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ANDREW  
FULLER







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Tom Nettles

# Introduction

## Two Hundred Years Ago, The World Lost a Good Friend

On one occasion when a friend gave Andrew Fuller a tour of Oxford and pointed out to him some of the exquisite architecture and ingenious craftsmanship of the buildings, Fuller responded, “Brother, I think there is one question, which after all that has been written on it, has not yet been well answered.” When his friend inquired what that subject was, Fuller responded, “What is justification?” They retired to a fireside where they could discuss the subject.<sup>1</sup>

And so it was with Fuller. His mind could never rest from focusing on the important issues of God and His grace, man and his duty, his sin, and his dependence, and the intrinsic and infinite excellence revealed in the gospel which was worthy of all acceptance. Fuller was born February 6, 1754, and died on May 7, 1815. Just three months into his 62nd year, Fuller had filled his days with activity for the advancement of the gospel to the lost and for the defense of Christian truth. His friend John Ryland Jr described Fuller’s activist spirituality. “Had Mr. Fuller’s life been protracted to ever so great a length, he could never have put in execution all the plans he would have laid for attaining his ultimate end since as fast as some of his labours had been accomplished, his active mind would have been devising fresh measures for advancing the divine glory, and extending the kingdom of Christ. As it was, he certainly did more for God than most good men could have effected in a life longer by twenty years.”<sup>2</sup>

Fuller's usefulness both as a theologian and active administrator at the genesis of the modern missions movement is well-documented. His incessant activity for this cause not only transformed the future of evangelicalism, but transformed him from a man who was on the edge of crippling himself through introspection to a man that was consistently joyful in gospel confidence. He wrote in his diary in July 1794: "Within the last year or two, we have formed a Missionary Society; ... My heart has been greatly interested in this work. Surely I have never felt more genuine love to God and to his cause in my life. I bless God that this work has been a means of reviving my soul. If nothing else comes of it, I and many more have obtained a spiritual advantage."<sup>3</sup>

Fuller gained his spiritual maturity in the furnace of affliction and soul turmoil. Out of the seventeen children he fathered, eleven of them died in infancy through young adulthood during his lifetime. His first wife died after a prolonged bout with what we would probably diagnose as Alzheimer's syndrome. His first theological lessons came as battles for his own soul, a struggle in which he learned the very practical implications of every branch of doctrinal truth forced on the mind by careful and exhaustive biblical exposition. In his mature years therefore, he did not shirk his duty to seek resolution in the truth for a wide variety of theological issues that arose in the day.

His value for the propagation of gospel truth extended, consequently, far beyond his revolutionary thought and work for the sake of world missions. In the midst of crushing efforts to collect funds for the missionary society, he could not shake off his conviction that he was put here for the defense and confirmation of the gospel. Fuller's writings and preaching constitute a large body of work and are worthy of the critical edition of his Works presently in production. His sound discussions on law and gospel, the nature of saving faith, the person and work of Christ, the character of divine revelation, the nature of justification, the Spirit's work in regeneration, the eternal generation of the Son, the christocentric principle in Scripture, the intrinsic and extrinsic credibility of the Christian faith, his insightful engagement with Socinianism and Deism, and other subjects will benefit all Christians for decades yet to come. Though he wrote for immediately relevant occasions, the character of his discussion was so grounded in biblical exposition and theological reflection that his doctrinal treatises, polemical engagements, and apologetic discussions have a timeless quality to them that will serve the cause of truth in any generation.

This edition of the *Founders Journal* is dedicated, on the 200th anniversary of the death of Fuller, to seek to demonstrate the edifying usefulness of a grasp of Fuller's thought.

There are several short articles analyzing a distinct literary contribution of Fuller. Michael Haykin, from the resources of an unmatched knowledge of the Fuller corpus, gives recommendations for reading in Fuller. Steve Weaver, Ph D graduate in church history and pastor in Frankfurt, Kentucky, gives a brief synopsis of an important Fuller sermon. Dustin Bruce, Jesse Owens, Erik Smith and Andrew Ballitch each provide a brief analysis of an important Fuller work. These four not only are students nearing the end of their Ph D labors, but serve in various capacities of Christian ministry and necessary labor to support their families. I am deeply grateful for their contributions that include insights into pastoral application and Christian discipleship. Jesse is a Free Will Baptist who manifests a spirit of honest, open, unintimidated and non-caricatured interaction frequently with positions from which he kindly dissents. He has provided a model of respectful description of Fuller's engagement with Dan Taylor, the progenitor of the New Connection of General Baptists in England. A long article on Fuller's doctrine of God by Paul Brewster, whose intellectual biography of Fuller which Michael recommends in his article, demonstrates how Fuller could use a basic Christian doctrine in a variety of edifying ways. It also serves as an expanded look at the work *The Gospel Its Own Witness* analyzed by Andrew Ballitch.

I pray that this issue will encourage its readers to find joy in their opportunities for hard labor in the work of the kingdom and increase in confidence that, indeed, the gospel is worthy of all acceptance and is its own witness.

—Tom Nettles, Louisville, Kentucky

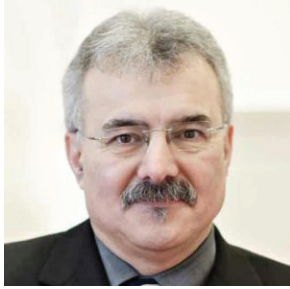
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## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Anecdote related in John Ryland Jr. *The Work of Faith, the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope illustrated in the Life and Death of the Reverend Andrew Fuller* (London: Button & Son, 1816), 574f.

<sup>2</sup> Ryland, Jr., 581.

<sup>3</sup> Ryland, Jr., 247.



Michael Haykin

## Reading Andrew Fuller

The first text that I ever read by Andrew Fuller, in the mid-1980s, was his *The Promise of the Spirit the Grand Encouragement in Promoting the Gospel* (1810), a circular letter that he wrote for the Northamptonshire Baptist Association. Every year at its annual meeting the association, like other Baptist associations, would ask one of its pastors to pen a small tract that would then be printed and sent out to all of the church members in the association. This particular one is a fabulous little piece that introduces a number of themes dear to Fuller's heart: the world-wide spread of the Gospel, the necessity of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and a concern on how to live with hope in the last days. It is one of a number of circular letters that Fuller wrote during his life for the association. They are an excellent introduction to Fuller's writing and thought. Other circular letters that should be read include his *Causes of Declension in Religion*, and *Means of Revival* (1785)—a helpful overview of the subject of revival—and *The Practical Uses of Christian Baptism* (1802)—a superb treatment of the meaning of baptism.

Then, a must-read is Fuller's *Memoirs of the late Rev. Samuel Pearce* (1800), where we see the heart of Fuller's piety in what he admires most about his close friend Samuel Pearce—what Fuller calls Pearce's "holy love" for God and humanity. What is critical about this work is that it delineates the spiritual ambience of Fuller and his circle of friends. Fuller's *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785, 1801) is also a must read. This is Fuller's superb demolition of hyper-Calvinism and his presentation of the biblical grounding for passionate preaching to the lost. It is essential reading as it lies at the foundation of the modern missionary movement. William Carey's iconic mission to India has for its theological rationale this work by Fuller.

A second key work of apologetics is Fuller's *Strictures on Sandemanianism* (1810), in which Fuller responds to an intellectualist view of faith that had particularly harmful spiritual effects. There were a number of major theological responses to the errors of Sandemanianism, but Martyn Lloyd-Jones believed that this work of Fuller was the key rebuttal of this system. Fuller's dependence on his mentor Jonathan Edwards is very evident in this work. Although Fuller became renowned in his day for his apologetics, he never lost his pastoral focus. This focus is clearly seen in his sermons—see especially his *The Nature and Importance of Walking by Faith* (1784), *The Qualifications and Encouragement of a Faithful Minister Illustrated* (1787), and *The Nature and Importance of an Intimate Knowledge of Divine Truth* (1796). His dozen or more ordination sermons are also a superb delineation of how an eighteenth-century Calvinistic Baptist viewed the ministry.

All of these texts can be conveniently found in either a three-volume edition of his works—*The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. Joseph Belcher (1845 ed.; repr. Harrisonburg, VA: Spinkle Publications, 1988)—or the one-volume *The Works of Andrew Fuller* (1841 ed.; repr. Edinburgh/Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2007). The author's *The Armies of the Lamb: The Spirituality of Andrew Fuller* (Dundas, ON: Joshua Press, Inc., 2001) introduces Fuller's piety through a series of edited texts from his writings and letters.

With regard to secondary sources, the best of recent Fuller biographies are those of Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth Century Particular Baptist Life* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2003) and Paul Brewster, *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010). Finally, John Piper has an excellent lecture on Fuller at the Desiring God website: "[Holy Faith, Worthy Gospel, World Vision: Andrew Fuller's Broadsides Against Sandemanianism, Hyper-Calvinism, and Global Unbelief](#)" (2007).

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Andrew Ballitch

# **An Analysis of Andrew Fuller's *The Gospel Its Own Witness***

Thomas Paine, one of the United States' Founding Fathers, published *The Age of Reason* in the 1790s. He advocated deism and argued against institutionalized religion and Christianity in particular. Andrew Fuller's *The Gospel Its Own Witness* came out in response in 1799. As the title suggests, Fuller argued that the morality and harmony of Christianity demonstrates its superiority to deism.

Fuller's defense proceeds in two parts. The first deals with "the holy nature of the Christian religion contrasted with the immorality of deism." The systems part ways at their very foundations. Deists deny the moral perfections of God, acknowledging only his natural perfections. They refuse Him worship and lack motivation toward virtue, which manifests itself in their lives, lives ultimately of despair. Christians, on the other hand, worship and serve a God of natural and moral perfections. They ground morality in the love of God, rather than self-love. This love of Christ and the promise of a future life motivate toward virtue. Sincere Christians demonstrate this reality in their moral lives and their leavening of society. For Fuller, hope comes exclusively from the gospel.

Part two of Fuller's apologetic considers the harmony of Christian religion as evidence that it is truly of God. Fuller demonstrates this coherence by drawing attention to fulfilled prophecy, focusing on events recorded outside the canon of Scripture. He shows that the Bible resonates with the conscience of man, serving as a mirror for personal sin and corruption in the world. He illustrates the consistency of Christian doctrine with salvation through a mediator, which appeals to humanity's sense of justice. Fuller even defends

biblical Christianity in light of the immensity of the universe and the possibility of multiple worlds. In the end, Christianity is coherent and inspires love of God and others; therefore it is superior to deism.

Does this two hundred year old defense of Christianity have any value for ministers today? Absolutely! We can learn from both Fuller's content and approach. He describes "modern unbelievers" as "deists in theory, pagans in inclination, and atheists in practice." This depiction aptly fits unbelievers today, even those in the pew. They profess God, but believe in a god inferior to the God of the Bible, refuse Him true worship, and live as if He doesn't exist. They need the gospel, in all its moral purity and glorious harmony. They need to see its superior path to virtue and the good life. They need to see it as the coherent truth that makes sense of the world. Fuller provides a foundation, a starting place, for such engagement.

