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Andrew Fuller and Fullerism : A Study in Evangelical Calvinism

2. FULLER AND JOHN CALVIN

IN the previous article we traced the stages by which Fuller worked out his doctrine of salvation and noticed the main influences on his theological development. Before going on to give a detailed account of his theology there is one matter which deserves careful consideration, namely the relationship between "Fullerism" and Fuller's knowledge of the writings of John Calvin. This is the subject of the present article. It may well be asked, whether Fuller's rejection of hyper-Calvinism for an evangelical or missionary Calvinism was not in any way influenced by a study of Calvin's own writings. This seems to be the implication of an article on Fuller written to celebrate the bicentenary of his birth.¹ Its author, Dr. A. H. Kirkby, writes: "In thinking of Fuller as a Calvinist not enough attention has been given to his knowledge of John Calvin's writings. When the Kettering man's works are read with this in mind certain interesting conclusions may be formed. (i) He does not object to the label "Calvinist," providing it is used in terms of John Calvin. (ii) He defends Calvin and Calvinism, and treats the Genevan as authoritative, often at those points where he (Fuller) differed from the eighteenth century high Calvinism. (iii) Calvin's writings are quoted, (iv) his words are frequently echoed, and (v) his leading doctrines are expounded and defended."²

It is true that replying to Philanthropos Fuller said, "Though in some things I think differently from Calvin, yet . . . I agree with him in the main, particularly in the leading sentiments advanced in the former treatise (*The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*)."³ He also distinguished between *high* Calvinism which was "more Calvinistic than Calvin" and bordered on Antinomianism, *moderate* Calvinism which was "half Arminian," taught by Baxter and his followers, and *strict* Calvinism, which he reckoned as his own system.⁴ Though for the sake of convenience he accepted the label "Calvinist," he made it clear that he did not believe everything that Calvin taught, nor anything because he taught it.⁵ That Fuller's doctrine was generally and substantially in agreement with that of Calvin is not at all surprising. He was brought up in a strongly Calvinist tradition, and was moreover, by study, experience and reflection, convinced of the truth of Calvin's leading ideas. He rejected only the excrescences of Calvinism which in the eighteenth century were paralysing the spiritual life and effectiveness of the Church. That he should have read and even quoted passages from Calvin is not surprising either, especially as he became involved in

continual controversy after and arising from the publication of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*. Such quotations from and references to Calvin's writings, however, do not suggest any direct formative influence, so far that is, as the main ideas and emphases of Fuller's doctrine of salvation are concerned. They do not demand the verdict that he rejected the hyper-Calvinism of his day because it did not square with the teachings of Calvin himself.

Dr. Kirkby draws attention to eight references to the *Institutes*,⁶ quotations being in the main identical with Norton's translation, and to six other brief references to the writings of Calvin, mainly commentaries.⁷ Since three of the references to the *Institutes* are duplicated, we are left with five.

(i) The reference to *Institutes* II. viii, in Fuller's postscript to his *Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined* (1802), is to the effect that this chapter of the *Institutes* which is concerned with Calvin's exposition of the moral law, is enough in itself, to disprove Mosheim's contention that Calvin neglected the science of morals.

(ii) The third section of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* contains a quotation from *Institutes* III. ii. 33, giving Calvin's teaching that "the bare and outward declaration of the word of God ought to have largely sufficed to make it to be believed," but because of our blindness and stubbornness the enlightening of the Holy Spirit is necessary. Thus Fuller could enlist Calvin's support for his doctrine that it is our depravity only that renders the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit necessary, that is to say, it is not any *natural* impotency in us but our *moral* impotency which necessitates our regeneration. As we have seen, however, this was something which Fuller had already learned with the help of Edwards.

(iii) The reference to *Institutes* III. xi. 7, occurs in the *Conversations between Peter, James and John* (pub. 1806), relating to the controversy with Abraham Booth, and also in Fuller's *Exposition of Genesis* (1805). It is to the effect that we are justified by faith, not as a righteous act, or on account of any inherent virtue contained in it, but in respect of Christ, on whose righteousness it terminates. This again is something which Fuller had already learned from Edwards.

(iv) *Institutes* III. xi. 23 is one of the passages quoted twice, both times in connection with the controversy with Booth. Calvin taught in this passage that we are reckoned or accounted righteous in justification, the obedience of Christ being imputed to us *as if it were our own*.

(v) The citation of *Institutes* II. xvi. 10-11, about Christ's sufferings on the cross, also occurs twice, again both times in connection with the controversy with Booth about imputation and

substitution. Though Calvin believed that Christ "felt all the tokens of God when he is angry and punisheth," yet God was in no way at enmity with His Son, or angry with Him. The imputation of our sin to the Saviour was not therefore, according to Calvin, a "real and proper" imputation.

