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# ANDREW FULLER: HEIR OF THE REFORMATION

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The task of this article is to explore the influence of the Reformation on the theology of Andrew Fuller. In essence, this is a study of Fuller's theological genealogy. But accessing theological genealogies is a tricky business. One can unwittingly succumb to one of two interpretive patterns. Often there is a temptation to read into a certain individual's theology influences that are difficult to substantiate historically. Theological writings in the past did not follow the strict guidelines for footnotes and citations that modern-day scholarship demands. Determining the sources used by a given theologian can easily become an exercise in historical speculation. Moreover, it is very easy to allow one's own biases and convictions to creep in and color one's conclusions. We are all familiar with Arminian historians who claim that every significant theologian in church history was a proto-Arminian, or (to be fair) the Calvinist historians who do the same.

On the other hand, while some historians attempt to draw tenuous theological lines of connection, others rely on the assessment of long-standing historiographical paradigms. This uncritical dependence has led some historians to neglect the necessary but often pain-staking work of reading and evaluating the primary sources. Instead certain historiographical paradigms are perpetuated which are at best misleading, or at worst completely false. Many of you are very familiar with the work of Richard Muller, William van Asselt and Carl Trueman. Their publica-

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tions challenged the previous interpretation of seventeenth-century Protestant Scholasticism given by Barthian historians who claimed that the Protestant Scholastics corrupted the theology of the early Reformers because they were influenced by early-Enlightenment rationalism.<sup>1</sup> Muller, Van Asselt and Trueman, through their careful study of the primary sources in their original contexts, demonstrate that the Protestant Scholastics were in fundamental theological agreement with the sixteenth-century Reformers, while also building upon and expanding the Protestant tradition in order to address specific issues and concerns found in the seventeenth-century.<sup>2</sup>

With these potential interpretive hazards identified, again our task is to investigate the influence of the Reformation on the theology of Andrew Fuller. It is important to note from the outset that, along with the magisterial Reformers, I will include the seventeenth-century post-Reformation theologians in this genealogy. There are many topics we could examine, but I will focus on three doctrines, two of which were obviously significant for the Reformation, and one which I would argue was likewise significant, but has been given less attention in both scholarly and popular studies. The three doctrines are: the doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of justification, and eschatology. Tracing the influence of the Reformation on Fuller through these three doctrines will demonstrate lines of continuity and discontinuity, nuanced historical-theological development, and the value of historical studies for addressing some of the contemporary theological challenges that we are faced with.

### THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

By Fuller's day, in the late-eighteenth century, the tradition of the higher critical reading of Scripture already had begun. One could argue, as Hans Frei did in his monumental book *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, that Benedict Spinoza laid the seeds in the seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> In his two books entitled: *Theological-political Treatise* (1670) and *Ethics* (1677), Spinoza presented a thoroughly naturalistic interpretation of Scripture, evacuated of all notions of the supernatural, and reduced the Bible to a set of ethics. Additionally, the work of Herman Samuel Reimarus, published posthumously in the late eighteenth century, revealed a thorough-going natural and/or rational approach to the Bible. Reimarus portrayed the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an elaborate hoax executed by the disciples in order to advance their socio-political agenda. Furthermore, Reimarus' publisher, Gotthold Lessing, made his own

contribution to this higher-critical tradition. Lessing's famous ditch erected a chasm between the accidental truths of history and the necessary truths of reason. Religion thus could be preserved without an appeal to historical verification. Instead, through the use of reason and education, man was to progress towards enlightenment.

This budding tradition of higher criticism sets the backdrop for Andrew Fuller's doctrine of Scripture. Although his work does not contain any sustained interaction with Spinoza, Reimarus or Lessing, Fuller does interact with the English Deists. Michael Haykin writes,

The leading proponents of Deism, men such as Toland, Anthony Collins (1676–1729) and Matthew Tindal (1655–1733), typified an age sick of and disgusted with the religious wars and controversies of the two preceding centuries. But, in regarding the Bible as the true source of these controversies and wars, these men went much further than most. They sought a religion shorn of its dependence on revelation and the miraculous, in which only that which could successfully weather rational criticism need be affirmed as religious truth.<sup>4</sup>

It can be argued that the Deists built on Spinoza's work and provided the intellectual fuel for Reimarus and Lessing. Subsequently, it is in this context of radical naturalism and rational autonomy that Fuller articulated his doctrine of Scripture.