We should also learn from Fuller's approach to apologetics. Before he publically responded to Paine, Fuller labored to understand his opponent, to move beyond a simplistic caricature. He didn't merely dismiss or quote Scripture and move on. Fuller considered Paine's arguments, took them to their logical conclusions, and relentlessly punctured the weak spots. His case was powerful because Fuller met his deist antagonist on his own turf, a common practice in his apologetics. He compared the systems at precisely the points Paine thought he had won, asking which was more moral, which more consistent.

Further, Fuller's tone is instructive. He engages Paine in a respectful manner, not resorting to personal attack. Fuller doesn't misrepresent his opponent or focus on minutia. But he does firmly and explicitly disagree. He is not afraid to point out error and identify sin, though he does so in a tasteful fashion. May this be characteristic of the ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ today! Ultimately, Fuller desires the repentance of his deist readers, that they might come to a saving knowledge of the truth. He plainly says this near the end, where he also reminds them that his disdain is not for them, but rather their principles. Whether one publically debates, blogs, or preaches, Fuller models God-honoring and effective polemics in defending the gospel as its own witness.

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Steve Weaver

# An Unsung But Influential Sermon

On April 27, 1791, Andrew Fuller preached a message at a Minister's Meeting at Clipstone. The title of the message was "Instances, Evil, and Tendency of Delay, in the Concerns of Religion." The text was Haggai 1:2, "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." In the sermon, Fuller pleaded with his fellow ministers not to delay in regard to the work of missions and to use means for the spread of the gospel among the nations. It was a bold sermon. Not only was William Carey in attendance, but so too were many of those, as Fuller's son Andrew Gunton Fuller recounts, "who had refused—some of them not in the kindest manner—to listen to his proposal."<sup>1</sup> Fuller preached in part,

"Instead of waiting for the removal of difficulties, we ought, in many cases, to consider them as purposely laid in our way, in order to try the sincerity of our religion. He who had all power in heaven and earth could not only have sent forth His apostles into all the world, but have so ordered it that all the world should treat them with kindness, and aid them in their mission; but, instead of that, He told them to lay their accounts with persecution and the loss of all things. This was no doubt to try their sincerity; and the difficulties laid in our way are equally designed to try ours."

"Let it be considered whether it is not owing to this principle that so few and so feeble efforts have been made for the propagation of the gospel in the world. When the Lord Jesus commissioned his apostles, He commanded them to go and teach 'all nations,' to preach the gospel to 'every creature;' and that notwithstanding the difficulties and oppositions that

would lie in the way. The apostles executed their commission with assiduity and fidelity; but, since their days, we seem to sit down half contented that the greater part of the world should still remain in ignorance and idolatry. Some noble efforts have indeed been made; but they are small in number, when compared with the magnitude of the object. And why is it so? Are the souls of men of less value than heretofore? No. Is Christianity less true or less important than in former ages? This will not be pretended. Are there no opportunities for societies, or individuals, in Christian nations, to convey the gospel to the heathen? This cannot be pleaded so long as opportunities are found to trade with them, yea, and (what is a disgrace to the name of Christians) to buy them, and sell them, and treat them with worse than savage barbarity? We have opportunities in abundance the improvement of navigation, and the maritime and commercial turn of this country, furnish us with these; and it deserves to be considered whether this is not a circumstance that renders it a duty peculiarly binding on us.”

“The truth is, if I am not mistaken, we wait for we know not what; we seem to think “the time is not come, the time for the Spirit to be poured down from on high.” We pray for the conversion and salvation of the world, and yet neglect the ordinary means by which those ends have been used to be accomplished. It pleased God, heretofore, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believed; and there is reason to think it will still please God to work by that distinguished means. Ought we not then at least to try by some means to convey more of the good news of salvation to the world around us than has hitherto been conveyed? The encouragement to the heathen is still in force, ‘*Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*: but how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?’”<sup>2</sup>

Fuller’s son records that the “impression produced by the sermon was most deep; it is said that the ministers were scarcely able to speak to each other at its close, and they so far committed themselves as to request Mr. Carey to publish his “thoughts.”<sup>3</sup> The next spring, Carey preached his famous sermon at Nottingham based on Isaiah 54:2-3 calling on ministers to “expect great things from God” and “attempt great things for God.” Also in 1792, he published his “thoughts” as *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. On October 2, 1792, in the home of Mrs. Beeby Wallis, The Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Heathen was launched. Thus, Fuller’s sermon, while little known today, played a pivotal role in paving the way for the Modern Missionary Movement.



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## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Gunton Fuller, *Andrew Fuller: Men Worth Remembering* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1882), 103.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Gunton Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller: Memoirs, Sermons, Etc.*, ed. Joseph Belcher, vol. 1 (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 147–148.

<sup>3</sup> Fuller, *Andrew Fuller*, 104. One of the remarkable features of the sermon is its consonance with the argument of Carey's Enquiry at several points. For example, in his opening remarks commending Christ's commission as perpetually binding on Christians in all ages, Carey remarked, "They accordingly went forth in obedience to the command, and the power of God evidently wrought with them ... but the work has not been taken up, or prosecuted of late years, except by a few individuals) with that zeal and perseverance with which the primitive Christians went about it." (8) "As to their distance from us, whatever objections might have been made on that account before the invention of the mariner's compass, nothing can be alleged for it, with any colour of plausibility in the present age. ... The ships of Tarshish were trading vessels, which made voyages for traffic to various parts; thus much therefore must be meant by it, that *navigation*, especially that which is *commercial*, shall be one great mean of carrying on the work of God." (67, 68) Section five Carey set forth very practical suggestions to answer Fuller's call "to try by some means to convey more of the good news of salvation to the world around us than has hitherto been conveyed." His lead summary of the section stated, "An Enquiry into the Duty of Christians in general, and what Means ought to be used, in order to promote this Work" (77). Truly Fuller was of a single soul with William Carey.

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Erik Smith

## An Analysis of Andrew Fuller's *Letters to Mr. Vidler*

In his *Letters to Mr. Vidler on the Doctrine of Universal Salvation*, Andrew Fuller confronts a Baptist minister whom he rightly suspected had adopted a scheme of final universal redemption. Fuller's letters demonstrate that he views the task of the pastor to be of utmost importance with no room for error, "Error in a minister may affect that eternal welfare of many," (293). Fuller's eight letters formed half of a debate and were published serially, each in response to a rebuttal from Vidler.

Fuller operates on two levels simultaneously in his responses. First, he expounds the pertinent texts of Scripture related to the particular doctrines in the debate, namely the nature and duration of the punishment of the wicked, the grounds of the salvation of the righteous and the benevolence of God. Fuller carefully reasons with his opponent regarding the meaning of various words in the text and the meaning of these passages in their larger context and framework and even the entire message of Scripture. Fuller demonstrates how any word, such as 'eternal' or 'everlasting,' may be twisted to mean anything at all by minds so inclined. Furthermore, following Vidler's own method for determining a word's meaning would render meaningless the assertion that God Himself is eternal or infinite.

Fuller demonstrates that God is just in the punishment of the wicked, and that this punishment vindicates God's holiness. Fuller proceeds to set forth the many passages which clearly state that those who perish in their sins ought to have no expectation of anything save perdition. He shows that the duration of this punishment is described in the same language as that which is attributed to the duration of bliss anticipated by the saints.

Second, Fuller addresses the root problem, namely that Vidler has adopted a pernicious system which pleads for a salvation that does not arise from the free grace of God through Jesus Christ. For God to pardon any sinner or mitigate his punishment apart from the saving work of Christ is to undermine any notion of grace. Furthermore, to argue that sinners will only suffer for a limited duration and then be restored to God would attribute their restoration to the work of justice, not grace, since they would properly pay for their crimes. Argues Fuller, “Thus, instead of supporting the doctrine of universal salvation, you undermine all salvation at the very foundation,” (319). This entire framework taints Vidler’s reading of the Scriptures and undermines their plain meaning.

Fuller then exposes Vidler’s motive: the reason Vidler argues for his exegetical conclusions is because he has a primary desire not for truth but for fashioning for himself a god that is more palatable and pleasing. Fuller engages Vidler on his own terms and illustrates the inconsistencies within Vidler’s own system. The true and living God, argues Fuller, is the God of Scripture who reveals Himself as holy, wise, just, and merciful. His mercy extends to all those in Christ and to none other. To argue that this somehow makes God anything less than just is to reveal a bias for one’s own notions of justice apart from what Scripture reveals.

Ultimately Fuller serves as a model pastor-theologian in how he confronts the heresy of Vidler. The pastor must be one who is unyielding in his allegiance to the text of Scripture. The words, sentences, and paragraphs of Scripture are worthy of careful scrutiny and deserve the utmost familiarity. The faithful pastor will be conversant with Scripture such that he has the weapons to oppose heresy where it appears. At the same time, the wise pastor will labor to uncover the flaws in the heretical systems that preclude others from seeing the truth. The heresy of universal salvation is prevalent in our own day, though it is largely divorced from any appeal to Scripture. Fuller’s *Letters to Mr. Vidler* also offer a paradigm for how we may confront other heresies, such as those involving the sexual revolution and homosexuality. Like Fuller, we must begin with the text of Scripture and offer a cogent defense of its meaning, and we must go on the offensive, exposing errors with probing questions and careful reasoning. As pastors we must be thinkers, willing to wrestle with the common errors of the day that we might disarm these heresies from conquering our own people.

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Dustin Bruce

## **An Analysis of Andrew Fuller's *Strictures on Sandemanianism***

Outside of England, Scotland was Andrew Fuller's most popular destination for raising support for the Baptist Missionary Society, visiting five times, in 1799, 1802, 1805 and 1813, with much success in raising funds and drumming up support.<sup>1</sup> Fuller mingled with supporters of various denominations, but found the Scotch Baptists to be unusually supportive. Differences would arise, however, as the Scotch Baptists' adherence to Sandemanianism proved incompatible with the Edwardsean notions of saving faith held by their BMS counterparts.<sup>2</sup> Fuller records that John Sutcliff, his traveling companion during his first visit, asked a Scotch Baptist elder whether or not their theology "allowed a proper and scriptural place for the affections?"<sup>3</sup> The clear contention on the part of Fuller and Ryland was that it did not.<sup>4</sup> The very question reveals the importance of Jonathan Edwards in the theology of Fuller and Sutcliff. An importance that would become clear in Fuller's publication of *Strictures on Sandemanianism*.

