

Book Review

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

In the preface to this book in 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) (p. xv). Timothy George has called Fuller “the most influential Baptist theologian between John Bunyan and the present day” (as cited on p. 65). Paul Brewster, a Southern Baptist pastor in Madison, Indiana and a church historian who holds a doctoral degree from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, has, through this book, made a significant contribution to this revival of interest in Fuller. In a day of doctrinal decline and indifference, Brewster presents Fuller as “a model pastor-theologian” (p. 6).

Brewster begins his study by offering a helpful biographical sketch of Fuller, beginning with his early years, leading to his conversion and call to ministry, and on to his productive years in pastoral ministry at Kettering, including his pioneer and longtime service as Secretary to the Baptist Missionary Society (pp. 8-35). In this sketch 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 (pp. 37-64). Here Brewster notes Fuller’s 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 hub of Fuller’s theology as the doctrine of soteriology (see pp. 65-108). He places most emphasis on Fuller’s departure from the high Calvinism of his day in his commitment “to extend the offer of salvation to all who would hear, regardless of their spiritual state” (p. 77). Of note is Brewster’s discussion of a shift in Fuller’s views on the atonement, under the influence of the “New Divinity” governmental view of the atonement, between the first and second editions of his noted work *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (pp. 87-89). This shift, in turn, had an influence of Fuller’s views on imputation and substitution (see pp. 89-85).

In assessing Fuller’s influence, Brewster both notes the conclusion that “Fullerism became the new orthodoxy” among Particular Baptists (p. 99), while also acknowledging that some, like David Benedict, believed that “Fullerism had led Baptists too far toward Arminianism” (p. 103). Brewster notes that “it is appropriate to recognize that by relaxing the Calvinistic standards of the Particular Baptists, Fuller may have helped open the door to methodological changes that have sometimes had a less than beneficial impact on Baptist churches” (p. 106). In other words, did *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* lead to the “four spiritual laws” and easy-believism? Brewster adds: “The degree to which the rise and spread of Fullerism is responsible for the

acceptance of Arminianism in Baptist life is a hotly disputed question” (p. 107). For those in the Strict and Particular Baptist camp Fuller was “the chief instigator of this event, and hence a great enemy of the gospel” (p. 107). Brewster, however, concludes, “it is probably best not to blame Fuller too heavily for what came into the denomination for quite some time after he lived and wrote” (p. 108).

The transition is next made from Fuller’s doctrine to his practice of ministry (pp. 109-157). Brewster begins by noting, “The doctrinal conclusions Fuller reached became the mainspring that powered the many facets of his active ministry” (p. 109). Again, according to Brewster, soteriology, as the hub of Fuller’s doctrine, exerted the greatest influence on his practical ministry. It led Fuller to place a priority on preaching and upon evangelistic preaching, in particular. Though his contemporaries agreed he was not the most eloquent and well-spoken of preachers he was deeply influential among his fellow ministers. Evidence of this is seen in the fact that Fuller was so often called upon to preach in ordination and pastoral installation services. In pastoral care Fuller pressed those under his shepherding to come to faith in Christ. His evangelistic concern also fueled Fuller’s tireless labors in founding the Baptist Missionary Society and “holding the rope” for William Carey and others who were willing to go down into the mission mine. Finally, Brewster sketches Fuller’s ministry as a polemicist and apologist, defending the faith against everything from Deism, to Socinianism, Universalism, Sandemanianism, and Antinomianism.

The book ends with a summarizing conclusion (pp. 159-179). It also includes two appendices (pp. 181-192). The first is a Confession of Faith composed by Fuller upon his candidacy to become the pastor at Kettering. The second is Fuller’s entry on “Calvinism” in a theological dictionary. Both appendices make plain Fuller’s general commitment to the doctrines of grace. In his conclusion, Brewster suggests weaknesses in Fuller’s practical ministry (e.g., lack of balance in neglecting local church ministry in favor of work for the missionary society and reluctance to delegate responsibilities to others) and in his theology (e.g., his adaptation of the governmental view of atonement). He also suggests several of Fuller’s strengths. Most notable among these was Fuller’s ability to serve as both an able pastor and theologian. Brewster acknowledges his own sympathies with Fuller’s evangelical Calvinism. He even suggests that with the rise of Calvinism in Baptist life, “No Baptist theologian can be read to greater profit on the dangers of hyper-Calvinism than Fuller” (p. 175). One wonders, however, if there is really a significant threat of hyper-Calvinism looming in the “Young, Restless, Reformed” movement. A more obvious danger appears to be recidivism to Arminianism.

In his conclusion, Brewster anticipates and acknowledges a criticism that might be lodged against his study of Fuller. Namely, does his focus on soteriology, as the hub of Fuller’s theology, neglect other salient angles on Fuller’s thinking? As I read the book, for example, I kept thinking of how Fuller’s post-millennialism radically affected his doctrine and ministry, including his wholesale commitment to the missionary movement. Brewster acknowledges that further work is needed on Fuller’s doctrine of God, revelation, the ordinances, eschatology, and

his impact on American Baptists (pp. 159-161). One might add to this that an assessment is needed of Fuller not merely by the standards of five point Calvinism but also according to full orbed Reformed theology (confessionalism, Regulative Principle, fourth commandment, etc.). These quibbles aside, Brewster's work is to be heartily commended for providing an admirable and stimulating introduction to the life, theology, and ministry of Andrew Fuller that will profit both pastors and theologians.

Jeffrey T. Riddle, Pastor, Christ Reformed Baptist Church, Charlottesville, Virginia