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“A DULL FLINT”: ANDREW FULLER— ROPE-HOLDER,
CRITIC OF HYPER-CALVINISM & MISSIONARY PIONEER

“I am a dull flint, you must strike me ag^t a steel to produce fire.”¹
Andrew Fuller

William Carey (1761–1834) is rightly known as the “Father of Modern Missions” and the main story of his pioneering mission work in India in the late eighteenth century and the first third of the nineteenth century needs little introduction. What is not so well-known today is the utterly vital help he received from friends who shared his vision to the full. A careful and attentive reading of the primary texts and letters relating to his mission reveals that if it had not been for a key circle of friends in England—notably Andrew Fuller (1754–1815), John Sutcliff (1752–1814), John Ryland, Jr. (1753–1825) and Samuel Pearce (1766–99)—and two co-workers in India—Joshua Marshman (1768–1837) and William Ward (1769–1823)—Carey would not have achieved an inkling of what he did. In fact, when Carey went to India, Fuller later said it was as if Carey had found a rich gold mine. Carey himself was more than willing to descend into the mine, but would Fuller and his other friends hold the rope that lowered him down? Fuller and the others in England vowed to hold the rope until they quit this earthly scene. Whenever God has done a great work in the history of the church it has always been through a team of men and women.

This afternoon we want to focus on one of Carey’s rope-holders, Andrew Fuller,² and see how his criticism of hyper-Calvinism and theology of missions prepared the way for Carey to go to

¹ Andrew Fuller, Letter to William Carey, April 18, 1799 (The Letters of Andrew Fuller, typescript ms., Angus Library, Regent’s Park College, Oxford University). I wish to thank Mr. A. Chadwick Mauldin of Fort Worth, Texas, for drawing my attention to this remark.

² On Fuller, 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 Reverend Andrew Fuller* (London: Button & Son, 1816). A second edition of this biography appeared in 1818. When Ryland’s book has been referenced in this paper, it is the second edition that has been cited.

For more recent studies, see Gilbert S. Laws, *Andrew Fuller: Pastor, Theologian, Ropeholder* (London: Carey Press, 1942); Arthur H. Kirkby, *Andrew Fuller (1754–1815)* (London: Independent Press Ltd., 1961); Phil Roberts, “Andrew Fuller” in Timothy George and David S. Dockery, eds., *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 121–39; and Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth-Century Particular Baptist Life* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K./Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster Press, 2003).

India. In a 1991 article in *Christianity Today* Bruce Shelley looked at five unsung heroes who stood behind five famous leaders in church history. And he rightly included Fuller as “the unsung hero” behind Carey’s “pioneering missionary career in Asia.”³ Though long forgotten in many Baptist circles, it bears remembering that Fuller was once described by Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–92) as “the greatest theologian” of his century.⁴ And Southern Baptist historian A. H. Newman on one occasion commented that Fuller’s “influence on American Baptists” was “incalculable” for good.⁵

Fuller wrote major theological works on a variety of issues, many of them in the area of apologetics. For instance, he wrote refutations of such eighteenth-century theological aberrations as Socinianism and Sandemanianism, and in 1799 published the definitive eighteenth-century Baptist response to Deism.⁶ But it was through his rebuttal of Hyper-Calvinism that he made his most distinctive contribution. As Philip Roberts, presently President of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has noted in a study of Fuller as a theologian:

[Fuller] helped to link the earlier Baptists, whose chief concern was the establishment of ideal New Testament congregations, with those in the nineteenth century driven to make the gospel known worldwide. His contribution helped to guarantee that many of the

On his thought, see also Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *‘At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word’: Andrew Fuller as an Apologist* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K./Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster Press, 2004). See also two very fine unpublished theses on Fuller: Doyle L. Young, “The Place of Andrew Fuller in the Developing Modern Missions Movement” (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981); and Thomas Kennedy Ascol, “The Doctrine of Grace: A Critical Analysis of Federalism in the Theologies of John Gill and Andrew Fuller” (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological seminary, 1989).