In his 1814 "Letters on Systematic Theology," Fuller gives a succinct summary of his doctrine of Scripture. Letter IV begins with a discussion of "The Being of God." In this letter Fuller is not interested in rehearsing arguments for the existence of God. Fuller states, "To undertake to prove his existence seem to be almost as unnecessary as to go about to prove our own. The Scriptures at their outset take it for granted; and he that calls it in question is not so much to be reasoned with as to be reproved."<sup>5</sup> Instead, a proper understanding of God as "the first cause and last end of all things" forms a necessary starting point for Fuller.<sup>6</sup> God is the creator of all things; he possesses glory and authority, and is worthy of all worship. Yet, for Fuller, this God has manifested himself in creation and, of course, must fully in his Son. Letter IV demonstrates that the being of God establishes God as the source of divine revelation and Scripture as a form of that revelation.

In Letter V Fuller discusses the necessity of divine revelation. He

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begins by showing that divine supernatural revelation was always necessary, even in the pre-lapsarian era. Fuller writes,

The light of nature, though sufficient to bear witness for God, and so to leave sinners without excuse, was never designed in any state to furnish man with all he needed. Even in innocence man was governed by a revealed law. It does not appear that he was left to find out the character or will of his Creator by his reason, though reason, being under the influence of rectitude would lead him, as he understood the mind of God, to love and obey it. But if revelation was necessary in innocence, much more now man's foolish heart is darkened by sin.<sup>7</sup>

Two things should be observed in this statement. First, Fuller presents a balanced approach to the use of human reason in theology. For Fuller, reason is only an instrument to be used and not the source or foundation of knowledge and truth. Second, Fuller insists upon the necessity of a supernatural revelation. The "light of nature" is not sufficient either for Adam or for those who live in the post-Fall world. Furthermore, Fuller contends that supernatural revelation is necessary for any hope of salvation.<sup>8</sup>

The heart of Fuller's doctrine of Scripture is found in Letter VI. This letter opens with Fuller's understanding of the vital doctrine of inspiration. He recognizes that inspiration according to the Holy Spirit moved "Holy men" to write the Holy Scriptures.<sup>9</sup> Inspiration, for Fuller, is not a mechanical process. Instead, he describes inspiration in terms of "sense" and "degree." Fuller states, "But though all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, it does not follow that it is so in the *same sense* and *degree*."<sup>10</sup> This should not be mistaken for a low view of inspiration like that of J. Patterson Smyth, whom B. B. Warfield chastised in the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Fuller is simply pointing out the organic nature of inspiration that does not override the characteristics and qualities of the human authors. Yet, in no way does the recognition of the human authors of Scripture diminish Scriptures' truth, consistency, perfection, pungency and utility, because fundamentally it is the Word of God. .

Fuller defines these categories (truth, consistency, perfection, pungency and utility) in depth. Fuller writes "a book professing to be a revelation from God should contain truth, and nothing but truth: such particularly must be its history, its prophecies, its miracles, and it doc-

trines.”<sup>12</sup> But not only truth, for Fuller the Bible must be consistent in all its parts. Regardless of the number of human authors, the diverse geographic locations and vast chronological differences, Fuller insists that under the inspiration of God the Bible is “consistent throughout.”<sup>13</sup> In regards to the Bible’s perfection, he states, “[i]f the Bible be of God, perfection must be one of its properties.”<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the perfection of Scripture implies the goodness of all that is contained in it. Fuller continues by describing the pungency of Scripture as a mirror that reflects the reader’s character and pricks the sinner’s heart.<sup>15</sup> Finally Fuller describes the utility of Scripture in terms of its profitability. Here Fuller points to a social dimension of Scripture that produces good “members of society,” which promotes peace and hope.<sup>16</sup>

It should be no surprise that Fuller’s doctrine of Scripture reflects the London Baptist Confession of 1689. I:5 reads:

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church of God to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scriptures; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, and the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, and many other incomparable excellencies, and entire perfections thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

For a particular Baptist in the eighteenth century, the London Baptist Confession of 1689 provided the obvious genetic link with the era of the Reformation. Fuller’s consistency with the Confession demonstrates his connection with the Reformation. Articulations of the doctrine of Scripture in the Reformation and post-Reformation era proceeded in similar fashion to what we have observed in Fuller.