While Sandemanianism had affected much of the Scotch Baptist denomination, Archibald McLean (1733–1812) would be Fuller's chief opponent. McLean, who after becoming convinced of Sandemanianism in 1762, was appointed to eldership in the Scotch Baptist denomination in 1768.<sup>5</sup> McLean rose as an effective leader among Scotch Baptist churches, championing his Sandemanian view of faith among other things. First meeting in 1799, Fuller and McLean interacted several more times, with McLean even visiting



Kettering. They also maintained correspondence through letters on a number of issues, many of them doctrinal in nature.<sup>6</sup>

In 1785, McLean issued *The Commission Given by Jesus Christ to His Apostles Illustrated*. This publication attacked Fuller's position on saving faith, though not mentioning him by name, as failing to uphold justification by faith alone.<sup>7</sup> By including "good dispositions, holy affections and pious exercises of the heart" in the nature of saving faith, McLean contended that some [Fuller] made justification "by the works of the law."<sup>8</sup> Fuller, never one to back down from a challenge, responded in an appendix to the second edition of *The Gospel Worthy* (1801). For Fuller, the differences between the two men clearly boiled down to one thing, "what the belief of the gospel includes."<sup>9</sup>

McLean desired to limit faith to a passive receiving in the mind of the truth of the gospel, lest someone substitute affections toward God for faith in Jesus.<sup>10</sup> While Fuller appreciated his concern, he considered McLean's understanding illogical and short of the concept of faith as found in the Bible. According to Fuller, "it is impossible to maintain that faith is a duty, if it contain no holy exercise of the heart. This, I presume, has already been made to appear. God requires nothing of intelligent creatures but what is holy."<sup>11</sup> With this foray, Fuller had entered a debate with McLean that would prove one of his most successful. As Martin-Lloyd Jones has noted, Fuller "more or less demolished Sandemanianism."<sup>12</sup>

Ten years later, the controversy remained unsettled and McLean's influence extended. In light of this, Fuller published a larger response to McLean's views in *Strictures on Sandemanianism* (1810). Fuller attacked Sandemanian doctrine at several points. However, one particular conclusive rebuttal of McLean's work came as Fuller argued that "knowledge of Christ is a distinct type of knowledge."<sup>13</sup> Haykin summarizes Fuller's argument, "Knowing Christ, for instance, involves far more than knowing certain things about him, such as the fact of his virgin birth or the details of his crucifixion." He continues, "It involves a desire for fellowship with him, a delight in his presence, a recognition that among all the beings of this universe he is truly the most beautiful."<sup>14</sup>

Fuller articulated his point in a distinctly Edwardsean manner. Edwards' concept of faith in *Religious Affections* provided just the support he needed. As Smith noted, "Edwards laid great stress on the difference between, as he called it, a person's having 'a merely notional understanding' of a thing and that person's 'being in some way inclined' toward it."<sup>15</sup> In many ways, this line of argumentation was perfectly suited for confronting the errors of the Sandemanians.

Fuller criticized McLean for confusing a merely notional and rationalist understanding of faith with a spiritual understanding, “A great deal of confusion on this subject has arisen from confounding simple knowledge, pertaining merely to the intellectual faculty, with that which is compound or comprehensive of approbation... Simple knowledge, or knowledge as distinguished from approbation, is merely a natural accomplishment, necessary to the performance of both good and evil, but in itself neither the one nor the other.”<sup>16</sup>

At this point in his argumentation, Fuller inserted a lengthy quote from Edwards. He explains, “I will close this letter by an extract from President Edwards’s *Treatise on the Affections*, not merely as showing his judgment, but as containing what I consider a clear, Scriptural, and satisfactory statement of the nature of spiritual knowledge.”<sup>17</sup> Fuller then proceeded to offer a six-page excerpt from *Religious Affections*.<sup>18</sup>

Fuller, as a thoroughgoing Edwardsean, made use of Edwards’s writings, imbibing them into his own thought and expressing the sentiments of the New England theologian both explicitly and implicitly.<sup>19</sup> In his debate with the Sandemanians, the senior theologian had left his disciple with a solid theological framework that enabled Fuller to argue persuasively and effectively against McLean. Fuller testified to the importance of Edwards’s thought in his final section,

“There are, no doubt, many enthusiastic feelings which have no true religion in them. There is such a thing too as to make a saviour of them as well as of our duties. But we must not on this account exclude the one any more than the other. President Edwards, in his *Treatise on Religious Affections*, has proved beyond all reasonable contradiction that the essence of true religion lies in them.”<sup>20</sup>

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## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Revival of the Eighteenth Century Particular Baptist Life*, vol. 8, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2003), 148.

<sup>2</sup> John Howard Smith, *The Perfect Rule of the Christian Religion: A History of Sandemanianism in the Eighteenth Century* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 17. Smith provides a helpful history of Sandemanianism in his work, one of the few writings on the subject.

<sup>3</sup> John Ryland Jr., *The Work of Faith, the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope Illustrated in the Life and Death of the Reverend Andrew Fuller*, 1st ed. (London: Button and Son, 1816), 183.

<sup>4</sup> Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Revival of the Eighteenth Century Particular Baptist Life*, 8:150.

<sup>5</sup> Chris Chun, *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards in the Theology of Andrew Fuller*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 162 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 112.

<sup>6</sup> Michael A. G. Haykin, “Andrew Fuller and the Sandemanian Controversy,” in “*At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word*” *Andrew Fuller as an Apologist*, vol. 6, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2004), 228.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>8</sup> Archibald McLean, *The Commission Given by Jesus Christ to His Apostles, in The Miscellaneous Works of Archibald McLean*, ed. Peter MacDonald, vol. I (Elgin, 1847), 66.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Gunton Fuller, “The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation,” in *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller*, ed. Joseph Belcher, vol. 2 (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 393.

<sup>10</sup> Haykin, “Andrew Fuller and the Sandemanian Controversy,” 229.

<sup>11</sup> Fuller, “The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation,” 395.

<sup>12</sup> David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 173.

<sup>13</sup> Haykin, “Andrew Fuller and the Sandemanian Controversy,” 232.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, “Religious Affections and the ‘Sense of the Heart,’” 104.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Gunton Fuller, “Strictures on Sandemanianism,” in *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller*, ed. Joseph Belcher, vol. 2 (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 598.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 602.

<sup>18</sup> Haykin points out that is six pages in the Yale critical edition of Edwards and five pages in the Sprinkle’s edition of Fuller. Haykin, “Andrew Fuller and the Sandemanian Controversy,” 232.

<sup>19</sup> Chun, *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards in the Theology of Andrew Fuller*, 132.

<sup>20</sup> Fuller, “Strictures on Sandemanianism,” 641.

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# An Analysis of Andrew Fuller's *Reply to Philanthropos*

Andrew Fuller's *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (GWAA) received many replies from fellow Calvinists, but the most surprising reply must have come from the New Connexion General Baptist, Dan Taylor. Taylor identified himself as "Philanthropos" (lover of man). While he commended Fuller's work, he held that a commercial view of the atonement was inconsistent with unlimited gospel invitations to sinners (a commercial view holds that Christ paid an exact penalty for an exact number of sins). This was a potential blow to the root of Fuller's argument in GWAA.

In his *Reply to Philanthropos*, Fuller set out to address four main points of dispute: "[1] Whether regeneration is prior to coming to Christ, as a cause prior to its effect; [2] whether moral inability is or is not excusable; [3] whether faith in Christ is required by the moral law; and [4] whether an obligation upon all those to whom the gospel is preached to believe in Christ, and the encouragements held out to them to do so, is inconsistent with a limitation of design in his death." On the first point Fuller affirmed the Calvinist position that regeneration both precedes faith and is its cause. On the second point, Fuller demonstrated the way in which he had been influenced by Jonathan Edwards's distinction between moral and natural ability. Unlike Taylor, Fuller believed that mankind's sin was inexcusable despite his lack of moral ability. On the third point, Fuller contended that the moral law *obligates* sinners to believe, while the Gospel *encourages* sinners to believe. According to Fuller, Taylor had overlooked this distinction.



The majority of Fuller's Reply centers on the fourth point, GWAA's most pertinent argument. In the First Edition of GWAA, Fuller maintained that both the commercial view and the "sufficient for all, efficient for the elect" view of the atonement were consistent with unlimited gospel invitations. However, in his Reply Fuller emphasized the atonement's sufficiency "regarding the degree of Christ's sufferings," and placed the particularity in the "sovereign purpose and design of the Father and the Son." As far as Fuller could tell, this was the historic view of "Calvinists in general," and was consistent with unlimited Gospel invitations. This change is reflected in the Second Edition of GWAA.

The interaction between Andrew Fuller and Dan Taylor provides a helpful model for Christian theological debate. Fuller and Taylor were quite far apart on many theological points. They were honest about their disagreements. But their interaction was cordial, and they were both willing to consider the other's arguments. On nearly every point, Fuller wielded his best arguments and pertinent biblical texts to demonstrate why he thought Dan Taylor's critiques were unfounded. For example, Taylor contended that man's sin was excusable if he did not have the moral ability to choose otherwise. Fuller considered this an egregious error. If man's sin was excusable due to moral inability, reasoned Fuller, then the best thing Christians could do was not evangelize "the heathen," but leave them without the Gospel, and therefore with excuse. Taylor's theology did appear, on the surface, to be in man's best interest. Yet as Fuller noted, it was in no way superior to his since it merely made salvation possible for the world, but could not ensure that one more person (or any person) would actually be saved.

Despite his vigorous rebuttal of Taylor's arguments, Fuller was aware of the temptation of "idolizing sentiments." In other words, what Fuller was after in his debate with Taylor was not merely winning an argument or defending his theological scheme, but arriving at truth. Fuller wrote near the end of his Reply: "Happy will it be for us all if truth be the sole object of our inquiries, and if our attachment to Divine truth itself be, not on account of its being what we have once engaged to defend, but what God hath revealed." Fuller desired this for both Taylor and himself. We would do well to learn from Fuller's exemplary model of firm conviction paired with a teachable spirit in pursuit of Divine truth.

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Paul Brewster

# Andrew Fuller's Doctrine of God

## Introduction

Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) lived and ministered in what historians now call the Age of Enlightenment. He would never have accepted that epithet as properly descriptive of his era. “Every generation has its peculiar work,” he wrote. “The present age is distinguished, you know, by the progress of infidelity.”<sup>1</sup> Rationalism was on the march along with Napoleon’s armies, and Fuller was determined to defend “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” from its corrupting influences (Jude 3, AV). Fuller charged that the Gospel emerging from the clash of the Church with rationalism had been stripped of “all that is interesting and affecting to the souls of men.”<sup>2</sup> What remained was, “Christianity in the frigid zone.”<sup>3</sup>

Fuller believed that at the core of this defection from the true faith stood a diminished doctrine of God. In many of his writings, the Baptist pastor-theologian sought to correct an inadequate concept of God by defending the revealed moral character of the Triune God of Scripture. Fuller’s writings pertaining to the doctrine of God have generally been overlooked in the tendency to focus on his innovative and influential contributions to Baptist soteriology and missiology. This essay will seek to explicate two areas of Fuller’s doctrine of God: the knowledge of God and the attributes of God.<sup>4</sup> In the conclusion, some effort will be made to reflect on the enduring value of this portion of Fuller’s theological legacy.

## The Knowledge of God

Though many areas of Fuller's doctrine of God were never fleshed out in his published works, his doctrine of the knowledge of God is an exception. The two pillars upon which it rested were the presupposition of the existence of God and the indispensable need for special revelation in knowing God.

