The Crucicentrism of Andrew Fuller (1754–1815)

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Introduction

After 2000 years, the cross is still relevant and controversial. In a recent article showing how suffering is connected to biblical service, Ajith Fernando argues that the cross is crucial to true Christian ministry. He shares that 'for Jesus, and for us [vocational ministers], doing God's will includes the Cross. The Cross must be an essential element in our definition of vocational fulfillment.' Yet, while some still hail the cross as foundational to the faith, others see it as an archaic symbol of needless brutality. Kathryn Tanner explains the perspective that some modern day womanists and feminists have regarding the cross.[1]

> It is true that obedience unto death is a marker of supreme dedication, but death itself is an impediment to the mission and not its positive culmination in any obvious way. If the mission of God continues, that is despite Jesus' death and not thanks to it. Rejection and death stand in the way of the mission and must be overcome in a resurrected life that moves through and beyond death. Insofar as the cross is simply the culminating indicator of the rejection of Jesus' mission in a world of sin, it would presumably have been better—a sign of the kingdom come—if the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus had never happened.[2]

For many of these feminists, a concern that the cross promotes violence persists. They see the cross as an interruption in the plan of God and not a central component of it.[3] Thus, despite him living over 250 years ago, the crucicentrism of Andrew Fuller's theology is both a relevant and necessary topic.

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[1] For a more complete picture of some Feminists' and Womanists' view of the cross, see J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 122–78.

[2] Kathryn Tanner, 'Incarnation, Cross, and Sacrifice: A Feminist-inspired Reappraisal,' *Anglican Theological Review,* vol 1 (2004), pp. 38–39.

[3] See Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad 1991), p. 93; Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), p. 102; Delores S. Williams, 'Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption,' in *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions* (ed. Paula M. Cooey, William R. Eakin and Jay B. McDaniel; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), pp. 1–14.

The importance of the cross for Fuller cannot be overstated.[4] For Fuller, the cross stood as the centrepiece of his theological web. Therefore, this article will reveal seven significances of the cross in Fuller's theology and then briefly evaluate the biblicity of his crucicentrism.

Suffering as a Backdrop for Fuller

On 6 February 1754, Andrew Fuller was born in Wicken, Cambridgeshire to Particular, non-conformist, Baptist parents.[5] While attending the Particular Baptist Church at Soham, Cambridgeshire, Fuller began to experience deep conviction, which led to his conversion in 1769. This conversion experience would leave a formative impression on Fuller that would later deeply affect his theology regarding the modern question of whether the gospel could be offered to the lost and whether it was the duty of the lost to respond to the gospel.

Not long after his conversion, Fuller's giftedness began to be recognised, which eventually led to him being chosen as the pastor of his church in May 1775. Fuller's pursuit of truth lead him to study the works of other Christian leaders like Jonathan Edwards, John Bunyan, John Gill, John Owen and many others. Though he studied and drew from the wisdom of others, everything had to pass through the purifying filter of God's word. 'Lord,' he proclaimed, 'Thou has given me a determination to take up no principle at second-hand; but to search for everything at the pure fountain of Thy word.'[6] This thought typified his life as a pastor and theologian. After serving for seven years in Soham, in 1782, he left to become the pastor of the Baptist church in Kettering, Northamptonshire, where he would faithfully remain until his death in 1815.

During his time as pastor in Kettering, Fuller would become a prolific writer and a formative theologian. Early in his ministry at Kettering, he would publish what could be described as his most important work, *The*

[4] List of some various quotes Fuller makes concerning the cross beyond those discussed in this paper. Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller* (ed. Andrew Gunton Fuller, Rev. Joseph Belcher; 3 vols; Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle, 1988), vol 1: pp. 141–42, 169, 185, 191, 194, 219, 243, 246, 275, 301–04, 310–17, 356, 412, 451, 454, 580, 597, 607, 653, 664–65, 671, 687, 691; vol. 2: pp. 213, 286, 407, 433, 504, 548, 616–17, 740–41; vol. 3: pp. 346, 529, 544, 546, 557, 562–64, 567, 624, 689–91, 732, 785–86, 800.

[5] Much of the information in this section was derived from Michael Haykin, 'Fuller, Andrew (1754–1815)' in *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* (ed. Timothy Larsen; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 241–44. For detailed accounts concerning the life of Fuller, see Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol 1: pp. 1–116; John Ryland, *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).

[6] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol 1: p. 20.

Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation, which he had hesitated in publishing for fear that it would cause a hindrance to the gospel.[7] This particular work would define much of his life and his ministry for in it he argued, as one holding to Particular Baptist convictions, against High-Calvinism that it was the duty of the lost to express faith in Jesus Christ.[8] Such a position was a substantial departure from the church in which he had come to faith in Christ. Fuller also assisted in the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society for the proclamation of the gospel throughout the world while pastor in Kettering. He served as the secretary of the mission and faithfully 'held the rope' for his co-labourer and friend William Carey until his own death in 1815.

Furthermore, Fuller was a man well acquainted with personal suffering. During Fuller's marriage to Sarah Gardin, eight of their eleven children died in infancy, and then Sarah died in 1792. In 1799, his close friend and fellow servant to the Baptist Missionary Society, Samuel Pearce, passed away.

As well as this personal tragedy, Fuller was assailed by both High-Calvinists and Arminians for *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*. Moreover, throughout his life, he served as an uncompromising apologist fighting against Deism, Sandemanianism, and Socinianism. The frenetic pace of his life and the tension of labouring faithfully as a pastor, mission secretary, and defender of the faith would take an emotional and physical toll.

Thus, it is clear why Fuller would have an affinity for the cross. His sufferings helped provide a natural link in his experiential identification with the sufferings of his Saviour; however, make no mistake, while experience may have provided a deeper identification with Christ, his theological convictions were firmly seated in his understanding of Scripture.

Fuller's Crucicentrism

Fuller's conversion experience coupled with his experiences of suffering interpreted through the lens of Scripture, established the cross as the anchor of his soul. As such, in reading his works, seven significances of the cross permeate his theology.

[7] Phil Roberts, 'Andrew Fuller,' *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition* (ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2001), pp. 34–51. To see more regarding Fuller's impact in this regard see Robert William Oliver, 'The Emergence of A Strict and Particular Baptist Community Among the English Calvinistic Baptists 1770–1850' (PhD Thesis, London Bible College, 1986), pp. 113–64.

[8] For more concerning the influence of Fuller regarding the modern question see Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Studies in English Dissent* (Weston Rhyn: Quinta Press, 2002), pp. 207–30.

First, the crucifixion is the crucial event that defines and encapsulates Christian doctrine without which there is no gospel. In a letter written showing the errors of Socinianism, Fuller argued that 'the doctrine of the cross is the central point in which all the lines of evangelical truth meet and are united. What the sun is to the system of nature, that the doctrine of the cross is to the system of the gospel; it is the life of it.'[9] Thus, for Fuller, the cross was not just part of the gospel, but at the heart of it.

This central emphasis is abundantly evident throughout Fuller's works. It is important to note up front that he essentially understood the cross as 'the Creator's taking upon him human nature, and dying for our sins' and it serves as 'the most powerful means of impressing the minds of the heathen, and of turning their hearts to God.'[10] This thought provides the framework for understanding its centrality in his theological system. In his third letter on systematic divinity, Fuller chose to begin with this weight-bearing doctrine upon which his entire frameworks rested. He wrote,

> I wish to begin with the centre of Christianity—*the doctrine of the cross*, and to work round it; or with what may be called the heart of Christianity, and to trace it through its principal veins or relations, both in doctrine and practice…The whole of the Christian system appears to be *presupposed by* it, *included in* it, or to *arise from* it: if, therefore, I write any thing, it will be on this principle.[11]

So, did such statements mean that Fuller thought it was only the doctrine of the cross that needed to be believed? No, but he believed that the doctrine of the cross when rightly understood incorporates all other essentialities. He explained, 'It is not meant, by these brief descriptions of the gospel, that there is no other truth necessary to be believed; but that the doctrine of the cross, properly embraced, includes all others, or draws after it the belief of them.'[12] This single point—the essential nature of the cross to the gospel—is the natural spring of his theological fountain from which many would drink. Every other point provided below is predicated upon this deep conviction of Fuller's.

