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# THE INFLUENCE OF JONATHAN EDWARDS ON ANDREW FULLER

THOMAS J. NETTLES

Fuller and his entire circle of friends found within Jonathan Edwards the key to a peculiar theological perplexity that vexed their souls and virtually the entire Particular Baptist fellowship. Fuller made sure the world knew this by his many quotes of Edwards, his unabashed integration of Edwards' ideas into his own major works, and his open testimony to the usefulness of Edwards ideas by letter and diary, and memoir. An example of such open indebtedness comes in the letter that Fuller wrote to Edwards' grandson, Timothy Dwight. Fuller wrote with a grace and deference we should covet to imitate for the purpose of declining an honorary title from Yale College. At the same time he expressed his great gratitude for Edwards. "The writings of your grandfather, President Edwards, and of your uncle, the late Dr. Edwards," so Fuller titled both the great Edwards and his son, "have been food to me and many others." Carey, Marshman, Ward, and Chamberlain, missionaries of the Baptist Mission Society, all "greatly approve of them." In particular, "The President's sermons on justification have afforded me more satisfaction on that important doctrine than any human performance which I have read."<sup>1</sup>

Jonathan Edwards had a great impact as an uncompromising Calvinist who supported the First Great Awakening in America. In addition, he became its foremost spiritual analyst. Theologically and philosophically he presented impeccably coherent and compelling arguments for the congruence of man's helpless responsibility with God's just sovereignty. His thickly reasoned, virtually impregnable and irresistible locomotive

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of theological metaphysics cleared the way for a biblically complete, theologically sound view of true spirituality. Here was a thinker around whom Fuller and his friends could rally. At the funeral sermon for Fuller, his friend John Ryland affirmed, "If I knew I should be with Fuller tomorrow, instead of regretting that I had endeavored to promote that religion delineated by Jonathan Edwards in his *Treatise on Religious Affections* and in his *Life of David Brainerd*, I would recommend his writing... with the last effort I could make to guide a pen."<sup>2</sup> Edwards provided a biblically consistent theology that did not merely tolerate but demanded practical response.

### THE CONTEXT

By 1750, Jonathan Edwards, the great preacher/theologian/philosopher of the First Great Awakening had been dismissed from his church in Northampton. Showing the reality of his human frame, Edwards remarked, "But I am now, as it were thrown upon the wide ocean of the world, and know not what will become of me, and my numerous and chargeable family."<sup>3</sup> His pastoral concern over the reality of his parishioners' spiritual experiences prompted his marvelously perceptive book, *Religious Affections*. Brainerd had died in 1747 in his home. Edwards' daughter Jerusha had followed him soon thereafter. The publication of Brainerd's journal had just been consummated in 1749.

The controversy over communion that led to Edwards' forced departure prompted, not only a crisis in his family, but a deep concern in Edwards' mind for the spiritual safety of his former flock. Not only had disagreement over the proper recipients of communion been controversial, Edwards lamented the presence of a general doctrinal carelessness, particularly concerning the "doctrines of grace." He felt they "would be more likely to be thorough in their care to settle a minister of principles contrary to mine, as to terms of communion, than to settle one that is sound in the doctrines of grace." He feared that his first cousin, Joseph Hawley, was a "man of Lax principles in religion, falling in, in some essential things, with Arminians." The problems posed by the merely formal church membership at Northampton caused Edwards to fear "the utmost danger, that the younger generation will be carried away with Arminianism, as with a flood." Subsequent to the finalization of his dismissal June 22, 1750, Edwards wrote to a minister friend in Scotland, July 1750, saying "Arminianism, and Pelagianism, have made a strange progress in a few years."<sup>4</sup>

In his farewell sermon to his congregation he warned: "The progress they have made in the land, within this seven years, seems to have been vastly greater, than at any time in the like space before: and they are still prevailing and creeping into almost all parts of the land... and if these principles should greatly prevail in this town, as they very lately have done in another large town I could name, formerly greatly noted for religion, and for so long a time, it will threaten the spiritual and eternal ruin of this people, in the present and future generations."<sup>5</sup>

The large town he could name, was of course, Boston, and among the clergy that he detected moving in the direction of Arminianism, or worse, were Charles Chauncy, Jonathan Mayhew, and Ebenezer Gay. Edwards saturated himself in their writings and in the sources from which they were deriving their gradual departures from orthodoxy and was determined to know their system thoroughly from its branches to its deepest roots. His efforts to lay the axe to the roots of this destructive system led to the production of at least four major theological treatises.

