to a god." It is, of course, possible, but highly unlikely, that the second generation would have introduced a practice unapproved by the apostolic church.

The evidence throughout the history of revelation is the same: Songs of lament, thanks, or praise are the ongoing response to divine acts and perfections. When God acts in judgment or deliverance, his people reply in lament, thanksgiving, or praise, as befits the situation. The Lord is not only great, but “greatly to be praised” (1 Chron. 16:25; Ps. 48:1; 96:4; 145:3). Each of his great attributes and each of his great acts is to be greatly praised. The notion that his greatest acts—the incarnation, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of his Son—would be greeted mutely is contrary to the entire pattern of act-and-praise disclosed across biblical history, and is indeed contrary to the evidence of the New Testament. Is the composition of hymns a serious matter that should be taken with all due seriousness and skill? Yes, just as this is true of preaching sermons and composing prayers; but we do the two latter in every service of worship, and there is no reason to believe we are exempt from the same careful composition when it comes to Christian hymns.

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ServantReading

God's Lyrics *By Douglas Sean O'Donnell*

by Alan D. Strange

God's Lyrics: Rediscovering Worship through Old Testament Songs, by Douglas Sean O'Donnell. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010, xxiii + 210, \$15.99, paper.

Great music has the power to move our whole being. This is undoubtedly why some of the most memorable and magnificent moments in my life have occurred in the concert hall or the opera house. I have marveled at Pierre Boulez conducting Mahler's Second Symphony and Leonard Bernstein conducting Beethoven's Third. Luciano Pavarotti has thrilled me in *Il Trovatore* as has Anna Netrebko in *La Boheme*. And then there are the countless performances on radio and recordings (one calls to mind Joan Sutherland singing *Norma*—or anything, for that matter—Birgit Nilsson in *Der Ring* and Franco Corelli in *Tosca*). As great an impact as these have had on me, however, they cannot compare with the times that sacred music, live or on recording, has moved me: Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *Creation*, Mendelsohn's *Elijah*, Brahms's *German Requiem* and many others.

Great music is indeed moving, and when wedded to sacred text, is unparalleled in its evocative power. The hymns of the church (which term I use comprehensively, to include the Psalms) are also great music, though more widely singable than what is often called classical or sacred music would be. The great hymns of the church, whether taking the words of Scripture directly or impliedly (as expressed in great Christian poetry), manifest clearly the ancient dictum “cantat bis orat”—“he who sings prays twice.” The singer prays in both the words that he sings and the music that he employs to sing it, both serving as an out-breathing of the pious soul to God.

In arguing here for great music and biblical words, I make no argument that either the music or the words must be of a certain age or complexity. Contemporary words and music, if well-rendered and composed, can both be simple (note, not simplistic) and altogether lovely, even as can contemporary music on the radio and in the concert hall and opera house. The illustrations I gave were of classics because they are better known than most contemporary examples would be. Music that is fitting for worship can be of a variety of origins and styles, but needs to be always reverent, whether joyful or mournful, depending on the character of the text, to which affect it ought to correspond. Certainly the worship of our triune God, a God of infinite majesty and holiness, should never be shallow but always appropriately full of depth and meaning.

Sadly, much of what passes for music in worship these days lacks profundity, a strange trait given the character of the God whom we worship. Douglas Sean O'Donnell, in his volume *God's Lyrics: Rediscovering Worship through Old Testament Songs*, has given us a much-needed work, for a church that has succumbed in its worship,

particularly in its worship music, to shallow sentimentalism. This sentimentalism dictates that worship should be comforting and never convicting. In the support of such sentiments, music in worship must be sweet and positive.

While such positive themes pass muster in our sentimentalized worship services, themes like God's wrath against sin and God being a warrior who conquers his and our enemies are rarely heard in such circles. O'Donnell's book is a call to recover a better, deeper, richer, pattern of worship, to rediscover a more thoroughly biblical worship through Old Testament songs given proper reflection in the context of New Testament worship.

O'Donnell, Senior Pastor of New Covenant Church (Naperville, Illinois), divides his book into three main parts. Part one consists of sermons on the six Old Testament songs that are his focus. The first is the "Song of Moses" from Exodus 15, in which Yahweh's triumph over Pharaoh is celebrated. The second is from Deuteronomy 32 and O'Donnell calls it the "Song of Yahweh": An Exodus from Israel's Apostasy. The third is the "Song of Deborah" from Judges 5, celebrating the Lord's victory over Israel's enemies. The fourth is in Samuel, consisting of two songs, the "Song of the Barren Woman" (1 Samuel 2) and the "Song of the Fertile King" (2 Samuel 22). And the fifth is the "Song of Habakkuk" (from chapter 3), expressing faith in God even in the midst of judgment. The five sermons exposit these texts, showing their place in redemptive history—of God delivering his people from his and their enemies, especially pointing in all of them to the ultimate deliverance which we enjoy in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Part two, chapters 6–10, following the five chapters of part one, continues to focus on the six aforementioned Old Testament songs. In part two, entitled "Applications for Christian Worship," O'Donnell argues the ongoing fitness of these Old Testament songs and their themes for worship in the New Covenant church. In chapter 6, O'Donnell notes that the six songs have four themes:

1. The Lord is at the center; that is, our God is addressed, adored and "enlarged."
2. His mighty acts in salvation history are recounted.
3. His acts of judgment are rejoiced in.
4. His ways of living (practical wisdom) are encouraged (113).