Second, the cross brings alive both Old and New Testaments. Without the cross, their message lacks importance and meaning. For Fuller, Jesus is the uniform figure of the Bible. Such a concept should not be taken to mean that Fuller believed that Christ should be read into every passage or seen behind every word. Such was not the case; however, while Christ

[9] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 2: p. 182.
[10] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 2: p. 128.
[11] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 1: p. 690, italics original.
[12] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 3: p. 546. See also vol. 1: p. 190.

should not be read into every passage, one should also not ignore how the Word of God finds its beginning and end in the eternal Word. He declared,

> Every Divine truth bears a relation to him [Jesus]: hence the doctrine of the gospel is called 'the truth as it is *in Jesus*.' 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. The evil nature of sin is manifested in his cross, and the lost condition of sinners in the price at which our redemption was obtained. Grace, mercy, and peace are in him. The resurrection to eternal life is through his death.[13]

Therefore, since the Scriptures find their beginning and end in Jesus, it should be no surprise that the cross, the death of the one in whom the Scriptures find their meaning, should be the focal point of the biblical narrative. While expounding upon Philippians 3:10, Fuller boldly proclaimed,

> The death of Christ is a subject of so much importance in Christianity as to be essential to it. Without this, the sacrifices and prophecies of the Old Testament would be nearly void of meaning, and the other great facts recorded in the New Testament divested of importance. It is not so much a member of the body of Christian doctrine as the life-blood that runs through the whole of it. The doctrine of the cross is the Christian doctrine.[14]

That is why the whole of Scripture must be studied through the lens of the cross. The cross helps in providing a more accurate understanding of the message of Scripture and provides the greatest fruit in the life of the student of the Scriptures. In his Meditation on Heavenly Glory, Fuller wrote,

> If we prefer the study of other things to the doctrine of the cross, even of those things which in subservience to this are lawful, we shall pursue a barren track. We may feed our natural powers, but our graces will pine away. It is by the study of Christ crucified that our souls will be enriched; for this is the medium through which God delights to communicate of his fullness.[15]

Third, the cross justifies God as both enforcer of law and extender of grace. Throughout the Bible a great mystery exists: how can God be both just in his exercise of holy wrath against sin and yet extend grace

[13] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 1: p. 704, italics original.
[14] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 1: p. 310. See also vol. 2: p. 181.
[15] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 2: p. 732.

in having a loving relationship with sinful man? With the fall and the enactment of the curse, humanity was exiled from the garden, and thus, from intimate fellowship with their creator. Immediately upon being exiled from the garden, sacrifices appear (Genesis 4:3–4) and these sacrifices serve throughout the Old Testament as a means of provision for sin. The only problem was that this provision was insufficient. Hebrews 9:22 says that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin, yet at the same time, the blood of bulls and goats (i.e. the Old Testament sacrificial system) is declared to be insufficient to remove this penalty of sin (Hebrews 9:13; 10:4). Thus, in the cross, Fuller saw that the wrath of God was satisfied and grace was extended to the world.[16]

The cross was where the Lamb of God became the propitiation for sins (Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). The cross was the visible demonstration for all of history where the mysterious reconciliation between the justice of God and the mercy of God was revealed for all in the physical and spiritual realm to behold.

> By the blood of Christ, as shed upon the cross, atonement was made, sin was expiated, and a way opened for God to draw near to the sinner, and the sinner to God. In punishing transgressors, displeasure is expressed against transgression. In substitutionary sacrifices, displeasure was expressed against transgression; but, withal, mercy to the transgressor… In the sacrifice of Christ, both these sentiments were expressed in the highest degree…In proportion as God's own Son was dear to him, and, as possessed of Divine dignity, estimable by him, such were the hatred of sin and the love to sinners manifested in smiting him.[17]

But, the fact that the cross satisfies the Law and extends grace to the sinner does not necessitate that the sinner is delivered. Faith must be exercised for the reception of this salvation.[18] The redemption provided by Christ through the cross is not applied in ignorance to its recipient. 'The finished work of Christ upon the cross did not supersede the necessity of our being active in overcoming evil.'[19] In a letter exposing the errors of Sandemanianism, this point was made as Fuller clarified,

> Yet in this strain the eulogists of Mr. Sandeman go on to declaim to this day. 'His main doctrine,' says one, 'appears to be this: the bare work of Jesus Christ, which he finished on the cross, is sufficient, without a deed or a thought on the part of man, to present the chief of sinners spotless before God.' If by *sufficient*…it be meant to deny that any deed

[16] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 2: p. 568.
[17] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 1: p. 302.
[18] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 2: p. 618.
[19] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 1: p. 315.