By 1753 the book *A careful and strict Enquiry into the modern prevailing notions of that Freedom of Will, Which is supposed to be essential to Moral Agency, Vertue and Vice, Reward and punishment, Praise and Blame* was ready for publication reaching the public the next year. In 1758 he published his treatise on *Original Sin*. Already drafted by 1755 but not published until 1765 were companion treatises entitled *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World* and *On the Nature of True Virtue*. In these he presses to uncover the roots of true morality and true worship. John Smith makes this pertinent and summarizing observation about the later of these that applies well to all of them: "The parallel between what Edwards was doing in finding distinguishing marks of truly gracious affections in the appraisal of heart religion and what he is doing here in the delineation of true virtue is clear. In both cases he aimed to set forth what goes beyond the capacity of nature and the natural man and thus to delineate the new dimension represented in the work of the Spirit as the power of grace."<sup>6</sup>

Arminians argued that neither true sin, true faith, nor true virtue could exist if any arose from a predisposing bias. Some sphere of human freedom must exist in which choice was contingent, the disposition indifferent, and the will self-determining. Edwards argued that such a case was impossible philosophically, unbiblical, fallacious as a theological construct, and destructive of the moral texture of all human action. If true contingency exists, the God of the Bible is driven out of the

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world. In making his case that every act of the will is the concretion of some sphere of moral predisposition, he argued for the vital necessity of an immediate, effectual, sovereign, gracious work of God for spiritual life and salvation.

One of the most influential elements of his discussion, especially for Baptist thought, appeared in *The Will* Section 4, part 1 entitled “Of the distinction of Natural and Moral Necessity and Inability” Edwards focused on a captivating idea.

What has been said of natural and moral necessity, may serve to explain what is intended by natural and moral inability. We are said to be naturally unable to do a thing, when we can't do it if we will, because what is most commonly called nature don't allow of it, or because of some impeding defect or obstacle that is extrinsic to the will; either in the faculty of understanding, constitution of body, or external objects. Moral inability consists not in any of these things; but either in the want of inclination; or the strength of a contrary inclination; or the want of sufficient motives in view. to induce and excite the act of the will, or the strength of apparent motives to the contrary. Or both these may be resolved into one; and it may be said in one word, that moral inability consists in the opposition or want of inclination. For when a person is unable to will or choose such a thing, through a defect or motives, or prevalence of contrary motives, tis the same thing as his being unable through the want of an inclination, or the prevalence of a contrary inclination, in such circumstances, and under the influence of such views.

After providing examples of moral inability, both negative and positive, Edwards summarized the issue. “Therefore, in these things to ascribe a nonperformance to the want of power or ability, is not just; because the thing wanting is not a being able, but a being willing. There are faculties of mind, and capacity of nature, and everything, sufficient, but a disposition: nothing is wanting but a will.”

While Edwards aimed these ideas at the Arminians to correct their tendency toward a humanly generated salvation, his greatest help for Fuller in particular, and the Baptists in general, came in their conflict over Hyper-Calvinism as expressed in the “Modern Question.”

## ENGLISH DISSENTERS' PROBLEM

What began with Joseph Hussey, a Congregational minister, in *God's Operations of Grace but No Offers of His Grace* (1707) and was reinforced by Lewis Wayman in *A Further Enquiry after Truth*, came into Baptist life principally through John Brine. He contended that the divine word gives no warrant for unregenerate men to consider repentance from sin and faith in Christ as their duty. As a corollary, no minister had warrant to call on the unregenerate to repent and believe. "This becomes the duty of Men," he explained, "when they have Warrant from the divine Word, to consider God as their Redeemer in Christ, which no unregenerate Men have any Warrant to do." A sinner must know he is elect, before he has warrant to believe.

This precise point handcuffed Andrew Fuller in his lengthy struggle with the condition of his soul before God. He felt himself a sinner and under condemnation, justly so, and felt real satisfaction that salvation only was to be found in Christ. During the depths of this struggle, however, he was not "aware that any poor sinner had a warrant to believe in Christ for the salvation of his soul, but supposed there must be some kind of qualification to entitle him to do it. Yet I was aware," he wrote, "that I had no qualifications." When he finally dared, even with no supposable warrant, to cast himself before Christ for mercy, he found complete satisfaction and drank in the gospel "as cold water is imbibed by a thirsty soul." He believed that he should have found this rest sooner if he "had not entertained the notion of my having no warrant to come to Christ without some previous qualification."<sup>7</sup>

Fuller summarized this theological state of affairs in a letter to Archibald McLean written in 1796. The letter appeared to the public for the first time twenty years later after the death of Fuller in the *Evangelical Magazine and Theological Review*. He reported on the growing attempts of the English Baptists to build up the churches in doctrine and discipline. "Till of late," he told McLean, "I conceive there was such a portion of erroneous doctrine and false religion among us that if we had carried matters a little farther we should have been a very dunghill in society."<sup>8</sup>

John Ryland, feeling just as strongly as Fuller, described with less vivid imagery how this had affected English Baptists.