In chapters 7–10, O'Donnell "illustrate[s] how the six scriptural songs sing of these themes." He compares these themes "with the most popular contemporary Christian choruses, as well as the most popular classic hymns sung in today's churches" (113–14).

The purpose of O'Donnell's comparative exercise is "to show some strengths and weaknesses of our favorite lyrics, and to suggest compensating for those weaknesses by using the six scriptural songs" (114). In short, the best of the hymns and songs of the church teach and preach Christ. These six songs support that and serve additionally as a corrective for the places in which the church's hymnody and choruses fall short. O'Donnell notes that even the best of our ecclesiastical music tends to fail with respect to rejoicing in God's acts of judgment. The worst of our choruses and hymns (as O'Donnell surveys particularly the top fifty contemporary Christian choruses and the top twenty-five hymns) woefully lack in the four themes, and even the best do not tend to contain all that these six scriptural songs do.

All of Scripture has as its theme the person and work of Christ, as do these six songs. O'Donnell wants us to see how each part of the Hebrew Scriptures—not just the Psalms,

but the Torah, Prophets, and all the Writings—points to and sets forth Christ. His concern in this book is to highlight that we can, and ought, by the use of the Scripture's own songs, come to enjoy this Christological richness, which many contemporary churches leave untapped and by which neglect they are spiritually impoverished. Especially helpful in this volume is O'Donnell's extensive interaction with what the church is actually singing. The appendices contain lists of both the choruses and hymns most used by the churches, and he interacts with them extensively in this work. He offers these neglected songs of Scripture (at least neglected in more recent times) as part of the cure that ails us in our sentimentalized church culture.

Part three of this book contains O'Donnell's own versions (text with music) of five of the six Old Testament songs (excluding the second one from II Samuel), along with a sixth song from Rev. 5:9–11. Whether or not one finds O'Donnell's poetic skills adequate—and the affect of the tunes appropriate for the words he selects—his attempt is an admirable one. This reviewer agrees that the church would do well to sing more of Scripture, both the Psalms and other Scriptures of the sort that O'Donnell furnishes us, and in so doing enjoy a more robust view of God and his work.

We need more of what O'Donnell is here endeavoring to do in this helpful volume. Surely the church needs to recover its best hymnody, to employ its richest psalmody, and to sing the songs of Scripture themselves. So many evangelical churches have fallen prey to theologically, poetically, and musically impoverished worship that O'Donnell's call to embrace the richness of the whole counsel of God in worship, and especially in our singing of sacred songs, is quite welcome. One hopes that O'Donnell's sounding of the alarm will, along with other such efforts, have a salutary effect on the church.

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ServantReading

Briefly Noted

God's Astounding Grace *by D. Scott Meadows*

by Gregory E. Reynolds

God's Astounding Grace: The Doctrines of Grace, by D. Scott Meadows. North Bergen, NJ: Pillar and Ground, 2012, 32 pages, \$3.99.

This little booklet displays a warmth of devotion and a clarity of truth that makes it very useful in convincing others of the truth of God's amazing grace. It will be valuable in persuading Arminians as well as unbelievers of the richness and wonder of God's grace. Professor John Murray always maintained that part of the work of evangelism is to convince poorly taught believers of the Reformed faith. This, of course, is best done by simply opening God's Word. Thus, Meadows only quotes Scripture, and does so with the care and acumen of a true pastor theologian.

The booklet presents the five points of Calvinism without saying so. Meadows simply opens the Bible in a winsome way, calculated to show the reader the glory of God's grace. He brings Scripture to bear on all of the well-known false notions and misconceptions that have always surrounded these doctrines. For example, in dispelling the idea that "foreknowledge" is simply a cognitive awareness, he shows that Scripture uses the word to "denote an intimate and particular love" (19). In doing so, Meadows build a theological case with peerless logic. He articulates these familiar doctrines with a care that makes them fresh for the novice or the theologically mature reader. It is obviously the work of a pastor as he frames his argument in a most irenic way. As a physician of the soul he convinces the reader of the dangerous nature of his spiritual disease and sets before him the wonderful cure offered in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The booklet is attractively designed and can thus be given to anyone with confidence that its looks reflect its content. D. Scott Meadows is a Reformed Baptist pastor serving as the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church (Reformed), in Exeter, New Hampshire. I highly recommend this booklet.