Fuller believed the existence of God was a presupposition that must be allowed. He did not arrive at this position through philosophical reflection so much as through the example of Scripture.<sup>5</sup> In his posthumously published *Letters on Systematic Divinity*, he wrote: "All reasoning must proceed upon some acknowledged principles; and what can deserve to be so considered more than our own existence, and that of the great First Cause?"<sup>6</sup> Some twenty years before, he had written in a very similar vein: "In this account of creation [Genesis] nothing is said of the being of God; this great truth is taken for granted. ... All reasoning must proceed upon some principle or principles, and what can be more proper than this?"<sup>7</sup> To use modern language, belief in God was taken to be "properly basic."<sup>8</sup>

It is worth mention that Fuller is not making the argument that God exists because the Scriptures say He does. Such an approach, he recognizes, would lead to the charge of circular reasoning: "It would be improper, I conceive, to rest the being of God on Scripture testimony; seeing the whole weight of that testimony must depend upon the supposition that He is, and that the sacred Scriptures were written by holy men inspired by Him."<sup>9</sup> Instead, Fuller is simply saying that, in presupposing the existence of God, the Bible models the proper approach.

From this presupposition, Fuller drew the corollary that efforts to prove God's existence were unnecessary and ill-advised. Once again, the Scriptures led Fuller to his conclusion. After observing that the author of Genesis made no attempt to prove the existence of God, Fuller comments: "May not this apparent omission be designed to teach us that those who deny the existence of a Deity are rather to be rebuked than reasoned with?"<sup>10</sup> What Scripture did not attempt, Fuller felt no compulsion to pursue. In fact, he believed efforts to prove God's existence were liable to be counter-productive: "I question whether argumentation in favour of the existence of God has not made more sceptics than believers."<sup>11</sup> Fuller feared engaging in arguments for God's existence tended mostly to "set men a doubting upon a subject which is so manifest from every thing around them as to render the very heathens without excuse, Romans 1:20."<sup>12</sup>

In spite of his strong language against the prudence of attempting to prove the existence of God, Fuller did occasionally offer observations that tended to bolster the premise “God is.” For example, he conceded that the very existence of the Scriptures rendered the existence of God necessary. With the exalted theme and content of the Bible in mind, Fuller wrote: “Men were as morally unable to write such a book as they were naturally unable to create the heavens and the earth. In this way the sacred Scriptures prove the being of God.”<sup>13</sup> Still, brief observations such as this did not rise to the level of what Fuller considered an argument, and certainly not an argument that would be used to convince a nonbeliever. Instead, Fuller subordinated this line of reasoning to the acceptance of the premise “God is.” The chief value in such an observation was to confirm belief, not to establish it.<sup>14</sup>

How, then, is this God whose being is presupposed to be known? Fuller formulated his answer along the traditional lines of natural and special revelation. Fuller’s doctrine of the knowledge of God may be best understood by viewing it against the backdrop of late eighteenth century Deistic thought, particularly as expressed in Thomas Paine’s (1737–1809) *The Age of Reason*.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Limited Value of Natural Revelation**

At his installation as pastor of the Baptist Church in Kettering (1783), Fuller delivered a rather complete personal confession of his faith to the congregation.<sup>16</sup> Article one expressed his belief in the sparse value of general revelation:

I. When I consider the heavens and the earth, with their vast variety, it gives me reason to believe the existence of a God of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, that made and upholds them all. Had there been no written revelation of God given to us, I should have been without excuse, if I had denied a God, or refused to glorify him as God.<sup>17</sup>

According to Fuller, nature reveals only a few truths about the existence and attributes of God. Such information is hopelessly limited, succeeding merely in rendering man without an excuse for his failures to believe in and seek God.

The late eighteenth century placed great stock in human powers of apprehension and deduction. It was, as history textbook headings frequently announce, “The Age of Reason.” As such, a whole host of writers from a wide variety of perspectives advocated a much larger and more positive role for natural revelation than Fuller allowed. In particular,



the Deists among these rationalists sought a religion built solely upon that which could be discovered by the light of nature. One of the most recognizable representatives of this school was the controversialist Thomas Paine. His *The Age of Reason* was released in two parts, in 1794 and 1795. Some measure of the popularity, or at least notoriety, of Paine's book can be gained from noting that by the century's end, over thirty replies to his work had been published.<sup>18</sup> It is sometimes forgotten that Paine wrote his diatribe against Christianity as a theological exercise. His subtitle reveals the theological thrust he intended for the treatise: "Being An Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology." In the preface, Paine expressed that his goal in writing *The Age of Reason* was to explain to the world his "opinion upon Religion."<sup>19</sup> Given Paine's theological claims for his book, it is not surprising that one of the many replies entered against it came from the leading theologian of the British Particular Baptists, Andrew Fuller.

Fuller had been made aware of Paine's book in 1794 by his scholarly friend, John Ryland, Jr. (1753-1825), of Bristol.<sup>20</sup> By 1796, Fuller was already thinking deeply on what the Deist had written. Preaching the annual sermon for the Northamptonshire Association in June of that year, he admitted *The Age of Reason* was having "great influence" due to the "bias of the present generation in favour of the principles which it contains."<sup>21</sup> A few more years saw Fuller publish a full-length attempt to refute some of the leading ideas of Deism, *The Gospel Its Own Witness* (1799).<sup>22</sup>

In keeping with many other rationalist authors, Paine argued in *The Age of Reason* for the sole authority of natural revelation:

But some perhaps will say—Are we to have no word of God—no revelation? I answer, Yes: there is a word of God; there is a revelation. THE WORD OF GOD IS THE CREATION WE BEHOLD and it is in *this word*, which no human invention can counterfeit or alter, that God speaketh universally to man.<sup>23</sup>

Applying his principle to the Bible, Paine was able to find value in only two places: a few chapters of Job and part of Psalm 19. Paine lighted upon these texts alone as "true deistical compositions; for they treat of the Deity through His works. They take the book of Creation as the word of God, they refer to no other book, and all the inferences they make are drawn from that volume."<sup>24</sup>

In *The Gospel Its Own Witness*, Fuller takes note of Paine's exclusive preference for natural revelation: "But that on which our opponents insist the most, and with greatest show of argument, is *the law and light of nature*. This is their professed rule on almost

all occasions, and its praises they are continually sounding.”<sup>25</sup> Fuller clarified he had no desire to deny the value of natural revelation. The Scriptures, he acknowledged, admitted it served an important function. And here was the rub. Where Deists thought a person could live well by nature’s light, Fuller believed it only provided enough information to justify God’s condemnation of rebellious creatures.

The Deistic confidence in the usefulness of natural light failed to take into account the sinfulness of humanity. Fuller made a distinction between what might be known via natural revelation and what was actually understood from that revelation: “By *the light of nature*, however, I do not mean those ideas which heathens have actually entertained, many of which have been darkness, but those which were presented to them by the works of creation, and which they might have possessed, had they been desirous of retaining God in their knowledge.”<sup>26</sup> In short, Fuller believed Deists like Paine had misunderstood the purpose of God’s revelation in creation. It was given to render men without excuse, not to give them the resources to become righteous or to order their lives as God intended. Because of the sinfulness of the human condition, natural revelation must always remain a resource whose potential is never fully tapped.

Fuller also knew Psalm 19, and he pointed out that Paine had regard for only the first portion of it, verses 1–6.<sup>27</sup> Taking it as a whole, Fuller believed, established his point. “It was, I doubt not, from a close observation of the different efficacy of nature and Scripture, that the writer of the *nineteenth Psalm*, (a Psalm which Mr. Paine pretends to admire,) after having given a just tribute of praise to the former, affirmed of the latter, ‘*The Law of Jehovah is perfect, converting the soul.*’”<sup>28</sup> Using the powers of observation and reason that his opponents claimed for their own, Fuller argued: “There is not a single example of a people, of their own accord, returning to the acknowledgement of the true God, or extricating themselves from the most irrational species of idolatry, or desisting from the most odious kinds of vice.”<sup>29</sup> To the contrary, he asked: “How was it that, notwithstanding the light of nature shone around the old philosophers, their minds, in matters of morality, were dark as night, and their precepts, in many instances, full of impurity? Did nature inspire Plato to teach the doctrine of a community of wives; Lycurgus to tolerate dextrous thieving; Solon to allow sodomy; Seneca to encourage drunkenness and suicide; and almost all of them to declare in favour of lewdness?”<sup>30</sup>

In sum, Fuller believed both reason and Scripture taught the same truth. Natural revelation was not sufficient to save, only to render man without excuse before the righteous judgment of God. For this reason, Fuller elevated special revelation in the Scriptures to a place of supreme importance.

The second and third articles of the confession of faith Fuller delivered to the church at Kettering spoke of his belief in the necessity and superiority of special revelation:

II. Yet, considering the present state of mankind, I believe we needed a revelation of the mind of God, to inform us more fully of his and our own character, of his designs towards us, and will concerning us; and such a revelation I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be, without excepting any one of its books; and a perfect rule of faith and practice. ...

III. From this divine volume, I learn many things concerning God, which I could not have learned from the works of nature, and the same things in a more convincing light. Here I learn, especially, the infinitely amiable moral character of God. His holiness, justice, faithfulness, and goodness, are here exhibited in such a light, by his holy law and glorious gospel, as is nowhere else to be seen.<sup>31</sup>

In a word, Fuller believed God's special revelation in the Scriptures was both more complete and more convincing.

Fuller recognized the cross of Christ as God's supreme act of self-revelation. He contrasted the completeness of the disclosure of God in the cross with the limitations of natural revelation: "God manifested Himself in creation, in giving laws to His creatures, in the providential government of the world, and in other ways; but all these exhibited Him only in part: it is in the gospel of salvation, through His dear Son, that his whole character appears; so that, from invisible, He in a sense becomes visible."<sup>32</sup> Although his death cut short an attempt to write a sort of systematic theology, Fuller did have in mind a plan on how he wished to proceed. He planned to start with the doctrine of the cross, because "the whole of the Christian system appears to be *presupposed by it, included in it, or to arise from it* . . ."<sup>33</sup> One of Fuller's favorite scriptural phrases was found in Ephesians 4:21, "the truth as it is in Jesus."<sup>34</sup> He took it to mean that all of God's truth which He wished to reveal to man was wrapped up and contained in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The notion that somehow a distinction should be made between God's act of revelation in the person of Jesus and the written records of His life and ministry appears never to have crossed Fuller's mind.<sup>35</sup> He operated from the premise "all things which proceed from God are in harmony with each other."<sup>36</sup> If it is "in the face of Jesus Christ we see the glory of the Divine character in such a manner as we see it no where else," then it is also true that only through the Scriptures is Jesus Christ known.<sup>37</sup> One of the nine addresses that comprise his *Letters on Systematic Divinity* is entitled "The Uniform Bearing of the Scriptures on the

Person and Work of Christ.” This letter summarizes Fuller’s commitment to the premise that all Scripture, including the Old Testament, reveals Christ.