The same idea was spreading, faster than we were aware, among our churches also: the ministers might distinguish between repentance and faith, and other internal duties; allowing the latter to be

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required, while they scrupled exhorting men to the former; but had things gone on a little longer in the same direction, we should soon have lost sight of the essence of duty, and of the spirituality of the divine law; and consequently men would have been treated, as though before conversion they were fallen below all obligation, to any thing spiritually good; and as though after conversion they were raised above all obligation, to any thing more than they were actually inclined to perform. Thus inclination would have been confined to the outward conduct, the turpitude of sin unspeakably lessened, and grace proportionably eclipsed, both as to the pardon of sin, and as to the application of salvation to the soul.”<sup>9</sup>

### BAPTISTS IN ENGLAND DISCOVER EDWARDS

In 1775, Robert Hall, of Arnsby, had recommended to Fuller that he read Jonathan Edwards’ *Freedom of the Will*. Clearly, Hall himself had been greatly helped by Edwards in seeing invitations to sinners as entirely consistent with strictest Calvinism. In *Help to Zion’s Travelers* (1781), Hall had argued, contrary to the position of Brine, for the warrant of any sinner to apply to Christ for salvation without an accompanying discernment that indeed he was chosen of God. When examining “A Sinner’s Warrant to Apply to Christ,” Hall fully consented that “there can be no gracious acts but in consequence of gracious principles.” By the same token, however, there can be no knowledge of gracious principles apart from gracious actions. None, therefore, can know themselves to be elect of God, redeemed by Christ, or called by the Spirit apart from repentance toward God and faith in Christ.

Such knowledge, such experience, is impossible to be obtained, but in consequence of believing in or receiving Jesus the Saviour; for he who believeth not, is declared to be under condemnation; the wrath of God abideth on him. To attempt, therefore, to define, as some do, who ought, and ought not to return to God by Christ, is daring presumption, and tends to discourage the soul, and rivet the fetters of guilt, where a sense of meanness and misery prevails, and in others, to encourage self-righteousness, by establishing the idea of previous fitness in order to salvation.<sup>10</sup>

Robert Hall’s adaptation of Edwards on this issue in *Help to Zion’s Travelers* is remarkable. In addition to his recommendation, Hall’s orga-

nization of Edwards' thought appears to have had an impact on Fuller's treatment. The final section of the book incorporates definitions and an extended discussion of the issues of natural and moral ability and inability. "No greater natural powers are necessary to love God, than to hate him; to serve him, than to oppose him," Hall reasoned; "Therefore God does not require more of any man than the right use of what he hath."<sup>11</sup> Serious attention to moral inability will convince any of the "absolute necessity of omnipotent grace" to deliver them. Though they cannot love God nor deliver themselves, "their criminality is equal to their inability."<sup>12</sup>

John Ryland, Jr., documents the cumulative effect the attention to Edwards produced. "At length, several of them began, independently of each other, to examine this question for themselves," he recalled. They concluded that they had "needlessly deviated from the scriptural path, in which the most orthodox of their predecessors had been used to walk."<sup>13</sup> He records his own discovery of the remedy in these words: "Closely studying Edwards on the Will, and entering into the distinction between natural and moral inability, removed the difficulties which had once embarrassed my mind." After studying some sermons by Newton on the subject he was ready to conclude, "this distinction well considered, would lead us to see that the affirmative side of the Modern Question was fully consistent with the strictest Calvinism." Later in a footnote Ryland stated, "I question much if any thinking man can steer clear of False Calvinism on the one hand, and real Arminianism on the other, without entering into the distinction between Natural and moral inability, as it is commonly termed."<sup>14</sup>

In his *Serious Remarks on the Different Representation of Evangelical Doctrine*, Ryland included fourteen pages carefully delineating Scripture passages that suit the concept of moral inability such as "The natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God," or Joseph's brothers "could not speak peaceably to him;" or combinations of natural ability and moral inability, "Having ears to hear but hear not;" or that moral inability is a matter of unwillingness—"You will not come to me that you may have life," or "The natural man *does not* receive the things of the Spirit of God." He related these to the perpetuity and relevance of the moral law in its evangelical use and as a standard of sanctification.

Edwards' impact on John Sutcliff may be seen in two clear instances. First, the catechism that Sutcliff first published in 1783 demonstrates how deeply he drank of the Edwardsean fountain. Particularly impor-



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tant, according to Joseph Ivimey, were the issues of “the harmony between the obligations of men to love God with all their hearts, and their actual enmity against him; and between the duty of ministers to call on sinners to repent and believe in Christ for salvation, and the necessity of omnipotent grace to render the call effectual.”<sup>15</sup> Sutcliff’s catechism gives a notable amount of space to this issue in the term of natural and moral ability and inability.<sup>16</sup>

Second, in 1789 Sutcliff republished a pamphlet by Edwards entitled “Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People, in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion.” Sutcliff’s preface to this edition closed with a call to all lovers of Christ and His Kingdom, no matter what their denominations may be or what other small differences may exist, to join hands in seeking the overthrow of Satan and all his hellish allies. He called for “thousands upon thousands divided into small bands in their respective cities, towns, villages,” to offer up “their united prayers.” Perhaps God would give grace and “shower down blessings on all the scattered tribes of Zion!”<sup>17</sup>