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ServantReading

How Jesus Runs the Church *by Guy Prentiss Waters*

by Gregory E. Reynolds

How Jesus Runs the Church by Guy Prentiss Waters. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011, xxx + 178 pages, \$13.49, paper.

It has become an axiom since I entered the ministry in 1980 that the most neglected doctrine in American Christendom is the doctrine of the church. In the following decades, a number of fine works have been written or republished from earlier times when this doctrine was seen as essential to true Christian faith and practice.

The title is an eye-catcher **How Jesus HOW TO RUNS THE CHURCH. “HIS CHURCH”** might have made the point even stronger, but it is a nice contrast with the “How to” pragmatism that pervades American evangelical ecclesiology. All along the way, Waters references every main point with lots of Scripture, demonstrating that ecclesiology is an essential part of biblical doctrine. Numerous quotations of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms enforce this fact. He also gives ample, footnoted references to other authors, demonstrating that his ideas are not spun out of whole cloth. He refers often to the Form of Government in *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (sixth edition, 2010), in which he is a minister, demonstrating the importance of good order in Presbyterian churches.

Waters covers the five major topics of sound ecclesiology by defining the church, the nature of its government, the source and delegation of its power, its offices, and its courts.

Waters’s pastoral and ecumenical sensibilities are evinced throughout the book. For example, he fairly represents those who do not believe that church membership is necessary, and goes on to gently but firmly argue its necessity by asking and answering a series of questions on the topic (16–21). Ecumenically, Waters makes it clear that by arguing that Presbyterianism is the most consistently biblical view of church government he is not saying that non-Presbyterian churches are not true churches (xxvii).

My only real difference with the book is the “two-office” view held by the author (86–90). But, as is typical in the PCA and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Waters is actually functionally three-office—what is often oddly referred to as “two-and-a-half-office.” It is a tribute to how much these two views have in common in our two denominations that T. David Gordon, a staunch three-office defender, wrote the foreword. Waters’s distinction between the teaching and ruling elder is so sharp that the four differences between the two (94) make a strong argument for the three-office view. It is telling that almost all of the writers Waters quotes are three-office.

One other disagreement I have with the book is not in principle but in an application of a principle about which we both agree. In arguing that the church’s judicial authority

does not extend beyond ecclesiastical matters, he qualifies the point by quoting WCF 31.4 to show that the church may address the civil authority with “humble petition in cases extraordinary” and when the civil authority seeks the church’s advice on a matter. Waters then cites the PCA General Assembly’s “Declaration of Conscience on Homosexuals and the Military” (1993) as a “positive and constructive example” (68) of the former. The OPC passed similar motions on the same subject in 1993 and 2010. The traditional Presbyterian understanding of what constitutes “cases extraordinary” is a direct threat to the church’s liberty or when the safety of any of its members and officers is at stake. Egyptians Presbyterians, for example, might legitimately petition their government on this issue. But when it comes to ethical problems with government policy, where does the number of such petitions end? Good men in our denominations disagree on this issue, and so this footnote does not detract from Waters’s book.

In the section on ordination it would have been helpful to add the idea that ordination confers authority for the office to which a man is being ordained (106–8).

I would like to have seen more references to Old Covenant church government such as are found in Westminster Assembly era works like George Gillespie’s *Aaron’s Rod Blossoming or the Divine Order of Church Government Vindicated* (1646), or most recently Leonard Coppes’s *Who Will Lead Us: A Study of the Development of Biblical Offices with Emphasis on the Diaconate*.¹

Apart from these differences, Waters gives us a robust and nuanced presentation of the biblical doctrine of church government. Its clarity and depth are a rare combination, especially on this topic.

The “Select and Annotated Bibliography” is an excellent resource for further study. Biblical, and name and subject indexes are very well done. This is a perfect book for an adult Sunday school class. It took me about twelve weeks to cover the material with a few excursions on the three-office view and women in office. I highly recommend this superb little book.

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¹ Leonard Coppes, *Who Will Lead Us: A Study of the Development of Biblical Offices with Emphasis on the Diaconate* (Chattanooga: Pilgrim, 1977).

Servant Poetry

Francis Thompson (1859-1907)

The Singer Saith of His Song

THE touches of man's modern speech
Perplex her unacquainted tongue;
There seems through all her songs a sound
Of falling tears. She is not young.
Within her eyes' profound arcane
Resides the glory of her dreams;
Behind her secret cloud of hair
She sees the Is beyond the Seems.
Her heart sole-towered in her steep spirit,
Somewhat sweet is she, somewhat wan;
And she sings the songs of Sion
By the streams of Babylon.