Fuller recognized the exegetical folly of “those who drag in Christ on all occasion.”<sup>38</sup> But he also believed Christ was legitimately to be found in Old Testament history, prophecies, Psalms, and more. An example of the rich use Fuller made of the Old Testament in preaching Christ can be seen in the following paragraph from his *Letters on Systematic Divinity*:

The body of the Jewish institutions was but a shadow of good things to come, of which Christ was the substance. Their priests, and prophets, and kings were typical of Him. Their sacrifices pointed to Him who “gave Himself for us, and offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.” The manna on which they fed in the wilderness referred to Him, as the “Bread of God that should come down from heaven.” The Rock, from which the water flowed that followed them on their journeys, is said to be Christ, as being typical of Him. Their cities of refuge represent Him, “as the hope set before us.” The whole dispensation served as a foil, to set off the superior glory of His kingdom. The temple was but the scaffolding to that which He would build, and the glory of which He would bear. The moral law exhibited right things, and the ceremonial law a shadow of good things; but “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” The Christian dispensation is to that of the Old Testament as the jubilee to a state of captivity. It might be in reference to such things as these that the psalmist prayed, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wonderful things out of Thy law.”<sup>39</sup>

In spite of the fact that Christ is the constant theme of Scripture, people still failed to seek him. Fuller noted that his age had an ambivalent posture towards the Bible. Positively, it was the era when Bible societies had begun to spring up and organize the dissemination of the Scriptures. Translation efforts, like those spearheaded by Fuller’s friend William Carey (1761–1834) in India, excited tremendous popular interest and support in both Britain and America.<sup>40</sup> But Fuller sadly concluded that, although the Scriptures were more available than ever before and “all orders and degrees of men will unite in applauding them,” still “they overlook Christ, to whom they uniformly bear testimony; and while thinking to obtain eternal life, will not come to him that they might have it.”<sup>41</sup>

### **Paine’s Challenge to Special Revelation in *The Age of Reason***

There was at least one order of men, however, who Fuller was well aware did not unite in praising the Scriptures. Thomas Paine was representative of a great many influential thinkers when he maintained the impossibility of a written revelation from God. Whereas

Fuller believed general and special revelation delivered a consistent message, Paine argued the Bible was completely at odds with the revelation contained in nature. Fuller turned to the Bible to illumine fully what he understood of God through nature and reason and Paine rejected the possibility of written revelation outright. In formulating his religious opinions in *The Age of Reason*, Paine boasted: "The most formidable weapon against errors of every kind is Reason. I have never used any other, and I trust I never shall."<sup>42</sup> Following his logic with rigorous consistency, he went on to assert, "My own mind is my own church."<sup>43</sup>

Paine's rejection of special revelation in the first part of *The Age of Reason* is partly founded on his epistemological conviction that "human language is local and changeable, and is, therefore, incapable of being used as the means of unchangeable and universal information."<sup>44</sup> Paine objected:

But how was Jesus Christ to make anything known to all nations? He could speak but one language, which was Hebrew; and there are in the world several hundred languages. Scarcely any two nations speak the same language, or understand each other; and as to translations, every man who knows anything of languages, knows that it was impossible to translate from one language to another, not only without losing a great part of the original, but frequently of mistaking the sense; and besides all this, the art of printing was wholly unknown at the time Christ lived.<sup>45</sup>

Paine allowed that the Deistic God he believed in was wiser than to commit Himself to such a flawed and limited mode of revelation. In contrast to the limitations of speech, Paine taught, "The creation speaketh an universal language, independently of human speech or human language."<sup>46</sup> He spoke passionately of the superior witness of creation:

It is an ever-existing original, which every man can read. It cannot be forged; it cannot be counterfeited; it cannot be lost; it cannot be altered; it cannot be suppressed; It does not depend upon the will of man whether it shall be published or not; it publishes itself from one end of the earth to the other. It preaches to all nations and all worlds; and this *word of God* reveals to man all that it is necessary for man to know of God.<sup>47</sup>

The principal objection which lay in the way of the advancement of Paine's thesis was the high esteem for the Bible which was almost universally prevalent in the eighteenth century. In the first part of *The Age of Reason*, Paine had written generally against what he called the "three frauds" of mystery, miracle, and prophecy. At the time, he had gone to some pains to clarify that he wrote without access to a Bible. But in the second part, Paine informed his readers "that they will now find that I have furnished myself with a Bible and

a Testament; and I can say also that I have found them to be much worse books than I had conceived.”<sup>48</sup> He noted that those who reviewed part one of his work often cited the Scriptures themselves against him. Therefore, the second part of *The Age of Reason* was dedicated to destroying the credibility of the Bible. Paine argued the Bible was filled with morally injurious material and was riddled with errors and contradictions. To cite but one example, he listed the genealogies of Jesus as related by Matthew and Luke in parallel columns, considering them hopelessly contradictory.

### **Fuller’s Reply to Paine in *The Gospel Its Own Witness***

In the introduction to *The Gospel Its Own Witness*, Fuller noted that most of the specific biblical errors alleged by Paine and other like-minded writers had already been refuted.<sup>49</sup> In part two of *The Gospel Its Own Witness*, Fuller himself offered an apologetic for the Bible. He especially focused on Paine’s charges that the Bible lacked internal consistency and that its predictive prophecies were less than convincing. But it seems Fuller felt the best reply to Paine’s skepticism lay in a different direction. The Baptist pastor offered a powerful theological rationale why Paine was unable to see the truth of God’s special revelation in Scripture:

Mr. Paine’s spirit is sufficiently apparent in his page, and that of the sacred writers in theirs. So far from writing as they wrote, he cannot understand their writings. That which the Scriptures teach on this subject is sufficiently verified in him, and all others of his spirit: *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.* ...

Finally, if the Bible be the word of God, it may be expected that *such an authority, and divine sanction should accompany it*, that while a candid mind shall presently perceive its evidence, those who read it either with negligence or prejudice, shall be openly confirmed in their unbelief.<sup>50</sup>

Paine’s spiritual disposition, therefore, accounted for his blindness. Fuller was not surprised going to the Scriptures had done Paine no good:

Mr. Paine, when he wrote the First part of his *Age of Reason*, was without a Bible. Afterwards, he tells us, he procured one; or to use his own schoolboy language, “a Bible and a Testament; and I have found them, he adds, to be much worse books than I had conceived.” In all this there is nothing surprising. On the contrary, if such a scorner had found wisdom, the Scriptures themselves had not been fulfilled. (Proverbs 14:6) ... Let us but



come to the Scriptures in a proper spirit, and we shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God: but if we approach them in a cavilling humour, we may expect not only to remain in ignorance, but to be hardened more and more in unbelief.<sup>51</sup>

In summary, Fuller maintained the knowledge of God available in creation was useful, but completely inadequate on its own. The Bible was required to give men a sufficient conception of what God was like and what he required of his creatures. Taken by itself, God's general revelation served only the negative function of justifying God in the condemnation of his rebellious creatures. On the other hand, when general revelation was used in conjunction with the Scriptures, it had the positive function of coming alongside the Bible as a confirming testimony. As to Enlightenment criticisms of Scripture, Fuller was not opposed to apologetic endeavors to meet them. He insisted, however, that the real objections to revelation which must be overcome belonged to the moral, not the intellectual, realm.

### **The Attributes of God**

The attributes of God also occupy a prominent place in the theological writings of Andrew Fuller. Always in the background of Fuller's discussions of God's attributes is the awareness of the inability of any human to conceive fully of God. In his *Letters on Systematic Divinity*, Fuller quoted with approval from John Owen (1616–1683):

The utmost of the best of our thoughts of the being of God is, that we can have no thoughts of it. Our knowledge of a being is but low when it mounts no higher but only to know that we know it not. —There be some things of GOD which He Himself has taught us to speak of, and to regulate our expressions of them; but when we have so done, we see not the things themselves, we know them not; to believe and to admire is all that we can attain to. We profess, as we are taught, that God is infinite, omnipotent, eternal; and we know what disputes and notions there are about omnipresence, immensity, infinity and eternity. We have, I say, words and notions about these things; but as to the things themselves, what do we know?<sup>52</sup>

### **The Natural (Non-Moral) Attributes of God**

Fuller divided the attributes of God into two categories: natural and moral. He believed the natural attributes of God were revealed both through general and special revelation. As to a listing of the natural attributes, Fuller was generally open-ended. His lists of the attributes

typically included omnisapience, omnipotence, eternity, immensity, omnipresence and immutability—followed with “&c.” Though Fuller did not develop his theology of the natural attributes very fully in any of his extant writings, he did express several ideas of interest.

Reflecting on the natural attributes of God added support to Fuller’s belief in dichotomous ability, which he had learned from Jonathan Edwards’s (1703–1758) *Freedom of the Will* (1754). Following Edwards closely, Fuller coupled his conception of the divine attributes with the doctrine of man’s creation in the *imago Dei*.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the divine attributes were allowed to inform his anthropology at a critical point. In his exposition of Genesis, Fuller notes, “The image of God is partly natural, and partly moral; and man was made after both. The former consists in *reason*, by which he was fitted for dominion over the creatures, James iii. 7; the latter, in *righteousness and true holiness*, by which he was fitted for communion with his Creator.”<sup>54</sup> Significantly, Fuller argued that “the moral image of God, consisting in ‘righteousness and true holiness’ was effaced by sin; but the natural image of God, consisting in his rational and immortal nature, was not.”<sup>55</sup> This understanding of human nature formed the platform upon which the Baptist pastor justified universal offers of the Gospel in his dispute with hyper-Calvinism. Fuller grounded the appropriateness of universal offers of the Gospel to the lost on the premise that all men maintained a functional natural ability, even after the fall. The problem they faced in coming to salvation was moral inability—one which could only be overcome by the divine act of regeneration.<sup>56</sup>

The second point of interest in Fuller’s understanding of the natural attributes of God is the way he used this distinction to explain the kenosis of Christ. As he understood it, this distinction in the divine attributes was central in affirming what was observed of Jesus in the incarnation. Fuller explained:

He *emptied* or *disrobed* Himself; He laid aside His glory for a season; yet not His goodness, but His greatness; not His purity, justice, faithfulness, or holiness; but the display of His eternity, supremacy, immensity, wisdom, power, omniscience, and omnipresence: becoming a mortal man, subject to His parents, supported by the ordinary aliments of life, and ascribing His doctrine and miracles to the Father. ... And this is that [which] accounts for the ascriptions given Him after His exaltation: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory and blessing.” Each of these terms has respect to that glory of which He had disrobed Himself, and with which He was therefore worthy now to be doubly invested.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, even in the incarnation—or especially in the incarnation—God in Christ exhibited ample attributes of his deity.

## **The Moral Attributes of God**

It would be almost impossible to overemphasize the significance the moral attributes of God occupied in Fuller's theology. It was the union of the natural attributes with the moral attributes that revealed the God of the Bible to be distinct: "It is by the union of these Divine excellencies that He stands opposed to all the deities of the heathen."<sup>58</sup> Consequently, Fuller never tired of glorying in the exalted moral nature of God.