Also see the excellent study by E.F. Clipsham, “Andrew Fuller and Fullerism: A Study in Evangelical Calvinism”, *The Baptist Quarterly*, 20 (1963–1964), 99–14, 146–54, 214–25, 268–76.

³ In an article that looked at five unsung heroes who stood behind five famous church leaders, Bruce Shelley rightly included Fuller as “the unsung hero” behind Carey’s “pioneering missionary career in Asia.” [“Where Would We Be Without Staupitz?”, *Christianity Today*, 35, No.15 (December 16, 1991), 31].

⁴ Cited Laws, *Andrew Fuller*, 127.

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⁶ Fuller’s main refutation of Socinianism may be found in *The Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared, as to their Moral Tendency* [*The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. Joseph Belcher (3rd London ed.; repr. Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 2:108–242]. For his reply to Sandemanianism, see *Strictures on Sandemanianism, in Twelve Letters to a Friend* (*Works*, 2:561–646). His chief response to Deism, especially that of the popularizer Thomas Paine (1737–1809), is *The Gospel Its Own Witness* (*Works*, 2:1–107). For examinations of Fuller’s reply to these theological aberrations, see Michael A. G. Haykin, “‘The Oracles of God’: Andrew Fuller and the Scriptures”, *Churchman*, 103 (1989), 60–76; *idem*, “A Socinian and Calvinist Compared: Joseph Priestley and Andrew Fuller on the Propriety of Prayer to Christ”, *Dutch Review of Church History*, 73 (1993), 178–98; Thomas Jacob South, “The Response of Andrew Fuller to the Sandemanian View of Saving Faith” (Unpublished Th.D. thesis, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993).

leading Baptists of the 1800s would typify fervent evangelism and world missions. ...Without his courage and doctrinal integrity in the face of what he considered to be theological aberrations, the Baptist mission movement might have been stillborn.⁷

“I will trust...my sinful, lost soul in his hands”

The youngest of three brothers, Andrew Fuller was born on February 6, 1754, at Wicken, a small village now on the edge of the Cambridgeshire Fens, about six miles from the cathedral city of Ely. His parents, Robert Fuller (1723-1781) and Philippa Gunton (1726-1816), rented and worked a succession of dairy farms.⁸ Baptists by conviction, both of them came from a Dissenting background, of which there were various congregations in the area. When Fuller was seven years of age, his family moved to the village of Soham, about two and a half miles from Wicken. Once settled in Soham, they joined themselves to the Calvinistic Baptist work in the village that met for worship in a rented barn.⁹ The pastor of the work was a certain John Eve (d.1782), originally a sieve-maker from Chesterton, near the town of Cambridge. Eve had been set apart to preach the gospel by St. Andrew’s Street Baptist Church, Cambridge, in 1749,¹⁰ and three years later he was ordained as the first pastor of the Baptist cause at Soham, where he ministered for nearly twenty years till his resignation in 1771.

Fuller later remarked that Eve was a hyper-Calvinist or, as he put it, one whose teaching was “tinged with false Calvinism.”¹¹ As such, Eve did not believe that it was the duty of the unregenerate to exercise faith in Christ. To be sure, they could be urged to attend to outward duties, such as hearing God’s Word preached or being encouraged to read the Scriptures, but nothing of a spiritual nature could be required of them, since they were dead in sin and only the

⁷ “Andrew Fuller”, 132–3.

⁸ Andrew Gunton Fuller, “Memoir” (*Works*, 1:1). For details of Fuller’s family, see Ryland, *Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 8–10; Andrew Gunton Fuller, *Andrew Fuller* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1882), 11–12.

⁹ [Ted Wilson], *Soham Baptist Church 250th Anniversary 1752–2002* ([Soham]: [Soham Baptist Church], 2002), [1]. This is an eight-page stapled pamphlet without pagination.