> or thought on the part of man is necessary *in the established order of things*, or that sinners *are* presented spotless before God without a deed or a thought on the subject, it is very false, and goes to deny the necessity of faith to salvation; for surely no man can be said to believe in Christ without thinking of him.[20]

This point of the paradox of the cross and the need to personally exercise faith to experience its benefits brings up the issue of Fuller's view of the atonement. To what extent is the atonement universal and to what extent is it limited?[21] Does the paradoxical provision of the cross imply a universality to his view of the atonement? Well, the answer to that question is, in a sense, both yes and no.

Fuller viewed the atonement as universally sufficient and particularly applied.[22]

> I know not but that there is the same objective fulness [*sic*] and sufficiency in the obedience and sufferings of Christ for the salvation of sinners as there is in the power of the Holy Spirit for their renovation; both are infinite; yet both are applied under the direction of infinite wisdom and uncontrollable sovereignty…It is allowed that the death of Christ has opened a way whereby God can consistently with his justice forgive any sinner whatever, who returns to him by Jesus Christ. If we were to suppose, for argument's sake, that all the inhabitants of the globe should thus return, it is supposed not one soul need be sent away for want of sufficiency in Christ's death to render his pardon and acceptance consistent with the rights of justice.[23]

So while the work of the cross is sufficient to save the world, the benefits of the cross are experienced particularly by those who believe.[24]

Fourth, and similar to point three, the cross unveils the heinousness of sin while extending hope to the sinner. The evil of sin is revealed in the cross as in no other way throughout history, and in doing so, it also reveals the cure for the cursed disease.

> By the cross of Christ, it [the gospel] exhibits the evil of sin in stronger colours than all the curses of the law could paint it; and so has a tendency, in the hand of the Holy Spirit, to convince the world of sin. Nor is this all:

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[20] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 2: p. 570, italics original. See also vol. 2: p. 587.
[21] For a more complete answer to this questions see Jeremy Pittsley, 'Christ's Absolute Determination to Save: Andrew Fuller and Particular Redemption,' *Eusebia*, vol IX (2008) pp. 146–58.
[22] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 2: pp. 374, 488–511, 709–10.
[23] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 2: p. 489.
[24] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 2: p. 302.

> it exhibits a Saviour to the guilty soul, to keep him from despair, which, at the same time, tends to conquer his heart with a view of God's free and self-moved goodness.[25]

The cross portrays the nature of sin, the penalty of sin, and the need to be rid of sin. '[T]he doctrine of the cross may itself be the means of convincing us of the evil of sin.'[26] In his seventh letter on systematic divinity, he said, 'The evil nature of sin is manifested in his cross, and the lost condition of sinners in the price at which our redemption was obtained.'[27]

In addition to showing the horror of sin, the cross serves as the source of hope for sinners. This reality is why, in a letter written to young ministers concerning the subject matter of sermons, Fuller pressed the point that for a sermon to be a 'gospel sermon' it must contain the preaching of salvation by the death of Christ. Without that central element, a sermon cannot be considered a true evangelical sermon. He argued, 'A sermon, therefore, in which this doctrine [of the cross] has not a place, and I might add, a prominent place, cannot be a gospel sermon. It may be ingenious, it may be eloquent; but a want of the doctrine of the cross is a defect which no pulpit excellence can supply.'[28] Does this mean that every sermon must be about the cross explicitly? Certainly not. He would continue to explain:

> There is a rich variety in the sacred writings, and so there ought to be in our ministrations…All I mean to say is, that as there is a *relation* between these subjects and the doctrine of the cross, if we would introduce them in a truly evangelical manner, it requires to be *in that relation*. I may establish the moral character and government of God; the holiness, justice, goodness, and perpetual obligation of the law; the evil of sin; and the exposedness of the sinner to endless punishment; but if I have any other end in view than, by convincing him of his lost condition, to make him feel the need of a Saviour, I cannot be said to have preached *the gospel*…[29]

Notice also that he spoke about preaching on a variety of topics, including damnation, but he stated that to do so without the intention of making the hearer feel their need for a Saviour was to have missed preaching the gospel. Such remarks highlight the richness of his view of the cross and help the reader to see his distaste for utilising the cross as a source of condemnation without a beckoning to repentance. The cross was not merely to show the damned that they are damned, but it was to

[25] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 2: p. 487.
[26] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 2: p. 391. See also vol. 3: p. 654.
[27] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 1: p. 704.
[28] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 1: p. 716.
[29] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 1: p. 716, italics original. See also vol. 1: p. 412.

show the damned that provision for sin has been made and to beckon all who will to come and believe on the Son who was lifted up in the wilderness (John 3:14–16).