### **On the Union of Natural and Moral Attributes in the Godhead**

Fuller believed the natural attributes of God were sanctified by union with his moral attributes. In his popular pamphlet *Dialogues & Letters between Crispus and Gaius*, Crispus asks, "Are not all the attributes of Deity essential to the character of an all perfect Being?"<sup>59</sup> The answer came back from Gaius:

They are; but yet the glory of his natural perfections depends upon their being united with those which are moral. The ideas of wisdom, power, or immutability convey nothing lovely to the mind, but the reverse, unless they be connected with righteousness, goodness, and veracity. Wisdom without holiness would be serpentine subtlety; power would be tyranny; and immutability annexed to a character of such qualities would be the curse and terror of the universe.<sup>60</sup>

Fuller refined and clarified his language in a closely parallel passage in *The Letters on Systematic Divinity*: "Power and knowledge, and every other attribute belonging to the greatness of God, could they be separated from righteousness and goodness, would render him an object of dread, and not of love; but righteousness and goodness, whether connected with greatness or not, are lovely."<sup>61</sup>

### **The Role of God's Moral Attributes in Fuller's Response to Deism**

The greatest display of the importance of the moral attributes of God in Fuller's theology is found by considering the extensive use he made of this subject in his apology against Deism, *The Gospel Its Own Witness*.

## *Deism's Non-Moral God is Inadequate*

In chapter one, Fuller launched his offensive against Deism, charging that it offered the world a God stripped of his moral attributes. Fuller asked:

But who or what is the God of the deists? It is true they have been shamed out of the polytheism of the heathens. They have reduced their thirty thousand deities into one: but what is his character? What attributes do they ascribe to him? For [sic, From] any thing that appears in their writings, he is as far from the holy, the just, and the good, as those of their heathen predecessors. They enjoy a pleasure, it is allowed, in contemplating the productions of wisdom and power; but as to holiness, it is foreign to their enquiries: A holy God does not appear to be suited to their wishes.<sup>62</sup>

To establish his point, Fuller cited from leading Deists, including Paine. These excerpts bolstered Fuller's premise that the God of Deism was devoid of moral attributes. Since the Deists denied the possibility of a written revelation, they viewed any discussions of God's moral character as simply a projection of man's variable moral values onto a conception of God.

In contrast, Fuller believed the moral attributes of God must be maintained, and even emphasized. He advocated that the moral attributes of God could be summed up in the word "holiness." Returning to the theme he had expressed in *The Dialogues Between Crispus and Gaius*, Fuller argued again: "Without such moral qualities, the non-moral attributes of God assumed a sinister character: Moral excellence is the highest glory of any intelligent being, created or uncreated. Without this, wisdom would be subtilty [sic], power tyranny, and immutability the same thing as being unchangeably wicked."<sup>63</sup>

While many of the Deistic thinkers simply ignored the moral attributes of God, some argued positively against them. For example, Fuller cited Lord Shaftesbury's (1671–1713) argument to the effect that a God with a moral nature must be passible, and hence disqualified as Deity by definition:

Lord *Shaftesbury*, not contented with overlooking, attempts to satirize the scripture representations of the divine character. "One would think, he says, it were easy to understand that provocation and offence, anger, revenge, jealousy in point of honour or power, love of fame, glory, and the like, belong only to limited beings, and are necessarily excluded a Being which is perfect and universal."<sup>64</sup>

Fuller replied with two observations. First, he reminded his readers of the principle of accommodation that was operative in revelation. Some biblical expressions which seemed to indicate passibility were no more than figurative representations designed to aid human comprehension of the divine mystery. Second, and more interesting, Fuller also realized the importance of maintaining a nuanced doctrine of God's impassibility in light of the biblical witness. His reasoning has a contemporary ring to it:

We do not think it lawful, however, so to explain away these expressions [biblical texts that seem to imply God is passible] as to consider the Great Supreme as incapable of being offended with sin and sinners, as destitute of pleasure or displeasure, or as unconcerned about his own glory, the exercise of which involves the general good of the universe. A Being of this description would be neither loved nor feared, but would become the object of universal contempt.<sup>65</sup>

Fuller understood that the God of Deism was amoral and inadequate because its conception of his nature had been formed without consulting the Scriptures. He turned the charge that Christians had projected their own moral predilections onto God back on his opponents. By ignoring the Bible, the Deist was forced to create a God "after his own heart, one who shall pay no such regard to human affairs as to call men to account for their ungodly deeds."<sup>66</sup> He closed his opening chapter on *The Gospel Its Own Witness* with a solemn warning: "But let men beware how they play with such subjects. Their conceptions do not alter the nature of God: and however they suffer themselves to trifle now, they may find in the end that there is not only a God, but *a God that judgeth in the earth*."<sup>67</sup> Fuller went on to prove that the doctrinal error inherent in the Deistic conception of God was a fountainhead from which a host of practical missteps flowed.

### *A God Who is Not to Be Worshipped?*

Fuller argued both natural and special revelation should convince a man God ought to be worshipped. But the Deists contemplated God so coolly that none dare call it worship. Perhaps hearkening back to some memories based on his extensive fund-raising efforts for the Baptist Missionary Society, Fuller said Deistic "adorations" reminded him of "the benevolent acts of certain persons, who are so extremely averse to ostentation, that nobody knows of their being charitable but themselves."<sup>68</sup>

Fuller took great issue with Paine's characterization of man's religious obligations. Paine had distilled all religious obligations into this creed: "I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in *doing justice, loving mercy*, and endeavoring to

make our fellow creatures happy.”<sup>69</sup> Fuller adopted Paine’s own caustic style in his reply, “Mr. Paine supplies the place of walking humbly with God, by adding, ‘and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy.’ Some people would have thought that this was included in doing justice, and loving mercy: but Mr. Paine had rather use words without meaning than write in favour of godliness.”<sup>70</sup>

Again, Fuller was convinced that a failure to recognize the moral attributes of God led to this error. Heterodoxy led inexorably to heteropraxy. God’s moral attributes were what rendered him a fitting object of love and worship, not just passive admiration. Deistic protestations of their goodwill to God were not enough. They were missing the real heart of Christianity: the love of God. Fuller objected: “If deists loved the one only living and true God, they would delight in worshipping Him: for love cannot be inoperative; and the only possible way for it to operate towards an infinitely glorious and all perfect Being is by worshipping His name, and obeying His will.”<sup>71</sup> Deism may claim for itself an exalted and superior approach to God, but Fuller believed it to be nothing more than practical atheism.

### *Deism Destroys Private and Public Morality*

Instead of advocating a morality that flowed from loving God, Deism reduced private morality to a sort of self-serving civic-mindedness. Because their own interests were tied up in the overall public welfare, men were urged to see the reasonableness of certain behaviors. Those with Deistic beliefs tended to place great hope for the moral improvement of society based on the spread of reason and education. The end result was a religion suited for the head but not the heart. Nothing could have been more opposed to Fuller’s fundamental religious sensibilities. He was scandalized by the moral vision expressed by Paine and others. In *The Gospel Its Own Witness*, Fuller charged: “Their deity does not seem to take cognizance of the heart.... Their morality only goes to form the exterior of man. It allows the utmost scope for wicked desires, provided they be not carried into execution to the injury of society.”<sup>72</sup> In contrast, Fuller taught:

It is a distinguishing property of the Bible that all its precepts aim directly at the heart. It never goes about to form the mere exterior of a man.... If you comply with its precepts, you must be, and not merely *seem to be*. It is the heart that is required; and all the different prescribed forms of worship and obedience, are but so many modifications, or varied expressions of it.<sup>73</sup>

Fuller also thought the Deistic notion that a self-serving root for morality tended to the public good to be wrong-headed. By instructing men to look to their self interest, Deism had actually made the self the new Supreme Being. The results of this program were



exactly opposite of what was claimed: "This said self-love, instead of being a source of virtue, is of the very essence of vice, and the source of all the mischief in the universe...."<sup>74</sup> If a holy God is not held up to society as the supreme object of worth, Fuller believed public morality could not long be sustained. He believed Deists were great enemies of the civic welfare because they were removing a moral vision of God as the great unifying force in public behavior. Fuller wrote, "It is thus that the love of God holds creation together: He is that lovely character to whom all holy intelligences bear supreme affection; and the display of his glory, in the universal triumph of truth and righteousness, is that end which they all pursue."<sup>75</sup> Take away a holy God from the center of man's affections, and "nothing but an endless succession of discord and confusion can be the consequence."<sup>76</sup>

### *Comparing the Lives of Deists and Christians*

Perhaps no element of *The Gospel Its Own Witness* seems more out of step with the present times than chapter five of part one, "The Lives of Those Who Reject the Gospel will not Bear a Comparison with Theirs Who Embrace It." Commenting on the wisdom of arguing for the moral superiority of one religion over another, Alan Sell says Fuller's "chosen ground of argument is shaky indeed."<sup>77</sup>

It should be kept in mind that Fuller entered this field as one provoked.<sup>78</sup> Paine had laid serious charges of moral failure at the doorstep of the Christian religion:

The most detestable wickedness, the most horrid cruelties, and the greatest miseries, that have afflicted the human race, have had their origin in this thing called revelation, or revealed religion. ... It is better, far better, that we admitted, if it were possible, a thousand devils to roam at large, and to preach publicly the doctrine of devils, if there were any such, than that we permitted one such impostor and monster as Moses, Joshua, Samuel, and the Bible prophets, to come with the pretended word of God in his mouth, and have credit among us....

Whence arose all the horrid assassinations of whole nations of men, women, and infants, with which the Bible is filled; and the bloody persecutions, and tortures unto death, and religious wars, that since that time have laid Europe in blood and ashes . . . the lies of the Bible have been the cause of the one, and the lies of the Testament of the other.<sup>79</sup>

In arguing for the moral superiority of the lives of Christians over Deists, Fuller was simply responding to a charge which Paine had made in too lurid terms to be ignored.