This edition influenced William Carey in his writing of the now famous *Enquiry* and encouraged him to urge Christians not only to pray for the conversion of the heathen but to preach to them!<sup>18</sup> Carey often referred to the encouragement he received from reading Edwards. In 1793 on board the ship *Cron Princess Marie* he found spiritual refreshment in a volume of Edwards’ sermons. On January 24, 1794, in the initial stages of engaging in evangelistic work with a congregation of “natives” Carey recorded, “All the morning I had a most unpleasant time, but at last found much pleasure in reading Edwards on the *Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners*.”<sup>19</sup> On March 9, Carey recorded, “This has been one of the most pleasant Sabbaths that I have ever enjoyed since I have been in this country. Spent most of the Day in Family exercises, particularly had much enjoyment in reading Edwards’ Sermon upon ‘The Manner in which the salvation of the soul is to be sought’—through the whole day enjoyed pleasure & Profit.”<sup>20</sup>

The insights and spirit of Edwards became so pervasive in this treasured fellowship that by the end of Fuller’s life some complained, “If Sutcliff and some of the others had preached more of Christ and less of Jonathan Edwards, they would have been more useful.” Fuller replied, “If those who talked thus preached Christ half as much as Jonathan Edwards did, and were half as useful as he was, their usefulness would double what it is.”<sup>21</sup>

## FULLER'S APPLICATION OF EDWARDS

It cannot surprise us that Fuller felt so strongly about Edwards. He acknowledged a great indebtedness to him. Reminiscing in a letter written in January, 1815, Fuller recalled that it was through a conversation with Robert Hall in 1775 that first became acquainted with Edwards on the Will. We might take strange comfort in the fact that Fuller knew so little about the American theologian that he mistakenly read a work by Dr. John Edwards of Cambridge entitled *Veritas Redux* and thought it a good book but not quite up to Mr. Hall's recommendation. He did not discover his mistake until 1777.<sup>22</sup> "On reading this work," he recounted when finally discovering the correct author, "and some others on physical and moral impotence, I saw the same things clearly stated in other words, which I had learned by bitter experience."<sup>23</sup> He had been helped in giving expression to his views by a statement in John Gill that distinguished between a thing's being in the power of the hand and its being in the power of the heart;<sup>24</sup> but Edwards' analysis so well accorded with his own experience and captured so accurately his own developing thought that he adopted Edwards' manner of expression for the rest of his life. The preface to the second edition of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* contains Fuller's remarks on one aspect of this pilgrimage.

He [Fuller speaks of himself in the third person] had also read and considered, as well as he was able, President Edwards' *Inquiry into the Freedom of the Will*, with some other performances on the difference between natural and moral inability. He found much satisfaction in the distinction; as it appeared to him to carry with it its own evidence--to be clearly and fully contained in the Scriptures--and calculated to disburden the Calvinistic system of a number of calumnies with which its enemies have loaded it, as well as to afford clear and honourable conceptions of the Divine government. If it were not the duty of unconverted sinners to believe in Christ, and that because of their inability, he supposed this inability must be natural, or something which did not arise from an evil disposition; but the more he examined the Scriptures, the more he was convinced that all the inability ascribed to man, with respect to believing, arises from the aversion of his heart. They will not come to Christ that they may have life; will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely; will not seek after God; and desire not the knowledge of his ways.<sup>25</sup>

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This distinction is one of the clear guiding principles of Fuller's *Confession of Faith* presented to the church in Kettering upon his call there in 1783.<sup>26</sup> In article 12 he professed "I believe that men are now born and grow up with a vile propensity to moral evil and that herein lies their inability to keep God's law, and as such it is a moral and a criminal inability. Were they but of a right disposition of mind there is nothing now in the law of God but what they could perform; but being wholly under the dominion of sin they have no heart remaining for God, but are full of wicked aversion to him." Later in article 15, he expanded the same theme. "I believe 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 hand 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."<sup>27</sup>

The distinction between natural and moral ability led irresistibly to a consideration of how the will and the affections relate to each other. Fuller found Edwards incontrovertible on this issue also and teased out its implications for the doctrine of regeneration in several places. Some nine years prior to his *Strictures on Sandemanianism* he published "On the Question Whether the Existence of a Holy Disposition of Heart be Necessary to Believing" as an appendix to the second edition of *Gospel Worthy*. He explored the implications of a writing by A. M'Lean on the nature of faith and observed, "Finally, everything which proves that spiritual blindness and unbelief have their origin in the depravity of the heart, proves that whatever may be said of particular volitions being caused by ideas received into the mind, original biases are not so; and every thing which proves spiritual perception and faith to be holy exercises proves that a change of heart must of necessity precede them; as no holy exercise can have place while the heart is under the dominion of carnality."<sup>28</sup> As a footnote to this observation, Fuller pointed to the powerful influence of Edwards on the *Will*.