Fifth, the cross serves to save and to sanctify the believer. The cross was not just sufficient to save someone from hell, but was intended also to communicate the terms of discipleship.[30]

> In receiving Christ, and salvation through him, we receive a doctrine that strikes at the very root of depravity. 'The Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil;' he, therefore, that receives him must thenceforth be at variance with them. We are not only justified, but sanctified, by the faith that is in him. The doctrine of the cross, while it gives peace to the conscience, purifies the heart. There is not a principle in it but what, if felt and acted upon, would cause the world to be dead to us, and us unto the world.[31]

Thus in the cross, both a dying and a birthing of life exists.[32] In the cross, one dies to self and is born again in new life to Christ. In describing his conversion experience in his memoirs, Fuller revealed, 'But, having found rest for my soul in the cross of Christ…I now knew experimentally what it was to be dead to the world by the cross of Christ, and to feel a habitual determination to devote my future life to God my Saviour, and from this time considered the vows of God as upon me.'[33] Additionally, the reality of the sufferings of Jesus on the cross helps sustain the believer through their own difficulties.

> Where, but in the gospel, will you find relief under the innumerable ills of the present state? This is the well-known refuge of Christians. Are they poor, afflicted, persecuted, or reproached? They are led to consider Him who endured the contradiction of sinners, who lived a life of poverty and ignominy, who endured persecution and reproach, and death itself, for them; and to realise a blessed immortality in prospect.[34]

Sixth, the cross increases godly sorrow while liberating the believer to service.[35] The paradox of the cross is further seen in this point. In the cross, the believer growing in grace has an increased awareness of godly sorrow towards sin and its consequences while at the same time more vividly

[30] Fuller, *Complete Works,* vol. 1: pp. 128, 150, 658; 3:415.
[31] Fuller, *Complete Works,* vol. 1: p. 275.
[32] This picture of death and life through the cross is possibly most vividly seen in his conversation concerning baptism. Fuller, *Complete Works,* vol. 3: p. 341.
[33] Fuller, *Complete Works,* vol. 1: p. 6.
[34] Fuller, *Complete Works,* vol. 2: pp. 52–53.
[35] Fuller, *Complete Works,* vol. 2: p. 359; vol. 3: p. 549.

understanding the freedom through grace which they have received, being more equipped to serve gladly. Thus, the cross demonstrates the heinousness of their sin and the riches of God's grace. It convicts them and encourages them simultaneously. Nowhere is this point seen more vividly in Fuller's work than in his exposition of the book of Genesis when he spoke of Joseph's revelation of his identity and the mercy extended to his brothers. He explained first that the reality of the grace received 'would not abate their godly sorrow, but rather increase it: it would tend only to expel the sorrow of the world, which worketh death.'[36] In other words, it was a liberating conviction, not a destructive conviction. Later on the same topic, he wrote,

> I cannot enlarge on particulars; suffice it to say, the more he [a sinner] views the doctrine of the cross, in which God hath glorified himself, and saved a lost world by those very means which were intended for evil by his murderers, the better it will be with him. He shall not be able to think sin on this account a less, but a greater, evil; and yet he shall be so armed against despondency as even to *rejoice* in what God hath wrought, while he *trembles* in thinking of the evils from which he has escaped.[37]

The knowledge of the grace received does not dismiss godly sorrow; rather, it increases it. The knowledge of the forgiving grace of the blood-stained cross does not create an atmosphere whereby the recipient of the grace can continue in sin so that the grace may abound; instead, knowledge of such grace brings about a deep awareness of one's sin and the great sacrifice given in the forgiving of it. Grace is not a dismissal of sin; it is a payment, a covering, for sin.

Seventh, the cross is a means of turning back a backslidden Christian. The cross is not just sufficient in saving and sanctifying believers, but on the occasion that a believer should wander from the fold, Fuller saw the solution to their dilemma to be the message of the cross. That same message that brought them into the family of God was the same message they need in returning to faithful service. The cross alone is the means of recovery, and the cross alone provides a covering for all sin.[38]

> Having, through the power of alarm, desisted from the open practice of sin, many have laboured to derive comfort from this consideration, without confessing their sin on the head, as it were, of the gospel sacrifice. Their sins may be said rather to have been *worn* away from their remembrance, by length of time, than *washed* away by the blood of the cross. But this is not recovery: the hurt, if healed, is healed slightly;

[36] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 3: p. 177.
[37] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 3: p. 177, italics original.
[38] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 3: pp. 652–59.