Fuller's reply to Paine was based on four major points. First, he challenged the thesis that moral evils found their root in Christianity. He began by asking an historical question: "Did these evils commence with Christianity?"<sup>80</sup> The obvious answer, Fuller believed, showed Paine was on the wrong track. Second, Fuller complained that Paine failed to distinguish between true Christians and mere professors. He was more than willing to grant many nominal Christians had engaged in behavior as wicked as Paine suggested. This proved nothing about the true ethical implications of genuine Christianity. Third, Fuller took Paine back to the moral lives of the models for cool-headed, rational religion—the ancient philosophers. Like Paine, they sought religion without revelation. But were their lives really as morally superior as sometimes assumed?<sup>81</sup> Fuller thought not and was willing to quote from the classical writers to point out that their values were shocking by contemporary standards. Fourth, Fuller believed the tendency of Christianity had been to overcome wickedness, not to give rise to it. In arguing this point, he was able to appeal to the contemporary example of France. The course of the French Revolution had essentially replaced the Christian religion with a Deistic alternative. But the results had not been the rational betterment of society and an increase of peace and virtue as promised by Paine. Instead, under the Revolution, France had degenerated into lawlessness and anarchy.<sup>82</sup>

Only having laid that background did Fuller go on to point out the moral failings of the leading Deistic authors. In making a case against them, Fuller found no shortage of ammunition. Herbert, Hobbes, Shaftesbury, Tindal, Bolingbroke, Hume, Hobbes, Voltaire, and many more were exposed as clouds without water. Paine himself was alleged to be both a "profane swearer and a drunkard."<sup>83</sup> But the *pièce de résistance* in Fuller's case was drawn from the infamous *Confessions of J. J. Rousseau* (1712–1778). Fuller probably preferred to cite the case of Rousseau because the descriptions were autobiographical, hence the charge of partiality was easier deflected. Rousseau had boldly introduced his confession with a challenge to the Creator: "Power eternal! Assemble round thy throne the innumerable throng of my fellow-mortals. Let them listen to my Confessions, let them blush at my depravity, let them tremble at my sufferings, let each in his turn expose with equal sincerity the failings, the wanderings of his heart; and if he dare, aver, I was better than that man."<sup>84</sup> In the face of such a challenge, Fuller was not afraid to point out the two-fold glory of the Gospel. Not only did it offer all men forgiveness for their wicked deeds without recourse to Rousseau's self-righteousness, but it also regenerated believers, resulting in men who lived holy lives.

## The Moral Attributes of God as a Fundamental Principle of Christianity

The centrality of the moral attributes of God to Fuller's thinking was neatly summarized in one of the exchanges between Crispus and Gaius. Crispus asks Gaius what he considers to be the "first and most fundamental principle of true religion."<sup>85</sup> When Gaius replies it is the moral character of God, Crispus asks why this is the case. In Gaius's reply, Fuller identifies foundational truths which flow from the holy character of God: "The equity of the Divine law, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the ruined state of man as a sinner, with the necessity of an almighty Saviour and a free salvation."<sup>86</sup>

Fuller's logic is clear and compelling. If God is not a moral Being whose nature is accurately reflected in Scripture, then the standard of righteousness in the Bible has no force. On the other hand, if God is as He is revealed to be, then man's sin is a monstrous affront to the Creator. No amount of penance can bring sinners back to God, because the sinner's nature is unaffected by such acts of piety. Thus, man's only hope lies in the doctrine of the cross of Christ. The Savior is almighty, possessing an unlimited pool of merit which is "able to save to the utmost" all who seek refuge in Him. In the dialogue, Crispus grasps that the glory of the Gospel is hidden in the character of God: "'To know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent' —in other words, to know the true glory of the Lawgiver and the Saviour, seems to be of the highest importance."<sup>87</sup>

## Conclusion

Several points can be suggested from this study of Fuller's doctrine of God. First, Fuller is a Baptist theologian of great versatility. Because of his heroic efforts on behalf of the Baptist Missionary Society, Fuller is rarely remembered for anything other than his profound soteriological and missiological contributions to Baptist life. While the historiography on Fuller has justly highlighted his landmark work *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, many of his contemporaries regarded *The Gospel Its Own Witness* as Fuller's signature book.<sup>88</sup> This paper has demonstrated there is enduring relevance in studying Fuller's doctrine of God. For example, concerning the knowledge of God, he helpfully presents a balanced account of two scriptural emphases: the existence of God is both a fact to be assumed as properly basic and is yet capable of rational confirmation.<sup>89</sup>

Second, Fuller provides a satisfying and full account of revelation. Taking his cue from the *Second London Confession*, Fuller was careful to give general revelation its due without allowing it to eclipse Scripture. In light of the pressures the Enlightenment agenda

brought to bear on the authority of the Scripture, Fuller's role at this critical point was a significant conserving force among Baptists. The recent attempt by moderate Southern Baptists to create a distinction between God's revelation as it happened historically and the preservation of that revelation in Scripture finds no foothold in Fuller's theology.<sup>90</sup> Specifically, Tull's portrayal of Fuller as seeking to privilege the revelation of God in Christ over the biblical content has been shown to rest on a distorted citation. Documentation for this reading of Fuller will have to be sought elsewhere or the appraisal itself rejected.

Third, Fuller's response to Deism provides a good case study of a theologian putting Jude 3 into practice: "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (NASB). Fuller believed reformulations to the doctrine of God must be attempted only with the greatest of care. A change in the doctrine of God would necessarily have significant ripple effects throughout all Christian faith and practice. If Deism posed the greatest temptation to this error in the eighteenth century, then perhaps Open Theism occupies a similar position today.<sup>91</sup> Fuller's defense of long-cherished attributes of God stands as a timely warning against the constant clamor for something new in theology.

Fourth, Fuller was surely correct in his belief that both private and public morals must suffer when a society begins to embrace a God diminished in his moral attributes. In tracing the decline of morality in society, the most troubling realization is that it has occurred not so much in spite of the Church, but rather because of the Church. Contemporary criticisms of Fuller's chosen apologetic base from which to respond to Deism are telling. It *does* seem perilous today to formulate an apologetic for Christianity based on the moral superiority of the Christian faith. Part of this can be set down to the encroachments of pluralism.<sup>92</sup> But another point looms just as large and may be even more significant. Fuller's logic seems fantastic today because the moral lines between Christians and non-Christians have become blurred—or more precisely, the moral behavior of Christians has steadily slipped over the years until it now almost parallels that of non-believers. Studying *The Gospel Its Own Witness* makes the case for David Well's important thesis: the Church must recover the moral vision of Christianity or else lose the Gospel.<sup>93</sup>

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## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Fuller, *The Gospel Its Own Witness: or the Holy Nature, and Divine Harmony of the Christian Religion, Contrasted with the Immorality and Absurdity of Deism* (Clipstone: J. W. Morris, 1799), 343; in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller with a Memoir of His Life* by Andrew Gunton Fuller. Ed. Joseph Belcher, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845; reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 2:105.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Fuller, *The Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared as to Their Moral Tendency* (1792), in *Works*, 2:127.

<sup>3</sup> Fuller, *The Calvinistic and Socinian Systems*, in *Works*, 2:127. Fuller acknowledged he borrowed this phrase from “the ingenious Mrs. Barbauld.” Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825) was an active member of the English literati whose poetry and essays frequently appeared in the periodical literature of the day.

<sup>4</sup> Fuller’s views on the Trinity are also developed at length in his extant writings and would make a suitable field of further inquiry.

<sup>5</sup> The Scottish philosopher, Thomas Reid, had written his influential treatise *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* in 1764. Much of what Fuller says about basic or foundational beliefs is similar to Reid’s starting point. I have been unable to verify that Fuller either owned or read any of Reid’s works, but it is known that Fuller traveled to Scotland five times in efforts to raise funds for the Baptist Missionary Society. Fuller’s library did contain many contemporary philosophical works and is not impossible that he may have been acquainted with Reid as well. I am indebted to Michael A. G. Haykin, Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality at The Southern Baptist Seminary, for a scan of the handwritten copy of the contents of Fuller’s library, dated 1798. The original copy is kept in the library of the Bristol Baptist College, Bristol, England.

<sup>6</sup> Fuller, *Letters on Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:693.

<sup>7</sup> Fuller, *Expository Discourses on the Book of Genesis*, in *Works*, 3:2.

<sup>8</sup> This phrase is identified with Alvin Plantinga’s Reformed epistemology. It appears that Fuller’s agenda regarding proofs for the existence of God is similar to that of Plantinga. For an introduction to the issues associated with this movement, and a bibliography, see the section “Reformed Epistemology” in *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology*, ed. R. Douglas Geivett and Brendan Sweetman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 131-182.

<sup>9</sup> Fuller, *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:695.

<sup>10</sup> Fuller, *On Genesis*, in *Works*, 3:2 He repeated the same point in almost identical language in his *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:693.

<sup>11</sup> Fuller, *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:693. Fuller seems to have been unaware that his own acceptance of the validity of the principle of “the great First Cause” only a few lines up the page was, in fact, one of the traditional “Five Ways” of Aquinas. Fuller never mentions Aquinas in any of his published writings. If he had any awareness of Aquinas at all, Fuller likely misunderstood the Catholic theologian’s purposes at this point; i.e., as seeking to establish the existence of God via a natural theology. Fergus Kerr explains how this is common misreading of Aquinas, see his chapter “Thomas Aquinas,” in *The Medieval Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Medieval Period*, ed. by G. R. Evans (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 201-220, esp. 212-13.

<sup>12</sup> Fuller, *On Genesis*, in *Works*, 3:2.

<sup>13</sup> Fuller, *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:695.

<sup>14</sup> Kerr has argued that Aquinas's "Five Ways" were really efforts by which the existence of the revealed God "can be tested." (Kerr, "Thomas Aquinas," 213.) This seems to be Fuller's concern also.

<sup>15</sup> A broader look at the interchange between Fuller and Paine is found in Alan P. F. Sell, "The Gospel Its Own Witness: Deism, Thomas Paine and Andrew Fuller," in Alan P. F. Sell, ed., *Enlightenment, Ecumenism, Evangel: Theological Themes and Thinkers, 1550-2000*, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2005), 111-143.

<sup>16</sup> This confession of faith included nineteen well-developed articles. No doubt, Fuller was led to complete such an extensive confession, in part, because of doctrinal conflict that marred the harmony of his first pastorate. It is printed in John Ryland's biography of Fuller but was inexplicably omitted from Belcher's edition of Fuller's works. See John Ryland, Jr., *The Work of Faith, the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope, illustrated in the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 2nd. ed. (Charleston: Samuel Etheridge, 1818), 54-59. Belcher did correct his oversight in a little book that followed the collected works, J. Belcher, *The Last Remains of the Rev. Andrew Fuller: Sermons, Essays, Letters, and Other Miscellaneous Papers, Not Included in His Published Works* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1856), 209-217. Unfortunately, this volume is rarely found today. Fuller's confession of faith may now be found in Paul Brewster, *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor Theologian* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman), 181-87.

<sup>17</sup> Belcher, *Last Remains*, 209. Though the wording is Fuller's own, the ideas expressed perfectly match the intent of the influential *Second London Confession of Faith* (1689). That document declared "the light of Nature" leaves men "unexcusable" [sic] but is insufficient to bring them to salvation. See W. L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1969), 248.

<sup>18</sup> Franklyn K. Proschaska, "Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason Revisited*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22(1972): 561-76; cited in Michael A. G. Haykin, "'The Oracles of God': Andrew Fuller and the Scriptures," *Churchman* 103 (1989): 63. Haykin's article has been recently reworked and appears as "'The Oracles of God': Andrew Fuller's Response to Deism" in Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *'At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word': Andrew Fuller as an Apologist*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, vol. 6 (Carlisle; Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2004), 122-138.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (Chicago: Belfords, Clarke & Co., 1897), preface.

<sup>20</sup> Ryland was pastor of the Broadmead Baptist Church and led the Bristol Academy, then the principal educational institution in British Particular Baptist life.