¹⁰ L. G. Champion, L. E. Addicott, and K. A. C. Parsons, *Church Book: St Andrew’s Street Baptist Church, Cambridge 1720–1832* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1991), 17.

¹¹ Fuller, “Memoir” (*Works*, 1:2, 12). Also see Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Armies of the Lamb: The spirituality of Andrew Fuller* (Dundas, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2001), 59. For an overview of the history of hyper-Calvinism in this period, see Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity, 1689–1765* (London: Olive Tree, 1967).

Spirit could make them alive to spiritual things.¹² Eve's sermons, Fuller thus noted, were "not adapted to awaken [the] conscience" and "had little or nothing to say to the unconverted."¹³

When he was fourteen, though, Fuller began to entertain thoughts about the meaning and purpose of life. He was much affected by passages that he read from the biography of John Bunyan (1628-88), his *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, as well as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and some of the works of Ralph Erskine (1685-1752), the Scottish evangelical and Presbyterian minister. These affections were often accompanied by weeping and tears, but they ultimately proved to be transient, there being no radical change of heart.

Now, one popular expression of eighteenth-century Calvinistic Baptist spirituality was the notion that if a scriptural text forcefully impressed itself upon one's mind, it was to be regarded as a promise from God. One particular day in 1767 Fuller had such an experience. Romans 6:14 ("sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace") came with such suddenness and force that Fuller naïvely believed that God was telling him that he was in a state of salvation and no longer under the tyranny of sin. But that evening, he later recalled, "I returned to my former vices with as eager a gust as ever."¹⁴

For the next six months, he utterly neglected prayer and was as wedded to his sins as he had been before this experience. When, in the course of 1768, he once again seriously reflected upon his lifestyle, he was conscious that he was still held fast in thralldom to sin. What then of his experience with Romans 6:14? Fuller refused to doubt that it was given to him as an indication of his standing with God. He was, he therefore concluded, a converted person, but backslidden. He still lived, though, with never a victory over sin and its temptations, and with a total neglect of prayer. "The great deep of my heart's depravity had not yet been broken up," he later commented about these experiences of his mid-teens.¹⁵

¹² Fuller, "Memoir" (*Works*, 1:12).

¹³ Fuller, "Memoir" (*Works*, 1:2).

¹⁴ Haykin, *The Armies of the Lamb*, 62-3.

¹⁵ Haykin, *The Armies of the Lamb*, 63-4.

In the autumn of 1769 he once again came under the conviction that his life was displeasing to God. He could no longer pretend that he was only backslidden. “The fire and brimstone of the bottomless pit seemed to burn within my bosom,” he later declared. “I saw that God would be perfectly just in sending me to hell, and that to hell I must go, unless I were saved of mere grace.” Fuller now recognized the way that he had sorely abused God’s mercy. He had presumed that he was a converted individual, but all the time he had had no love for God and no desire for his presence, no hunger to be like Christ and no love for his people. On the other hand, he could not bear, he said, “the thought of plunging myself into endless ruin.” It was at this point that Job’s resolution—“though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15)—came to mind, and Fuller grew determined to cast himself upon the mercy of the Lord Jesus “to be both pardoned and purified.”¹⁶

Yet, the hyper-Calvinism that formed the air that he had breathed since his earliest years proved to be a real barrier to his coming to Christ. It maintained, as we have seen, that in order to flee to Christ for salvation, the “warrant” that a person needed to believe that he or she would be accepted by Christ was a subjective one. Conviction of one’s sinfulness and deep mental anguish as a result of that conviction were popularly regarded by hyper-Calvinists as such a warrant. From this point of view, these experiences were signs that God was in the process of converting the individual that was going through them. The net effect of this teaching was to place the essence of conversion and faith not in believing the gospel, “but in a persuasion of our being interested in its benefits.” Instead of attention being directed away from oneself towards Christ, the convicted sinner was turned inwards upon himself or herself to search for evidence that he or she was being converted.¹⁷ Against this perspective Fuller would later argue that the gospel exhortation to believe in Christ was a sufficient enough warrant to come to the Lord Jesus.