Richard Muller writes,

many of the Reformed orthodox argued that theology has two principia or foundations...God and Scripture. These two foundations are both necessary: without God, there can be no word con-

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cerning God, no theology; without the scriptural revelation, there can be no genuine or authoritative word concerning God and, again, no theology. The first of these assertions is indisputable: if God did not exist, a word concerning God would be gibberish. The second assertion, however, requires supportive argumentation.<sup>17</sup>

Muller's description of the Reformed understanding of God as one of the two foundations for theology bears similarity to Fuller's discussion of the being of God. Likewise Muller goes on to discuss the supportive arguments for Scripture being the second foundation for theology by explaining the necessity for a supernatural revelation distinct from natural revelation. John Calvin's writings provide a helpful illustration. Calvin discusses the need of supernatural revelation to communicate to fallen human beings what they could not receive from natural revelation. Supernatural revelation, according to Calvin, is singularly focused on salvation, which shines the light of God's Word into a world of darkness.<sup>18</sup> In the seventeenth century, Francis Turretin restated Calvin's point: "revelation by the Word of God stands absolutely and simply necessary to man for his salvation."<sup>19</sup> The similarities between Calvin, Turretin and Fuller on this point are undeniable. However, it is important to note one possible difference between Calvin and Fuller. In the post-Fall world, Calvin explicitly teaches that supernatural revelation is necessary even for rightly understanding the relation between God and the natural order.<sup>20</sup> Calvin is not implying that Scripture should be read like a scientific textbook, providing answers to all our questions about the natural world; instead, he is emphasizing that sin is not only a moral problem, but an epistemological one as well. On this point, it would seem that Fuller is less consistent with Calvin. Fuller's adoption of Jonathan Edwards' distinction between natural and moral ability presents a dilemma by allowing natural ability to remain intact within sinful human beings. This natural ability, which includes rightly understanding natural revelation, for Fuller, explains how men and women are held accountable for rejecting what God has revealed in the created order. Other scholars have described how Fuller's debates with Hyper-Calvinists and Arminians, and his association with New Divinity Theologians, shaped his thoughts on this point.

However, these developments should be placed in the wider intellectual context of the eighteenth century. Mark Noll, in his book *America's*

*God*, describes this context well. Enlightenment philosophical ideas were chipping away at the edifice of puritanism in North America, and the same can be said about old world Reformed Europe. Scientific advancements and philosophical skepticism challenged older authoritarian traditions and Protestant biblicism.<sup>21</sup> Autonomous human reason was exalted and new moral philosophies, which set out to establish ethics on grounds external to Scripture, quickly followed. Jonathan Edwards attempted to hold back this philosophical floodgate, but to no avail. Noll write, “[Calvinist] philosophical orientation soon vanished, leaving barely a trace behind... Followers of Edwards did retain some of his ethical precepts... but none of them thought it was important to resist systematically the new moral philosophy.”<sup>22</sup> The end result impacted Calvinists of all stripes: the followers of Edwards in New England, British Calvinists like Fuller, and even Presbyterian like Charles Hodge later at Old Princeton. Following Noll’s assessment, Fuller’s differences with Calvin should not be unexpected.

With regards to the doctrine of inspiration proper, Fuller’s position reflects great continuity with the Reformation. There were few in the sixteenth and seventeenth century who held to a strict dictation theory, while the majority of Protestant theologians understood that inspiration included the use of the backgrounds and characteristics of the inspired human authors. Likewise the categories that Fuller uses to describe the properties of Scripture (truth, consistency, perfection, pungency and utility), also generally follow what we find in the writings of the Reformers. The Reformers described Scripture’s truth, certainty and infallibility; and its purity, holiness and perfection; and finally its perspicuity and efficacy.<sup>23</sup> As mentioned earlier, these properties are summarized in the London Baptist Confession and the continuity can be traced easily from the Reformation to Andrew Fuller.