Of the other references, (i) one which occurs in the *Exposition of Genesis* (1805),⁸ is concerned with Calvin's translation of Psalm 105 : 18, and is therefore without theological significance.

(ii) A reference in Fuller's *Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*,⁹ to Calvin on Luke 6 : 27, is again practical rather than doctrinal.

(iii) Fuller in a discussion of the question of Judas' presence at or absence from the Last Supper, cited Calvin on Luke 22 : 21¹⁰. Calvin who believed that Judas was present, declined to use Luke 22 : 21 in support of his contention, since the order of words proved nothing as to the order of time.

(iv) Calvin's comment on the meaning of *περιποίησις* in Ephesians 1 : 14, is quoted in *The Reality and Efficacy of Divine Grace*,¹¹ written against Dan Taylor, as part of Fuller's argument for a limited atonement. This doctrine was not a distinctively "Fullerite" one, being one of the "Five Points" of Calvinism, accepted by ordinary and hyper-Calvinists alike. Neither Calvin's words nor Fuller's use of them bear any relation to the point that divided strict from hyper-Calvinists, namely the *sufficiency* of the atonement for the entire world.

(v) Calvin on John 3 : 16 is quoted in connection with the point mentioned above, the nature of the particularity of redemption.¹² Calvin like Fuller regarded the death of Christ, considered in itself, as affording an offer of salvation to sinners without distinction. The particularity of redemption was seen to consist in God's *design*, that is, in the sovereignty of its application. Fuller came to this opinion through the arguments of Dan Taylor, considered as always in the light of Scripture.¹³

(vi) The remaining quotation from Calvin, that on John 1 : 11-13, occurs in Fuller's *Strictures on Sandemanianism*,¹⁴ and concerns the relationship between faith and regeneration. It is used in support of Fuller's contention that faith is not a bare cold knowledge, and that regeneration is necessary to believing, a doctrine which his own experience, as well as his study of the Bible and Jonathan Edwards, forced him to hold.

Such then, are Fuller's references to and quotations from Calvin's writings. Some of them, as we have noticed, have no bearing on the question of whether or not Calvin's writings had any direct influence on Fuller's doctrine of salvation. Two interesting facts emerge concerning those that are relevant. (a) They relate to two subjects, the substitutionary aspect of Christ's death in relation to

the particularity of redemption, and the doctrine of imputation. (b) They occur at the time when Fuller was engaged in controversy with Abraham Booth on those very subjects.

Booth accused Fuller of denying the leading principles of Calvinism at those very points.¹⁵ It is not surprising therefore, that Fuller should have consulted Calvin to find out what in fact he did teach on those two subjects. The result was, that he discovered that it was Booth and those who thought like him, who differed from Calvin. So far as the question of particular redemption was concerned, this study of Calvin only confirmed what Fuller already believed. His mind was made up when he wrote his reply to Dan Taylor (1787). On the question of imputation, Fuller was less clear and more hesitant than on most other subjects. The controversy itself, it would seem, helped to clarify and finalise his ideas on the subject, and it is not impossible that Calvin's teaching was a deciding factor, though even here as we have already seen, his chief mentor was Jonathan Edwards.¹⁶

Apart from these references, Kirkby mentions a number of "echoes of words of Calvin,"¹⁷ in various places in Fuller's writings, which he thinks are significant. For instance their respective commentaries on Genesis have many things in common, particularly in the early chapters. Dr. Kirkby cites the following examples.

(a) Calvin commented on Genesis 1 : 26, that "Paul made this image to consist in righteousness and true holiness,"¹⁸ while Fuller who distinguished the image as partly natural and partly moral, said, "the latter consisted in righteousness and true holiness." It is difficult to see, however, why it should be supposed that Fuller was dependent on Calvin here. It would seem much more likely that he was aware of the same words in Ephesians 4 : 24. In any case, under the influence of this verse, the *imago Dei* was commonly described in identical language in confessions, commentaries and theological works.¹⁹

(b) They were in agreement about God's shutting the door of the ark. But so, too, were other commentators and expositors²⁰ Bunyan saw it as a mark of God's "distinguishing grace" as did Fuller, and also like him, found an allusion here to the final shutting in and out on the day of judgment.²¹ Matthew Henry on Genesis 7 : 16, said that the reason why the Lord shut Noah in, was "to secure him and keep him safe in the ark," also "to seclude all others, and keep them out for ever."²² Gill's comment was similarly that God shut him in "to keep out the waters and all within in safety; and shut out others."²³