<sup>21</sup> Fuller's sermon was entitled "The Nature and Importance of an Intimate Knowledge of Divine Truth," in *Works*, 1:173.

<sup>22</sup> Fuller released three editions of this book by 1802 and it remained in print well over thirty years. Michael Haykin has characterized it as the "definitive eighteenth century Baptist response to Deism." Haykin, "'The Oracles of God,'" 60.



<sup>23</sup> Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 27.

<sup>25</sup> Fuller, *TGLOW*, 46; in *Works*, 2:18.

<sup>26</sup> Fuller, *TGLOW*, 46; in *Works*, 2:18.

<sup>27</sup> Actually, Paine had cited an English poetic rendition of Psalm 19:1-6, by Joseph Addison (1672-1719). He admits he had not checked it against the Scriptures, for "I keep no Bible." Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 28. This admission would give rise to frequent objections against Paine, to the effect that he had condemned that which he did not know.

<sup>28</sup> Fuller, *TGLOW*, 48; in *Works*, 2:19.

<sup>29</sup> Fuller, *TGLOW*, 48; in *Works*, 2:19.

<sup>30</sup> Fuller, *TGLOW*, 49; in *Works*, 2:19.

<sup>31</sup> Belcher, *The Last Remains*, 209-10.

<sup>32</sup> Fuller, *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:695.

<sup>33</sup> Fuller, *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:690.

<sup>34</sup> This was Fuller's rather free citation of the verse, which actually reads "as the truth is in Jesus" in the AV. He cited it the same way on several occasions. Fuller, *Works*, 1:691, 704, and more.

<sup>35</sup> James Tull's otherwise excellent chapter on Fuller in *Shapers of Baptist Thought* is marred by the attempt to suggest this. Tull portrays Fuller as a biblicist, but not a bibliolater, who sought to answer the question: "What is it that the Scriptures reveal which is of more ultimate authority than the Scriptures themselves?" Tull goes on to reproduce a passage from Fuller's *Letters on Systematic Divinity* which he claims shows that Fuller subordinated the Bible to the revelation of God in the cross. In that passage, Fuller writes, "The only display of the Divine perfections which can be denominated perfect is in the salvation of sinners, through the obedience and death of his beloved Son." Tull has set up a false dichotomy, and ignored the context of Fuller's statement in order to prove his thesis. Fuller's real point in the citation Tull used was simply that no other single act of God recorded in Scripture reveals all the Divine attributes as clearly as does the cross. Tull has read his own concerns back into Fuller's argument. James E. Tull, *Shapers of Baptist Thought* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1972; Macon, GA: Mercer Press, 1984), 94. The passage from Fuller is in *Works*, 1:706. A more accurate portrayal of Fuller's view of Scripture is found in John H. Watson, "Baptists and the Bible: As Seen in Three Eminent Baptists," *Foundations* 16 (1973): 237-254, esp. 250. Watson has grasped the salient point that Tull obfuscated: namely, Fuller is "concerned to affirm the superiority of the Bible as revelation."

<sup>36</sup> Fuller, *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:696. Fuller actually was discussing the relationship between general and special revelation when he used this phrase. What follows in the body of the paper will demonstrate that Fuller applied the principle much more broadly.

<sup>37</sup> Fuller, *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:704.

<sup>38</sup> Fuller, *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:702.

<sup>39</sup> Fuller, *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:703-04.

<sup>40</sup> William Wallace Everts reports that Fuller was able to raise £10,000 in six weeks to rebuild the printing press at Serampore when it was destroyed by fire in the early nineteenth century. W. W. Everts, "Andrew Fuller," *The Review and Expositor* 17.4 (1920): 429.

<sup>41</sup> Fuller, *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1: 704.

<sup>42</sup> Paine, *The Age of Reason*, preface.

<sup>43</sup> Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 6.

<sup>44</sup> Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 25.

<sup>45</sup> Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 25.

<sup>46</sup> Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 25.

<sup>47</sup> Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 25.

<sup>48</sup> Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 60.

<sup>49</sup> Fuller mentions Shaftesbury, Tindal, Morgan, Bolingbroke, Voltaire, Hume and Gibbon as kindred spirits to Paine. He also mentions that *Leland's Review of the Deistical Writers* constituted an able defense against their errors. Fuller, *TGIOW*, 2; in *Works*, 2:5.

<sup>50</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 230; in *Works*, 2:73.

<sup>51</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 231-32, in *Works*, 2:74.

<sup>52</sup> Fuller, *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:694.

<sup>53</sup> See Peter Beck, "Jonathan Edwards and the *Imago Dei*: A Man Ahead of His Time" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Valley Forge, PA, 16-18 November 2005).

<sup>54</sup> Fuller, *On Genesis*, in *Works*, 3:6. Fuller repeated the same line of argument in letter seven of *Letters on Systematic Divinity*.

<sup>55</sup> Fuller, *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:705.

<sup>56</sup> For a more in-depth look at Fuller's soteriology, see Brewster, *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor Theologian*, 65-108.

<sup>57</sup> Fuller, *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:705-06.

<sup>58</sup> Fuller, *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:706.

<sup>59</sup> Fuller, *Works*, 2:654. Originally published as periodical installments in the *Evangelical Magazine* from 1793–1794, these reflections were gathered with other material in a very popular work by Fuller, *Dialogues, Letters, and Essays on Various Subjects* (1st. ed., 1806).

<sup>60</sup> Fuller, *Works*, 2:654.

<sup>61</sup> Fuller, *On Systematic Divinity*, in *Works*, 1:705.

<sup>62</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 16-17; in *Works*, 2:9.

<sup>63</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 15; in *Works*, 2:9.

<sup>64</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 20; in *Works*, 2:10. The reference is to the third Earl of Shaftesbury's volume, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. Among other points, he had been critical of revealed religion.

<sup>65</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 20-21; in *Works*, 2:10. Fuller's insight here may suggest that the Open Theism movement has created somewhat of a straw man in caricaturing evangelicalism's commitment to an impassible God.

<sup>66</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 22; in *Works*, 2:11.

<sup>67</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 23; in *Works*, 2:11.

<sup>68</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 25; in *Works*, 2:12.

<sup>69</sup> Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 5. An interesting topic for further inquiry would be the influence of Deistic conceptions of religious obligation on the formation of the Social Gospel movement in the nineteenth century.

<sup>70</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 25; in *Works*, 2:12.

<sup>71</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 33; in *Works*, 2:14.

<sup>72</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 37; in *Works*, 2:15.

<sup>73</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 36; in *Works*, 2:15.

<sup>74</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 40; in *Works*, 2:16. In this same chapter Fuller enumerated the vices that flowed from a lack of loving God. He outdid even the Apostle Paul, coming up with sixty or more evils man commonly pursued.

<sup>75</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 41; in *Works*, 2:17.

<sup>76</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 42; in *Works*, 2:17.

<sup>77</sup> Alan P. F. Sell, "Andrew Fuller and the Socinians," *Enlightenment and Dissent* 19 (2000 [Festschrift issue for D. O. Thomas]), 111; cited by Tom Nettles, "Christianity Pure and Simple," in Michael Haykin, ed., *'At the Pure Fountain,'* 169. [Fuller's apologetic writings aimed at the Socinians were extensive. The primary work was *The Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared, as to Their Moral Tendency* (1792), in *Works*, 2:108-242.] Sell actually makes this objection in reference to Fuller's argument against Socinianism—but Fuller's work there was argued from exactly the same ground he now took against Deism. Sell reiterates these concerns in his article on Fuller's response to Deism. Sell doubts if Fuller's thesis that Christianity produces men who live morally superior lives is demonstrable. Even if it were, he asks, "What is the epistemological status of such a claim?" Sell, *"The Gospel Its Own Witness: Deism, Thomas Paine, and Andrew Fuller,"* 142.

<sup>78</sup> In his review of Fuller's Socinian works, Nettles makes the point that Fuller only chose to take the moral ground in argument because that was what his opponents had first selected as their point of critique. Even in Fuller's day, pundits complained at the pastor's boldness to make moral comparisons. Fuller shot back that their objections were in the same category as the Philistines complaining of "the unfairness of the weapon by which Goliath lost his head." Fuller, *Works*, 2:255. The same scenario was repeated in the conflict with Deism. See Nettles, "Christianity Pure and Simple," in *At the Pure Fountain*, 168.

<sup>79</sup> Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 145.

<sup>80</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 91; in *Works*, 2:31.

<sup>81</sup> This idea has had enduring staying power. Not that long ago, in the isolated Arkansas community where the present writer began his pastoral ministry, the figures of classical antiquity were still assumed to have been paragons of virtue. The older men of the church had been named after these supposed worthies: Claudius, Cicero, Cato, Brutus, etc.

<sup>82</sup> Fuller proved his point by a quotation from one of the councils seeking to direct France during her time of turmoil, to the effect that immediate measures were needed for the "regeneration of public morals." The Baptist pastor insisted the regeneration they sought in public morals could have but one source: "A knowledge of evangelical truth." Fuller, *TGIOW*, 93; in *Works*, 2:32.

<sup>83</sup> Fuller, *TGIOW*, 110; in *Works*, 2:37. Fuller took this description from the public record of Paine's trial for libel.

<sup>84</sup> Cited in Fuller, *TGIOW*, 115; in *Works*, 2:38.

<sup>85</sup> Fuller, *Dialogues and Letters Between Crispus and Gaius*, in *Works*, 2:654.

<sup>86</sup> Fuller, *Dialogues and Letters Between Crispus and Gaius*, in *Works*, 2:655.

<sup>87</sup> Fuller, *Dialogues and Letters Between Crispus and Gaius*, in *Works*, 2:655.

<sup>88</sup> William Wilberforce (1759-1833) was in this category. See Ryland, *The Work of Faith*, 124.

<sup>89</sup> Too often these emphases are kept compartmentalized as irreconcilable agendas. It seems that Fuller combines the strengths of Reformed epistemology and evidentialism. When kept in their proper spheres, both have important functions.

<sup>90</sup> This effort reached its peak in Southern Baptist life during the heated debate on the floor of the 2000 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting. Messengers debated the point of whether the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* should describe the Bible as the “revelation of God” or as the “record of the revelation of God.”

<sup>91</sup> Process Theology, in common with Deism, also complains the Church has created a God who is a cosmic moralist. Process theologians believe Christians have mistakenly imported Greek concepts of God into their own religion. For one example, see John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976). Fuller’s apologetic for the moral character of God as revealed in Scripture provides at least a partial answer to these charges.

<sup>92</sup> See D. A. Carson’s discussion of what he calls “philosophical pluralism,” which he defines as the belief “that any notion that a particular ideological or religious claim is intrinsically superior to another is necessarily wrong.” D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 19. Sell has helpfully warned that arguments based on the moral superiority of Christianity “certainly requires careful handling in the pluralistic society of which we are increasingly consciously a part.” Sell, “*The Gospel Its Own Witness: Deism, Thomas Paine, and Andrew Fuller*,” 142.

<sup>93</sup> David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

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