President Edwards (than whom no man will be allowed to have possessed a clearer insight into these difficult subjects) speaks with

great caution on the will being determined by the understanding. He denies that it is so, if by the understanding be meant what is called *reason* or *judgment*; and only allows it “in a large sense, as including the whole faculties of perception or apprehension.” And even when taken in this large sense, he rather chooses to say, that “the will always is as the greatest apparent good, or as what appears most agreeable, is than to say, that the will is *determined* by the greatest apparent good, or by what seems most agreeable; because an appearing most agreeable or pleasing to the mind, and the mind’s preferring and choosing, seems hardly to be properly and perfectly distinct.”<sup>29</sup>

These issues had already been treated in some degree in Edwards’ *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*. Completed and published in 1746, it preceded Edwards’ *Will* by eight years but established the foundation for much that Edwards would argue in his famous expose of the irrationality of Arminianism. Fuller read Edwards’ *Religious Affections* prior to 1781. On February 3, 1781, he wrote: “I think I have never yet entered into the true idea of the work of the ministry.... I think I am by the ministry, as I was by my life as a Christian before I read *Edwards on the Affections*. I had never entered into the spirit of a great many important things. Oh for some such penetrating, edifying writer of this subject!”<sup>30</sup>

One can detect the impact of *Religious Affections* throughout Fuller’s writings in vocabulary and argument. For example, his 1783 confession of faith speaks of the Bible as that “divine volume” in which he learns “especially the infinitely amiable moral character of God.”<sup>31</sup> A sentence appeared in a 1785 “Circular Letter” on causes of declension, stated, “We maintain the doctrine of one infinitely glorious God; but do we realize the amiableness of his character?”<sup>32</sup> Edwards wrote in those same terms exploring “when the mind is sensible of the sweet beauty and amiableness of a thing,” or the “true beauty and amiableness of the holiness or true moral good that is in divine things: or that Christ is so “excellent and amiable a person” and the “amiableness of the duties themselves that are required of us.”<sup>33</sup>

How Edwardsean ideas and vocabulary wended their way into the very entrails of Fuller’s brain may be seen by comparing this distillation of arguments. Reflecting on the passage “But ye have an unction from the holy one,” Edwards insisted, “Spiritual understanding primarily

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consists in this sense, or taste, of the moral beauty of divine things.” Edwards contended that divine beauty implied a “sensible sweetness and delight in the presence of the idea of it” that went far beyond a mere “notional understanding” or “speculative knowledge” and demanded “sensible knowledge, in which more than the mere intellect is concerned.” He illustrated this sensible knowledge by drawing an analogy: “He that has perceived the sweet taste of honey, knows much more about it, than he who has only looked upon and felt it.”<sup>34</sup>

Fuller quoted a large section from this very place in *Religious Affections* as a footnote to his discussion with Mr. M’Lean in an “Appendix” to the *Gospel Worthy of all Acceptation.* mentioned above.<sup>35</sup> Fuller’s own text duplicated the thought and, at times the exact language, of Edwards. He wrote, “A spiritual perception of the glory of Divine things appears to be the first sensation of which the mind is conscious.” He described “spiritual perception” as the “judgment arising from holy sensibility.” Through an “unction from the Holy One” we “perceive the glory of the Divine character, the evil of sin, and the lovely fitness of the Saviour; neither of which can be properly known by mere intellect, any more than the sweetness of honey or the bitterness of wormwood can be ascertained by the sight of the eye.”<sup>36</sup>

In an article entitled “Inward Witness of the Spirit,” Fuller summarized the substance of a couple of Edwards’ arguments in *Religious Affections* and issued at least one severe warning also issued by Edwards. The warning is that none can consider themselves the subjects of saving operations of the Spirit of God simply because pertinent Scripture passages bolt into their minds at critical junctures that seem to be personal messages from God “that their sins are forgiven and God does love them.” But, Edwards reminded his readers, “there is not Scripture which declares that any person is in a good estate directly, or any other way than by consequence.”<sup>37</sup> Edwards viewed assurance as a consequential inference drawn from the combination of two things: a heart knowledge of, a cordial consent to, the loveliness of divine things as they are in themselves and the action that is taken as a result of such knowledge. “Spiritual understanding... consists in a sense of the heart, of the supreme beauty and sweetness of the holiness or moral perfection of divine things, together with all that discerning and knowledge of things of religion, that depends upon, and flows from such a sense.”<sup>38</sup> This kind of spiritual perception leads one to make biblical religion the main business of his life. The business of holy practice according to “Christian

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rules” is the business he is chiefly engaged in, not just at certain seasons, but that which he “perseveres in through all changes, and under all trials, as long as he lives.”<sup>39</sup>

Fuller followed this line of thought. He asked the question “In what form or manner does God communicate peace to our minds, and the knowledge of our interest in his salvation?” Such peace and knowledge do not come, though some eminent saints have spoken this way, by means of a special revelation to any individual through a passage of the Bible that he in particular is a child of God, such an event would mean that God is making a “new revelation, and revelations of new truths continually.” No individuals interest in Christ is anywhere directly revealed in Scripture.