(c) Fuller agreed with Calvin that the flood was a type of baptism.²⁴ Here again we need to realize that Calvin had no monopoly of this idea, which ultimately goes back in any case to I Peter 3 : 20-21. Edwards in his *History of Redemption*, for instance,

wrote that the salvation of Noah and his family by the ark was "a wonderful type of the redemption of Christ, of that redemption that is sealed by the baptism of water, and is so spoken of in the New Testament, as I Peter 3 : 20-21."²⁵ Edwards and Fuller both regarded the ark as a type of Christ, the hiding place of the Church. Calvin on the other hand made it a type of the Church, adding that nowhere else is there any security of salvation. It is a difference of emphasis rather than a fundamental difference of meaning, but one that hardly suggests dependence. There is indeed no reason to suppose any borrowing even from Edwards. It seems most probable that Fuller derived the idea from I Peter. Edwards made the water a type of Christ's blood; Fuller a type of God's wrath. Anyway it is not strictly true to say that Fuller regarded the flood as a type of baptism. He regarded both the flood and baptism as types of redemption in Christ.

(d) Calvin and Fuller agreed about the rainbow existing before it became a token of the Covenant.²⁶ This is another idea that was by no means confined to Calvin.²⁷ The question itself was raised by most expositors.²⁸ Fuller could have found it in Calvin; on the other hand he could have found it in Gill or Edwards, or even remembered it from Mr. Eve's sermons.

(e) The last of these so called "echoes" of Calvin mentioned by Dr. Kirkby is what he has described as "the most remarkable parallel between the sixteenth century Reformer and the eighteenth century Baptist."²⁹ It occurs in the first article of the Confession of Faith which Fuller offered the church at Kettering on October 7th, 1783. He claims that almost every word can be found in Calvin's commentary on Psalm 19, and has set out the two passages in parallel columns, so as to show the similarity. Words and phrases common to both are in italics.

FULLER

"When I consider the heavens and the earth, with their vast variety, it gives me 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 or refused to glorify him as God."

CALVIN

"When a man, from beholding and contemplating the heavens has been brought to acknowledge God he will learn also to reflect upon and to admire his wisdom and power . . . In the first verse, the Psalmist repeats one thing twice, according to his usual manner. He introduces the heavens as witnesses and preachers of the glory of God, attributing to the dumb creature a quality which,

strictly speaking does not belong to it, in order the more severely to upbraid men for their *in-gratitude*, if they should pass over so clear a testimony with unheeding ears . . .

When we behold the heavens we cannot but be elevated by the contemplation of them, to Him Who is their great Creator; and the beautiful arrangement, and wonderful variety . . . cannot but furnish us with an evident proof of His providence. Scripture, indeed, makes known to us the time and manner of the creation; but the heavens themselves, although God should say nothing on the subject, proclaims loudly and distinctly enough that they have been fashioned by his hands; and this in itself abundantly suffices to bear testimony to men of His glory. As soon as we acknowledge God to be the Supreme Architect Who has erected the beauteous fabric of the universe, our minds must necessarily be ravished with wonder at his infinite goodness, wisdom and power.

Although God should not speak a single word to men yet the orderly and useful succession of days and nights eloquently proclaims the glory of God and that there is now left to men no pretext for ignorance."

Three things may be said about this "remarkable parallel."

(1) The language is not identical. In fact it is no more than generally similar. (2) Such similarity of language and ideas as does exist, is no more than we might expect, from two persons writing about the same subject from much the same point of view. (3) The real similarity consists of the fact that there are two ideas common

to Calvin and Fuller : (a) that nature itself testifies to the existence of a God of infinite goodness, wisdom and power, who created and upholds all things, and (b) that even if there were no written revelation, man would by virtue of this revelation in creation, be without excuse for his unbelief.

A direct study of Calvin by Fuller need not be postulated in order to account for this similarity. His study of Scripture in itself is sufficient to explain it. Both ideas and the vocabulary used to express them were, moreover, part and parcel of the current coinage of Calvinist theology.³⁰ Even if it had been possible to show that the 1783 Confession showed signs of Calvin's influence, it would not necessarily have meant that "Fullerism" grew out of a study of Calvin, for the first article of the Confession was not concerned with Fuller's distinctive doctrines at all. However, there is no evidence of such influence. Indeed the only help which Fuller can be said to have derived from Calvin so far as the formulation of his doctrine of salvation was concerned, was that mentioned above, in connection with his understanding of imputation.