> and may be expected to break out again. The same way in which, if we be true Christians, we first found rest to our souls, must be pursued in order to recover it; namely, 'repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.'[39]

In the case that one feared that their sin was the sin of unpardonable offense, Fuller assured them that so long as they would repent and confess their sin, forgiveness through the cross was available. 'If, therefore, we confess our sin with contrition, we may be certain it is not unpardonable, and that we shall obtain mercy through the blood of the cross.'[40]

Was He Right?

Was Fuller right that the central message of the Bible is the cross? While an evaluation of all of Fuller theological assessments regarding the cross, such as the scope of the atonement, is too great a discussion to be had here, this question regarding the centrality of the cross to the Bible will be briefly examined and answered.

Two points should immediately be noted. First, the fact that various doctrines presented in Scripture are intrinsically connected is not being contested. Second, by arguing for an emphasis of the cross, Fuller is not arguing that the Bible does not present other doctrines aside from the cross or that there is not more to know; rather, he is arguing that without the cross these other doctrines and thoughts lose their value and meaning.

So, is he right? Yes, Fuller was correct in his view that the cross is central to the message and doctrines of the Bible. The meta-narrative of the Scriptures is the Kingdom of God.[41] In conjunction with this central theme, the central figure is the King before whom every knee will bow, Christ Jesus.[42] Thus, the central theme is the Kingdom and the central figure is the King, but the central means by which the King establishes his kingdom is the cross.[43] This idea is in part why King Jesus is referred to as the crucified one.[44]

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[39] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 3: p. 652, italics original.
[40] Fuller, *Complete Works*, vol. 3: p. 653.
[41] 2 Sam 7:12–6; 1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chr 20:6; Ps 145:1, 10–3; Jer 10:6–10; Dan 4:34–7; Obad 21; Zeph 3:15; Zech 9:9; Matt18:23–5; Luke 9:1–2, 6; 1 Cor 15:24–8; etc.
[42] Ps 2:5–12; Isa 45:22–3; John 12:13; 1 Cor 15:23–8; Phil 2:9–11; etc.
[43] Rom 14:9; Gal 1:4; Col 1:19–20; 2:13–5; 1 Cor 1:11–8; Eph 2:14–6; etc.
[44] 1 Cor 1:23; Gal 3:1; etc. For an interesting and detailed examination of cruciformity see Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

Forgiveness of sins only comes through the shedding of the blood of the perfect Lamb of God,[45] and the crucifixion is the means by which that blood was shed, accomplishing and applying the redemption by which saints are purchased and placed into the kingdom.[46] That is in part why the cross is at times used synonymously with the good news.[47] Moreover, the cross is so intricately connected to the gospel that the apostle Paul could proclaim that an enemy of the cross was another way of describing an enemy of the gospel.[48]

Now the question at hand is whether or not Fuller's claim of the centrality of the cross to the message and doctrines of Scripture is correct, and the answer to that question, as briefly evidenced above, is yes. Therefore, one could easily argue that the central message of the Scriptures is the Kingdom of God, and appropriately so; however, what Fuller rightly focuses in on is that it is a kingdom established through the cross. Thus, it is appropriate to talk of the preeminence of the doctrine of the cross.

Conclusion

For Fuller, the cross was the sum of the gospel, the means of redemption, and the central focus of all of biblical history. The cross permeates Fuller's works. His thoughts regarding the crucicentric nature of the Scriptures are pointed, powerful, and appropriate. Scarcely a page in his works can be read without a reminder of the humility of Jesus in dying for sinners. Everything to which Fuller held hung in the balance by this unyielding belief of the cross.

Though the cross may still find itself the topic of scorn and criticism, the attacks are nothing new. The same arguments were posed in Fuller's time, which is why his works still provide valuable insights and relevant answers. Thus, if Ajith Fernando's assessment that '[t]he Cross must be an essential element in our definition of vocational fulfillment'[49] is correct, then maybe it is time that pastors and church leaders acquainted themselves with a thoughtful theologian named Andrew Fuller.

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[45] Gen 22:7–8; John 1:29; Heb 2:17; 9:13–4, 22; 10:4, etc.
[46] 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:24; 3:18; etc.
[47] 1 Cor 1:17–8, 23
[48] Phil 3:18
[49] Ajith Fernando, 'To Serve is to Suffer,' *Christianity Today* (August 2010) p. 32.