Instead, such assurance comes by inference from the presence of spiritual perceptions and actions in one’s life. The truth of the Gospel, no matter how its impressions come to our minds, must be “cordially” embraced. That is, an “approving view of God’s way of salvation, such a view as leads us to walk in it” is the foundation of peace and is the way that “God speaks peace to the soul.” The Spirit, either through preaching, or one’s “silent reflection” on Scripture, or reading it, enables the sinner “to discern and approve the gospel way of salvation.” Such an “approving view of God’s way of salvation” that makes one “cordially embrace it” is the path by which “God speaks peace to the soul, and says ‘I am thy salvation.’” No sooner is “the gospel in possession of the heart than joy and peace will ordinarily accompany it.” Since the New Testament promises eternal life to believers, “we cannot but conclude ourselves interested in it.” Cordial approbation, however, involves much more than mental perception and analysis and impressions on the Spirit, but Godward living. One cannot follow a “career of iniquity” and have any just point of assurance. Though this involves inference, Fuller, like Edwards, does not deny the personal work of the Spirit in this, but emphasizes that the internal work of the Spirit accompanies the knowledge of and heartfelt reception of what Scripture itself actually teaches.<sup>40</sup>

George Ella represents this as “Grotian rationalism and Socinian scepticism.” He says Fuller “preaches as a wolf amongst the sheep” and that he “boils Christian assurance down to reason rather than revelation.” Though Fuller believes he has “done the work of an evangelist,” according to Ella his effort is a mere “caricature of the pastoral calling of a preacher and he misuses the Spirit’s name to promote a gospel without

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means, based on pure rational inference to fulfil its end.”<sup>41</sup>

It is obviously true that Fuller did use inference both in his theological reasoning and in seeking to draw conclusions about one’s spiritual condition. This can hardly be evidence, however, that he promoted reason over revelation. He avoided the error of “enthusiasm” by adhering to the clarity of biblical revelation over any supposed private revelation in discerning the evidences of salvation. It is not clear why Ella prefers the word “revelation” in speaking of individual assurance. Either he must be advocating such “enthusiasm” or he means that one must draw just inferences from Scripture in this matter.

What Ella had in mind when he portrayed Fuller as promoting a “gospel without means” is also unclear, for Fuller’s advocacy of *means* is virtually impossible to challenge. If Ella is asserting that Fuller had no place for the Spirit’s work in empowering the Gospel, his case could hardly be made. Fuller’s challenge to the thought of Robert Sandeman puts to flight any suspicion that Fuller denied the necessity of the efficacious working of the Spirit. Though agreeing with Sandeman that the sinner’s immediate closure with Christ should be the goal of gospel preaching, he argued against Sandeman’s contention that faith preceded moral renovation by the Spirit. Fuller viewed all sinners as “intrenched (*sic*) in prejudice, self-righteousness, and the love of sin.” These strongholds must be beaten down. As long as a “wreck of them remains sufficient to shelter him against the arrows of conviction” he will remain an unbeliever. In short, it is not until “by the renovating influence of the Holy Spirit they fall to the ground,” that the “doctrine of salvation by mere grace, through a Mediator, is cordially believed.”<sup>42</sup> Such a severe missing of the mark by Mr. Ella does neither him nor Edwards, nor Fuller justice. Far from Grotian rationalism, his argument is strictly biblical and purely Edwardsean.

Two more examples of Edwards impact on Fuller’s must suffice. Edwards argued in *The Nature of True Virtue* that “True virtue most essentially consists in benevolence toward being in general,” or as he wrote later “union of heart to being in general.”<sup>43</sup> One manifestation of such consent concerns the way in which virtuous beings regard justice. Love of justice is the consequence of true virtue, not the constitution or cause of it. But if consent to being in general, that is, true virtue, exists, then one will love justice as a consequence. The “tendency and consequences of justice are agreeable to general benevolence, as the glory of God and the general good.” “Also, the same consistency of justice with

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true virtue means that “he whose heart opposes the general system, should have the hearts of that system, or the heart of the ruler of the system, against him; and, in consequence, should receive evil, in proportion to the evil tendency of the opposition of his heart.”<sup>44</sup>

Fuller shows the impact of this isolated idea on his own thinking in a short treatise entitled “Why Modern Christian are Deficient in Joy.” He speaks of the appearance of evil in the world and how such could depress the Christian did he not see “every partial evil contribute to the general good.” How such events set in motions wheels acting “upon other wheels” so that “the justice, goodness, wisdom, and veracity of God in denouncing” evil become clear, demonstrates that these things are “right and best upon the whole.” A public execution, for example, might seem terrible beyond conception when viewed strictly from the standpoint of the suffering party, but our “love for the species, and a regard for the general good” make us of one mind with god and, thus, truly happy. On a larger scale when all that have benefited from her are crying “Alas for the great city” at the overthrow of the mystical Babylon, the saints “rejoice over her” and cry “Hallelujah!” God has avenged himself on her for the blood of his servants shed at her hand and shown that his judgments are true and righteous. This joy does not come from malevolence but from “viewing things on a large scale, viewing them as God views them, and feeling accordingly.”<sup>45</sup> That is a precise and obvious application of Edwards’ view that “that heart opposes the general system, should have the hearts of that system, or the heart of the ruler of the system, against him; and, in consequence, should receive evil, in proportion to the evil tendency of the opposition of his heart.”