Fuller was in the throes of a genuine conversion and quite aware of his status as a sinner, but, under the influence of the hyper-Calvinist spirituality of conversion, he was convinced he had neither the qualifications nor the proper warrant to flee to Christ in order to escape the righteous judgment of God. Upon later reflection, he saw his situation as akin to that of Queen Esther. She

¹⁶ Haykin, *The Armies of the Lamb*, 69–71.

¹⁷ Andrew Fuller, *Strictures on Sandemanianism, in Twelve Letters to a Friend (Works, 2:563–4)*. See also Clipsham, “Andrew Fuller and Fullerism”, 103.

went into the presence of her husband, the Persian King Ahasuerus, at the risk of her life, since it was contrary to Persian law to enter the monarch's presence uninvited. Similarly, Fuller decided: "I will trust my soul, my sinful, lost soul in his [i.e. Christ's] hands—if I perish, I perish!" So it was in November, 1769 that Fuller found peace with God and rest for his troubled soul in the cross of Christ.¹⁸

His personal experience prior to and during his conversion ultimately taught him three things in particular. First, there was the error of maintaining that only those sinners aware of and distressed about their state have a warrant or right to come to Christ. Second, genuine faith is Christ-centred, not a curving inwards upon oneself to see if there was any desire to know Christ and embrace his salvation. Third, he recognized that true conversion is rooted in a radical change of the affections of the heart and manifest in a lifestyle that seeks to honour God.¹⁹

*"To feel my way out of a labyrinth"*²⁰

The following spring, 1770, Fuller was baptized and joined the church at Soham. Within six years the church had called Fuller to be their pastor. Now, though he had personally known the deadening effect of hyper-Calvinistic preaching, Fuller knew no other way of dealing with non-Christians from the pulpit and initially, he said, he "durst not...address an invitation to the unconverted to come to Jesus."²¹ But as he studied the style of preaching exhibited in the Acts of the Apostles and especially in Christ's ministry, he began to see that "the Scriptures abounded with exhortations and invitations to sinners." But how was this style of preaching to be reconciled with the biblical emphasis on salvation being a sovereign work of grace?²²

By 1780 Fuller had come to see clearly that his own way of preaching was unduly hampered by a concern not to urge spiritual duties upon non-believers. As he wrote in his diary for August 30 of that year:

¹⁸ Haykin, *The Armies of the Lamb*, 71–2.

¹⁹ Clipsham, "Andrew Fuller and Fullerism", 106–7.

²⁰ Fuller compared his movement out of hyper-Calvinism to the finding of a path out of a labyrinth: Fuller, "Memoir" (*Works*, 1:13).

²¹ Fuller, "Memoir" (*Works*, 1:12).

²² Fuller, "Memoir" (*Works*, 1:15).

Surely Peter and Paul never felt such scruples in their addresses as we do. They addressed their hearers as *men*—fallen men; as we should warn and admonish persons who were blind and on the brink of some dreadful precipice. Their work seemed plain before them. Oh that mine might be so before me!²³

The “pulpit,” Fuller commented a few months later,

seems an awful place!—An opportunity for addressing a company of immortals on their eternal interests—Oh how important! We preach for eternity. We in a sense are set for the rising and falling of many in Israel. ...Oh would the Lord the Spirit lead me into the nature and importance of the work of the ministry!²⁴