NOTES

¹ Article, "Andrew Fuller—Evangelical Calvinist," by A. H. Kirkby, in *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. xv, No. 5 (Jan. 1954), pp. 195-202.

² *Ibid.*, p. 197. This statement implies either (a) that Fuller's doctrine was substantially in agreement with that of Calvin, or (b) that "Fullerism" was the result of Fuller's study of Calvin's writings, and that having studied them he accepted Calvin's doctrine, repudiating the hyper-Calvinism which differed from it. The first is self-evident, or if it requires demonstration needs but little proof, since the only aspects of Calvinism which Fuller denied were its hyper-Calvinist excrescences. It must be assumed, therefore, that Dr. Kirkby intended the second implication.

³ Fuller, *Works*, ii. 189.

⁴ *Ibid.*, i. cxiv-v. See also Ryland, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

⁵ *Ibid.*, cxiv-v. See also Ryland, *op. cit.*, p. 369. One point at which Fuller disagreed with Calvin (though Calvin was not mentioned), was the interpretation of the parable of the Wheat and the Tares. See Calvin, *Institutes* IV. i. 13, and Fuller, *Works*, iv. 459. Fuller in opposition to the view of Calvin, stressed the fact that the field is the world, and not the Church, adding that the application of this principle to the Church, "would render all the rules of the gospel superfluous."

⁶ Fuller, *Works*, i. 332 (= *Institutes* II. viii), ii. 75 (= *Inst.* III. ii), ii. 505 (= *Inst.* III. xi. 7), ii. 505 (= *Inst.* III. xi. 23), ii. 508 (= *Inst.* II. xvi. 10-11), ii. 537 (= *Inst.* III. xi. 23), ii. 540 (= *Inst.* II. xvi. 10-11), iii. 86 (= *Inst.* xi. 7). T. Norton's translation (from the Latin) was the earliest English translation (1561).

⁷ There are in fact seven such references, viz. *Works*, ii. 316, ii. 401, ii. 548, iii. 214, iii. 468, v. 255, and v. 676. Two of these, however, quote the same passage in Calvin, viz. his comment on *John* 3. 16. They are ii. 548 and v. 676.

⁸ *Works*, iii. 214.

⁹ *Ibid.*, iii. 468.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, v. 255.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, ii. 316. Calvin's comment is, *περποιήσις*, which we render *the purchased possession* is not the kingdom of heaven, or a blessed immortality, but the church itself."

¹² *Ibid.*, ii. 548 and v. 676. One occurs in the Fuller-Booth controversy, the other in answer to a query about the extent of the love of God.

¹³ *vide* ii. 545-6. Fuller was relieved to find that all the old Calvinists placed the particularity of redemption in the sovereignty of its application. Probably he had in mind such works as Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, which he had certainly read (see ii. 65, ii. 67). Owen, for instance, in this work (IV. i.—p. 183 of new edition by J. I. Packer, London, 1959), speaks of the "dignity, worth, preciousness, and infinite value of the blood and death of Jesus Christ. . . . It was . . . the purpose and intention of God that his Son should offer a sacrifice of infinite worth, value, and dignity, sufficient in itself for the redeeming of all and every man, if it had pleased the Lord to employ it to that purpose," also of other worlds besides. Fuller refers to Owen's teaching here, in a letter to Ryland, in 1803 (ii. 542).

¹⁴ *Works*, ii. 401.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, ii. 547ff.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ii. 553. The chief but not the only one.

¹⁷ *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. xv, No. 5 (Jan. 1954), pp. 198-200.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 198. The reference in Fuller is iii. 8. Kirkby cites Calvin's *Commentary on Genesis*, Vol. i, p. 94. See also *Institutes*, I. xv. 4, where the image is said to consist in (a) knowledge, and (b) true righteousness and holiness.

¹⁹ e.g. *Westminster Confession*, ch. 4 ("Of Creation"), §2, says man "was endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness after his (i.e. God's) own image." The answer to Q. 17 of the *Larger Catechism* has it that God made men and women "after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness." See also answer to Q. 10 of the *Shorter Catechism*. Jonathan Edwards (on original sin), said that the spiritual image of God is "man's righteousness and true holiness," which in Scripture is called the "divine nature" (*Works*, i. 217). The Particular Baptist Confession of Faith (1677) says man was "made after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness" (ch. iv. §2). This confession, known as the Second London Confession, originally issued in 1677, second edition 1688, was received by the first Particular Baptist Assembly, Sept. 3-12, 1689, and re-issued 1699, 1719, 1720, and on numerous subsequent occasions. The text of the confession is to be found in E. B. Underhill's *Confessions of Faith and other Public Documents Illustrative of the History of the Baptist Churches of England in the Seventeenth Century*, London, 1854, W. J. McGlothlin's *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Philadelphia, 1910, and W. L. Lumpkin's *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Philadelphia, 1959. The General Baptist Orthodox Creed (1678) says man was "made after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness" (art. xi). The text of this confession too is to be found in Underhill, McGlothlin and Lumpkin.