Fuller’s essay entitled “Spiritual Pride” carries many of the same traits and ideas of the section in Edwards’ *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival* by that same title. Fuller aimed his pastoral warnings at those that live, if not by open words, at least in the “sentiments of their hearts” according to the prayer, “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men.” He applied this idea along a wide spectrum of spiritual attitudes demonstrating how sinners, no matter how destitute, tend toward self-justification. In addition, he critiqued theological systems that implied a manner of self-justification. The main difficulty in these is an improper grasp of the nature and relation of Law and Gospel. The doctrine of sinless perfection, that redefines sin and perfection both, as well as the view that depravity releases one from obligation to sinless perfection violate this construct. Other theological issues such as the Example and Governmental views of



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the atonement and misapplications of the Doctrines of Grace contribute to his discussion showing how each of them tend toward creating a kind of self-righteousness and constitute spiritual pride.<sup>46</sup>

Edwards pointed mainly to the tendency to spiritual pride present within those zealous for the Awakening who were overconfident of the purity of their own motivation and nurtured a censoriousness toward the actions, spirit, and even competence of others.

Though their intended audience is different, the similarities are striking. Both Edwards and Fuller locate spiritual pride in the same place initially: they point to its singular conformity to satanic rebellion. "There is nothing pertaining to sin which approaches nearer to the image of Satan than Pride," Fuller wrote: "This appears to have been the transgression for which he himself was first condemned, and by which he seduced our parents to follow his example."<sup>47</sup> "Of all kinds of pride, spiritual pride is upon many accounts the most hateful," Edwards declared; "it is most like the devil; most like the sin he committed in a heaven of light and glory." "This is the main door by which the devil comes into the hearts of those who are zealous for the advancement of religion," Edwards wrote. He further observed in a strain developed by Fuller, "It is by this [spiritual pride] that the mind defends itself in other errors, and guards itself against light, by which it might be corrected and claimed."<sup>48</sup>

The method of discussion also is similar. Both describe one after the other a variety of deceits into which such pride draws its victim and include also how the workings of true humility, or true spirituality, would operate in the same situation. Both refer to Dagon as typological of pride. Edwards exposed pride and worldly-mindedness as "the two pillars of Dagon's temple, on which the whole house leans."<sup>49</sup> Fuller characterized the self-righteousness proud as "like priests of Dagon" who would "set up his idol as long as he can possibly make it stand."<sup>50</sup> Edwards presented pride as disposing person to "singularity in external appearance," that "love the show and appearance of the distinction"<sup>51</sup> while Fuller noticed "persons whose self-complacency, on account of the plainness of their apparel, has risen to a most insufferable degree of arrogance." Both also issue serious warning to those zealous for the censure of others. Edwards said they call upon other Christians "sharply rebuking them for their being so cold and lifeless" and at times "speak of almost every thing that they see amiss in others, in the most harsh, severe, and terrible language." In this same line, picturing those that nursed a "censorious spirit toward those who have fallen," Fuller warned,

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“Seest thou a man whose resentments rise high when another falls, who is fierce and clamorous for the infliction of censure, and whose anger cannot be otherwise appeased, there is little reason to expect that he will stand long.”<sup>52</sup> Fuller also expressed concern that misapplication of religious equality resulted from pride. “The parent and the children, the master and the servant, the magistrate and the subject, being all on an equal footing in the house of God, there is danger of the latter forgetting the inequality when out of it, and disregarding that order and subordination which are essential to the well-being of society.”<sup>53</sup> On the same concern, Edwards had noted “an improper boldness before men... as though it became all persons, high and low, men, women, and children in all religious conversation wholly to divest themselves of all manner of shamefacedness, modesty, or reverence toward man; which is a great error and quite contrary to Scripture.... There is a fear of modesty and shamefacedness in inferiors towards superiors, which is amiable and required by Christian rules.”<sup>54</sup>

Other examples of Edwardsean theological vocabulary, metaphysics, doctrinal definition could be traced out in several writings of Fuller, particularly his *Strictures On Sandemanianism*<sup>55</sup> and in his various discussions of justification and the nature of saving faith. What he wrote to his friend, John Ryland Jr. on the subject of Baxterianism and justification could be said about many other subjects that came under the scrutiny of Fuller’s vise-grip intellect: “The greatest, though not the only, instruction that I have received from human writings, on these subjects, has been from *President Edwards’ Discourse on Justification*.”<sup>56</sup>

### CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

Working thoroughly in the ideas of a great theologian with critical sympathy tends to make the student a competent, and sometimes great, theologian. Fuller was never ashamed to uncover the benefit he received from a wide variety of writers. Though no man’s slave, he felt indebted to all whom he had read. It did not make him less of a theologian to know the necessity of shared gifts, but a better one. And his deep and thorough grasp of the leading ideas of Edwards’ theology energized the native powers and biblical knowledge of Fuller.