And by the time that Fuller left Soham to take up the pastorate of the Baptist work in Kettering, Northamptonshire, he was convinced, as he told the Kettering congregation at his induction on October 7, 1783, that

it is the duty of every minister of Christ plainly and faithfully to preach the gospel to all who will hear it. And, as I believe the inability of men to spiritual things to be wholly of the moral, and therefore of the criminal kind—and that it is their duty to love the Lord Jesus Christ and trust in him for salvation, though they do not—I, therefore, believe free and solemn addresses, invitations, calls, and warnings to them, to be not only consistent, but directly adapted, as means in the hands of the Spirit of God to bring them to Christ. I consider it as a part of my duty, which I could not omit without being guilty of the blood of souls.²⁵

This theological revolution in Fuller’s sentiments about the duty of sinners to believe the gospel and how that gospel should be preached were later encapsulated in a book, *The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785), and in his lifetime his views came to be known as Fullerism. As Geoffrey F. Nuttall once observed, Fuller is thus one of the few Englishmen to have a theological perspective named after him and it “points to a remarkable achievement.”²⁶

²³ Fuller, “Memoir” (*Works*, 1:23).

²⁴ Fuller, “Memoir” (*Works*, 1:25), Diary entries for February 5 and 8, 1781.

²⁵ *Confession of Faith* XV [in Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *The Armies of the Lamb: The spirituality of Andrew Fuller* (Dundas, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2001), 279].

²⁶ “Northamptonshire and *The Modern Question: A Turning-point in Eighteenth-Century Dissent*” in his *Studies in English Dissent* (Weston Rhyn, Oswestry, Shropshire: Quinta Press, 2002), 205.

“Cordial belief of what God says...[is] every one’s duty”²⁷

Two editions of *The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation* were issued in Fuller’s lifetime. A first draft had been written by 1778, the manuscript of which has just been purchased by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Just before Christmas, a friend alerted me to an item that was for sale by a rare book dealer, The Philadelphia Rare Books & Manuscripts Co. It was entitled “Thoughts on the Power of Men to do the Will of God” and was listed as being by Andrew Fuller. As it turns out, they had acquired a manuscript that had been housed since 1860 in the divinity school in Rochester, when it was given to that school by the son of Andrew Fuller, and were asking nine hundred dollars for it. They could have asked, I think, nine thousand dollars for it. It is invaluable. It is now in the Archives at SBTS, where a digital copy of it will be made. It begins thus:

What a narrow Path is Truth! How many Extremes are there into w^h we are liable to run! Some deny Truth; others hold it, but in Unrighteousness. O Lord, impress thy Truth upon my Heart with thine own Seal, then shall I receive it as in itself it is, “A Doctrine according to Godliness.”

This draft was eventually re-written and published as the first edition in Northampton in early 1785. It bore a lengthy subtitle—*The Obligations of Men Fully to Credit, and Cordially to Approve, Whatever God Makes Known, Wherein is Considered the Nature of Faith in Christ, and the Duty of Those where the Gospel Comes in that Matter*. A second edition appeared in 1801 with a shortened title—*The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*—and simpler subtitle, *The Duty of Sinners to Believe in Jesus Christ*, which well expressed the overall theme of both editions of the book.²⁸ There were a number of substantial differences between the two editions, which Fuller freely admitted and which primarily related to the doctrine of particular redemption, but the major theme remained unaltered: “faith in Christ is the duty of all men who hear, or have opportunity to hear, the gospel.”²⁹ Or as he put it in his preface to the first edition:

²⁷ “Preface” to *The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation* (1st ed.; Northampton, [1785]), iv. Subsequent references to this work are to the first edition unless otherwise noted.

²⁸ For the second edition, see *Works*, 2:328–416. For studies of this work, see Clipsham, “Andrew Fuller and Fullerism”, 214–25; Tull, *Shapers of Baptist Thought*, 85–92; Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, 23–76.