²⁰ Calvin's *Genesis*, Vol. I, p. 272. See Fuller's *Works*, iii. 48, on Gen. 7.

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²¹ Bunyan's *Exposition of the first ten chapters of Genesis* (Offor, Vol. ii, p. 472).

²² Matthew Henry's *Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, i. 36 (3 vol. edn., London, 1846).

²³ Gill, *Exposition of the Old Testament* (4 vol. edn., London, 1852), Vol. i. 45.

²⁴ Calvin, *op. cit.*, i. 273, c.f. Fuller, *Works*, iii. 52. See also Fuller, iv.

598-9. "The salvation of Noah and his family by the ark was a figure of our salvation by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. . . . Baptism is a like figure. . . . It is another sign of the same thing."

²⁵ Edwards, *History of Redemption* (Part II. 2), Works, i. 541.

²⁶ Calvin, *op. cit.*, i. 299, cf. Fuller, *Works*, iii. 55, on Gen. 9. 13.

²⁷ These later expositors may of course have derived the idea from Calvin, but we are only concerned with whether or not Fuller derived the idea from Calvin. One of Calvin's frequent ideas also found in Fuller but which is not mentioned by Kirkby, is that of the labyrinth. See *Inst.* I. v. 12; I. vi. 1, I. vi. 3, for example. Fuller speaks of the "labyrinths of anti-christian errors and corruptions" (iii. 294), and the "maze of folly and impertinence" (iii. 556). The Scriptures are the criterion of the divine origin of a doctrine. "If we lose sight of this we shall soon be lost in the mazes of uncertainty" (iii. 569).

²⁸ Matthew Henry on *Genesis* 9. 12ff. (Vol. i, p. 42) says that it is likely that the rainbow "was seen in the clouds before, when second causes concurred, but it was never a seal of the covenant till now that it was made so by a divine institution." Gill (i. 53) raising the question whether the rainbow existed previously or not, said it is "not easily answered." He inclined to the view that it was a new thing. Edwards (*Works*, ii. 696) cited the author of *Revelation Examined with Candour*, as supposing that the rainbow was never seen before Noah saw it. He did not give his own view.

²⁹ *Baptist Quarterly* (Vol. xv, No. 5 (Jan. 1954), p. 199. For Fuller's Confession of Faith see Ryland, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-109. For Calvin, *Commentary on Psalms*, i. 308-9.

³⁰ The Second London Confession speaks of the "light of nature and the works of creation and providence" so far manifesting the "goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable." (Ch. 1, "Of the Holy Scriptures." Underhill, *op. cit.*, p. 179). It gives as Scripture references, *Rom.* 1. 19, 20, 21; 2. 14, 15; *Psalms* 19. 1, 2, 3. Chapter 4 of the same confession says the creation of the world was "for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness" (Underhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-7). This confession closely follows the Westminster and Savoy Confessions. Thomas Scott's *Commentary* says (on Psalm 19), "The heavens so declare the glory of God, and proclaim his wisdom, power, and goodness, that atheists, infidels, idolaters, and all ungodly men, will be forever left without excuse." (Vol. i., p. 776 of new edition, with introduction, etc., by William Symington). Page xix of the introduction cites Fuller as saying of this commentary: "I believe it exhibits more of the mind of the Spirit in the Scriptures than any other work of the kind extant." There is no suggestion, of course, that Fuller based the first article of his *Confession of Faith* on Scott's *Commentary*, as the commentary was not issued till 1788, appearing in various parts between that year and 1792. It is a case rather, of Fuller's language and ideas being part of the current coinage of Calvinist theology. In the next century C. H. Spurgeon in his exposition of Psalm 19, spoke of the "variety" of the heavens, and of their declaring the "power, wisdom and goodness of God" (Vol. i, p. 269 of 6 vol. edn. of *The Treasury of David*, London, 1950). Spurgeon also cited Anthony Burgess (1656), that the heavens discovered the wisdom, power, and goodness of God. Notice also art. 11 of the General Baptist Orthodox Creed, which teaches that the creation manifests God's "eternal power, wisdom, and goodness" (Underhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-2).

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