Intimate acquaintance with the ideas of a great theologian tends to make the student and wise and sensitive pastor. Fuller took the difficult ideas of Edwards, digested their spiritual implications and used them for the good of souls. Both his personal counsel and his pulpit ministry

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show the helpful effects of the integration of ideas for which Edwards was largely the catalyst. Edwards put Fuller in touch with “some of the most essential branches of the Christian ministry.”<sup>57</sup>

Proper contemplation of the implications of the thought of a great theologian tends to make the student zealous for the glory of God. Fuller’s willingness to become the student of a great thinker whose intellectual capabilities were surpassed by his ignited affections for the glory of the triune God made him share in those traits. Edwards helped Fuller see more clearly, hear more purely, and taste more lustily the glory, harmony, and sweetness of that “new sense of things” that they both had experienced through the efficacious operations of the Holy Spirit. **E**

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### ENDNOTES

1 Andrew Fuller, “To Timothy Dwight,” in Michael A.G. Haykin, ed., *The Armies of the Lamb: The Spirituality of Andrew Fuller* (Dundas, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2001) 199, 200.

2 Haykin, *Armies of the Lamb*, 27.

3 Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, memoir by Sereno E. Dwight, revised and corrected by Edwards Hickman, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), I, cxx.

4 Edwards, *Works.*, cxx–cxxi.

5 Jonathan Edwards, “A Farewell Sermon,” in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 238.

6 John E. Smith, *Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 104.

7 John Ryland, Jr., *The Life and Death of the Reverend Andrew Fuller* (London: Button & Son, 1816), 29, 30.

8 Haykin, *Armies of the Lamb*, 144.

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10 Robert Hall, *Help to Zion’s Travelers* in *The Baptist Library* (Prattsville, NY: Robert H. Hill, 1843), III, 86, 87.

11 Hall, *Help to Zion’s Travelers*, 111.

12 Hall, *Help to Zion’s Travelers*, 112.

13 Ryland, *Life and Death of the Reverend Andrew Fuller*, 9.

14 Ryland, *Life and Death of the Reverend Andrew Fuller*, 43.

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15 Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists*, 4 vols. (London: Printed for the author, 1811–1830), IV, 437.

16 Thomas J. Nettles, *Teaching Truth, Training Hearts* (Amityville: Calvary Press, 1998) 113–16.

17 Edwards, *Works*, II, 279.

18 William Carey, *An Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (Facsimile ed., London: The Carey Kingsgate Press Limited, 1961), 12.

19 Terry G. Carter, ed., *The Journal and Selected Letters of William Carey* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000) 4, 12.

20 Carter, *Journal and Selected Letters of William Carey*, 18.

21 Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, revised Joseph Belcher (1845 ed.; repr. Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), I, 101; Carey, *Obligations of Christians to use Means*, 12.

22 Ryland, *Life and Death of the Reverend Andrew Fuller*, 58.

23 Ryland, *Life and Death of the Reverend Andrew Fuller*, 44.

24 Ryland, *Life and Death of the Reverend Andrew Fuller*, 42.

25 Fuller, *Works*, II, 330

26 Ryland, *Life and Death of the Reverend Andrew Fuller*, 99–109.

27 Ryland, *Life and Death of the Reverend Andrew Fuller*, 106

28 Fuller, *Works*, II, 411–12.

29 Fuller, *Works*, II, 411–12. Fuller quotes Edwards from Part I, Section II of *Freedom of the Will*.

30 Fuller, *Works*, I, 25. This contradicts George Ella's remark: "Convincing evidence for a direct influence by Edwards on Fuller has still to be produced as Fuller's theology is radically different from Edwards" (George M. Ella, *Law and Gospel in the Theology of Andrew Fuller* [Durham, England: GO Publications, 1996], 168).

31 Ryland, *Life and Death of the Reverend Andrew Fuller*, 100.

32 Fuller, *Works*, III, 319.

33 Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 272–74.

34 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 272.

35 Fuller, *Works*, II, 411–12.

36 Fuller, *Works*, II, 413.

37 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 294.

38 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 272.

39 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 383f.

40 Fuller, *Works*, I, 624–626.

41 Ella, *Law and Gospel*, 144, 145.

42 Fuller, *Works*, II, 562–564, 576.

43 Jonathan Edwards "The Nature of True Virtue," in *Works*, I, 22, 129.

44 Jonathan Edwards, "The Nature of True Virtue," in *Works*, I, 129.

45 Fuller, *Works*, III, 329f.

46 Fuller, *Works*, III, 564–578.

47 Fuller, *Works*, III, 3:564.

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48 Edwards, *Works*, I, 399.

49 Edwards, *Works*, I, 399.

50 Fuller, *Works*, III, 567.

51 Edwards, *Works*, I, 400.

52 Fuller, *Works*, III, 569.

53 Fuller, *Works*, III, 573.

54 Edwards, *Works*, I, 402.

55 Fuller, *Works*, II, 561–646. In this work, Fuller assumes, in opposition to Sandeman's view of notional faith, Edwards' position that the faith that finds union with the justifying work of Christ is largely a matter of the affections. The view of faith he defends is the same as that of Edwards in his sermon of justification, his work on the will, and the affections. His view of saving faith as necessarily arising from an altered disposition [606–614], quotes John Owen several times, but the undercurrent of discussion is Edwardsean. In the chapter entitled "The Connexion Between Knowledge and Disposition," Fuller quotes [602–606] over 3000 words from Edwards' *Religious Affections*.

56 Fuller, *Works*, II, 715.

57 Fuller, *Works*, II, 416.