²⁹ *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (*Works*, 2:343). Extremely helpful in tracing the differences between the two editions is Robert W. Oliver, *History of the English Calvinistic Baptists 1771-1892: From John Gill to C.H. Spurgeon* (Edinburgh/Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 2006), 156–72.

true faith is nothing more nor less than an hearty or cordial belief of what God says, surely it must be every one's duty where the gospel is published, to do that. Surely no man ought to question or treat with indifference any thing which Jehovah hath said.³⁰

What is quickly evident in both of the editions is the large amount of space given to closely reasoned exegesis.

In the first edition, for example, Fuller devotes the second major part of the work to showing that “faith in Christ is commanded in the Scriptures to unconverted sinners.”³¹ It had been reflection on Psalm 2, for instance, that had first led Fuller to doubt the hyper-Calvinist refusal to countenance faith as the duty of the unconverted.³² He now undertook an interpretation of this text in light of his subject, reading it, as the New Testament reads it in Acts 4, as a Messianic psalm. The command to “the heathen” and “the people” of Israel (verse 1) as well as to “the kings of the earth” and “the rulers” (verse 2)—interpreted in Acts 4:27 as “Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the gentiles, and the people of Israel”—to “kiss the Son” (verse 12) is a command given to those “who were most certainly enemies to Christ, unregenerate sinners.” And “kissing the Son” Fuller understood to be “a spiritual act,” which meant, from the perspective of the New Testament, nothing less than “being reconciled to, and embracing the Son of God, which doubtless is of the very essence of true saving faith.”³³ Clearly, Fuller reasoned, here was both Old and New Testament support for his position.

A number of Johannine texts, however, plainly revealed that “true saving faith” is “enjoined [by the New Testament] upon unregenerate sinners.”³⁴ John 12:36, for instance, contains an exhortation of the Lord Jesus to a crowd of men and women to “believe in the light” that they might be the children of light. Working from the context, Fuller argued that Jesus was urging his hearers to put their faith in him. He is the “light” in whom faith is to be placed, that faith which issues in salvation (John 12:46). Those whom Christ commanded to exercise such faith, however, were rank unbelievers, of whom it is said earlier “they believed not on him” (John 12:37), and, in

³⁰ “Preface” to *Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation*, iv.

³¹ *Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation*, 37.

³² “Preface” to *Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation*, iii.

³³ *Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation*, 37-39.

³⁴ *Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation*, 40.

fact, Fuller pointed out on the basis of the quote of Isaiah 6:10 in John 12:40, “it seems” that these very same people whom Christ called to faith in him “were given over to judicial blindness, and were finally lost.”³⁵

Then there is John 6:29, where Jesus declares to sinners that “this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” Fuller pointed out that this statement is made to men who in the context are described as following Christ simply because he gave them food to eat (verse 26) and who are considered by Christ to be unbelievers (verse 36). Christ rebukes them for their mercenary motives and urges them to “labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life” (verse 27). Their response as recorded in John 6:28 is to ask Christ “what shall we do, that we might work the works of God?” His answer is to urge them to put their faith in him (verse 29). It is as if, Fuller said, Christ had told them, faith in him is “the first duty incumbent” upon them “without which it will be impossible...to please God.”³⁶

Again, in John 5:23 Fuller read that all men and women are to “honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.” Giving honour to the Son entails, Fuller reasoned, “holy hearty love to him” and adoration of every aspect of his person. It necessarily “includes faith in him.” Christ has made himself known as a supreme monarch, an advocate who pleads the cause of his people, a physician who offers health to the spiritually sick, and an infallible teacher. Therefore, honouring him in these various aspects of his ministry requires faith and trust.³⁷

Among the practical conclusions that followed from such Scriptural argumentation was that preachers of the gospel must passionately exhort their hearers to repent and commit themselves to Christ.³⁸ In the second edition, Fuller sharpened this emphasis, for he was more than ever convinced that there was “scarcely a minister amongst us”—that is, amongst the Calvinistic Baptist denomination—“whose preaching has not been more or less influenced by the lethargic systems of the age.”³⁹ Far too many of Fuller’s fellow Baptist ministers failed to imitate the

³⁵ *Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation*, 40.

³⁶ *Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation*, 40-43.

³⁷ *Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation*, 43-44.

³⁸ *Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation*, 163-172.

³⁹ *Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation (Works, 2:387)*.

preaching of Christ and the apostles who used to exhort the unconverted to immediate repentance and faith. For a variety of reasons, they regarded the unconverted in their congregations as “poor, impotent...creatures.” Faith was beyond such men and women, and could not be pressed upon them as an immediate, present duty. Fuller was convinced that this way of conducting a pulpit ministry was unbiblical and simply helped the unconverted to remain in their sin.⁴⁰ Without a doubt Fuller’s conclusion that ministers needed to press home repentance and faith as immediate duties upon all of their hearers was foundational to Carey’s later argument that this needed to take place not only in England but throughout the world.⁴¹ Chadwick Mauldin is surely right when he affirms that *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* was “at its heart a missionary document.”⁴²

“*The armies of the Lamb*”⁴³

There is a direct line from the publication of the *Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation* to Fuller’s whole-hearted involvement in the formation of what became the Baptist Missionary Society in October of 1792, which sent Carey to India in 1793, and Fuller’s subsequent service as secretary of that society until his death in 1815. The work of the mission consumed an enormous amount of Fuller’s time as he regularly toured the country, representing the mission and raising funds. On average he was away from home three months of the year. Between 1798 and 1813, for instance, he made five lengthy trips to Scotland for the mission as well as undertaking journeys to Wales and Ireland.⁴⁴ Consider one of these trips, that made to Scotland in 1805. In less than sixty days, Fuller travelled thirteen hundred miles and preached fifty sermons for the cause of the Baptist mission. He also carried on an extensive correspondence both to the missionaries on the field and to supporters at home. Finally, he supervised the selection of missionary appointees and sought to deal with troubles as they emerged on the field.

⁴⁰ *Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (Works, 2:387-393).

⁴¹ In Harry Boer’s words: “Fuller’s insistence on the duty of all men everywhere to believe the gospel...played a determinative role in the crystallization of Carey’s missionary vision” (*Pentecost and Missions*, 24). See also Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792-1992* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 12-13.

⁴² “Fullerism as opposed to Calvinism: A Historical and Theological Comparison of the Missiology of Andrew Fuller and John Calvin” (M.A. thesis. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010),

⁴³ *The Promise of the Spirit, the Grand Encouragement in Promoting the Gospel* (Works, 3:359).

⁴⁴ On Fuller’s trips to Scotland, see Dudley Reeves, “Andrew Fuller in Scotland”, *The Banner of Truth*, 106-107 (July/August 1972), 33-40.

In short, he acted as the pastor of the missionaries sent out.⁴⁵ The amount of energy and time this took deeply worried his friends. As Robert Hall, Jr. (1764-1831) put it in a letter to John Ryland, Jr.:

...if he [i.e. Fuller] is not more careful he will be in danger of wearing himself out before his time. His journeys, his studies, his correspondcies [*sic*] must be too much for the constitution of any man.⁴⁶

As he poured himself into the work of the Baptist Missionary Society, Fuller continued to refine his thinking about missions. Along with his re-thinking of the responsibility of both preachers and hearers of the gospel discussed above, there emerged a fresh perspective on the nature of the church. There is little doubt that Fuller wholly affirmed traditional Calvinistic Baptist thinking about the church. In that tradition the church is a body of people who have personally repented and exercised faith in Christ, and borne witness to this inner transformation by baptism.⁴⁷ But Fuller was also concerned to emphasize something else about the church.

When Fuller spoke of the local church after he had assumed the role of secretary of the mission his emphasis often fell on the church's responsibility to evangelize and indeed participate in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. As he wrote, for example, in 1806:

The primitive churches were not mere assemblies of men who agreed to meet together once or twice a week, and to subscribe for the support of an accomplished man who should on those occasions deliver lectures on religion. They were men gathered out of the world by the preaching of the cross, and formed into society for the promotion of Christ's kingdom in their own souls and in the world around them. It was not the concern of the ministers or elders only; the body of the people were interested in all that was done, and, according to their several abilities and stations, took part in it. Neither were they assemblies of heady, high-minded, contentious people, meeting together to argue on points of doctrine or discipline, and converting the worship of God into scenes of strife. They spoke the truth; but it was in love: they observed discipline; but, like an army of chosen

⁴⁵ Doyle L. Young, "Andrew Fuller and the Modern Mission Movement", *Baptist History and Heritage*, 17 (1982), 17-27.

⁴⁶ Letter to John Ryland, Jr., May 25, 1801 [cited Geoffrey F. Nuttall, "Letters from Robert Hall to John Ryland 1791-1824", *The Baptist Quarterly*, 34 (1991-1992), 127].

⁴⁷ See in this regard, Michael A. G. Haykin, "'Hazarding all for God at a clap': The Spirituality of Baptism among British Calvinistic Baptists", *The Baptist Quarterly*, 38 (1999-2000), 185-195.

men, it was that they might attack the kingdom of Satan to greater advantage. Happy were it for our churches if we could come to a closer imitation of this model!⁴⁸

Fuller certainly had no wish to abandon either the stress on doctrinal preaching for the edification of God's people or that on proper discipline, but he had rightly noted that the pursuit of these concerns to the exclusion of evangelism had produced in all too many eighteenth-century Calvinistic Baptist churches contention, bitter strife and endless disputes. These inward-looking concerns had to be balanced with an outward focus on the extension of Christ's kingdom.

Moreover, evangelism was not simply to be regarded as the work of only "the ministers or elders." The entire body of God's people were to be involved. This conception of the church is well summed up in another text, which, like the one cited above, compares the church of Christ to an army. "The true churches of Jesus Christ," he wrote five years before his death, "travail in birth for the salvation of men. They are the armies of the Lamb, the grand object of whose existence is to extend the Redeemer's kingdom."⁴⁹ Retaining the basic structure of earlier Baptist thinking about the church, Fuller has added one critical ingredient drawn from his reading about the life of the Church in the New Testament: the vital need for local Baptist churches to be centres of vigorous evangelism.

"I loved him"

Among the things that William Carey said when he heard of the death of Andrew Fuller were three simple words: "I loved him." Why do I love him and commend his writings to you? Not because he was perfect as a Christian, nor because I always agree with him in every theological jot and tittle. But I love him for three reasons.

First of all, he had that quality that is so necessary for solid pastoral ministry: theological balance. He was at once a zealous missionary theologian, as we have seen, and an ardent upholder of the doctrines of grace. As he wrote to John Ryland, Jr., shortly before his death: "I have preached and written much against the abuse of the doctrine of grace, but that doctrine is all my salvation

⁴⁸ *The Pastor's Address to his Christian Hearers, Entreating their Assistance in Promoting the Interest of Christ* (Works, 3:346).

⁴⁹ *Promise of the Spirit* (Works, 3:359).

and all my desire. I have no other hope than from salvation by mere sovereign, efficacious grace through the atonement of my Lord and Saviour.”

Second, Fuller had the ability to nurture and sustain deep, long-lasting, and satisfying friendships that enabled him and his friends to serve God powerfully in their generation. No great work for God is accomplished by men working in isolation.

Finally, he models for us what true Christian piety is all about: he built his life and thought on the Word of God—as he said in the first draft of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*: “O Lord, impress thy Truth upon my Heart with thine own Seal.” And he exemplified the great goal of Christian living, which is to live for the glory of the Triune God. As he once said: to “glorify God, and recommend by our example the religion of the meek and lowly Jesus, are the chief ends for which it is worthwhile to live.”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ See Haykin, *Armies of the Lamb*, 97-98.