We began this section by describing the context of higher criticism that was emerging during Fuller’s time. What is interesting to note is Fuller’s reliance on a pre-critical Reformed doctrine of Scripture in the midst of the so-called modern developments. Fuller did not attempt to construct a *via media* between the pre-critical and critical traditions. From the eighteenth century forward, the higher critical tradition would grow to dominate biblical scholarship. There is no question that we can continue to wrestle with the same issues, both outside and within evangelical circles, and particularly as we send students to complete doctorates in secular universities. Is there something to be learned from Fuller’s

example? It appears to be so. Let it be made clear, this article is not arguing for some blind traditionalist entrenchment. Advancements in biblical scholarship are important and necessary, even in the Reformed tradition. However, in observation, modern biblical scholarship continues to follow the higher critical scientific method, now dressed up in historicist clothing. It is important to maintain a fundamental continuity with the Reformation, which insists that the Bible is supernatural revelation, containing truth, perfect and consistent in all its parts, and efficacious in its purpose.

### **THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION**

The doctrine of justification is arguably the defining doctrine for the Reformation. It clearly distinguished Protestants from Roman Catholics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; yet it was also debated amongst Protestants themselves. By the seventeenth century, the rise of Arminianism and Socinianism, along with concerns about antinomianism, fueled sophisticated debates over the doctrine of justification. It seems that in Fuller's day very little had changed. Fuller also wrestled with Arminians, Socinians and Antinomianism, and his doctrine of justification shared the same contours and emphases.

Fuller begins with a strong commitment to justification as forensic in character. This stands in opposition to the Roman Catholic position where justification is renovative in character and not strictly declarative. Fuller speaks of the inherent change in terms of sanctification and not justification.<sup>24</sup> Fuller goes on to explain: "the term is forensic, referring to the proceedings in a court of judicature, and stands opposed to *condemnation*."<sup>25</sup> The common human courtroom analogy is invoked, yet Fuller is careful to show where the analogy is imperfect. He describes how justification in an earthly courtroom results in the accused being declared truly innocent, while placing dishonor on the accuser.<sup>26</sup> Gospel justification, as Fuller describes it, includes pardon, which presumes the true guilt of the accused. Consequently, in justification blessing and righteousness are given to the one who deserves condemnation. Given that justification is forensic, where the sinner is declared righteous, Fuller is adamant that human works contribute nothing to the ground of one's justification. Justification is according to the grace of God, Fuller writes:

As transgressors of the holy, just, and good law of God, we are all,

by nature, children of wrath. All the threatenings of God are in full force against us, and, were we to die in that condition, we must perish everlastingly. This is to be under condemnation. But condemnation, awful at it is, is not damnation. The sentence is not executed, nor is it irrevocable ... Hence, the sinner stands in a new relation to God as a Lawgiver. He is no longer “under the law [“] with respect to its condemning power, but “under grace.”<sup>27</sup>

Consistent with his Reformation forbearers, Fuller insists that justification is by faith alone through grace alone. For Fuller, grace “denotes free favour to the unworthy.”<sup>28</sup> He goes to explain:

The opposition between grace and works, in this important concern, is so clear in itself, and so plainly marked by the apostle [speaking of the epistles of Paul] that one can scarcely conceive how it can be honestly mistaken: “If it be by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace.”<sup>29</sup>

Likewise faith is a duty, however, for Fuller the term duty should not be mistaken for a work.<sup>30</sup> Clearly, Fuller rejects the Roman Catholic and Arminian views, which ascribe to the ground of justification some work of the believer, whether acts of repentance, the work of faith, or subsequent works of obedience. But how does this forensic justification, which is received by faith alone through grace alone, function?

The London Baptist Confession XI.1 states:

Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing Christ’s active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness by faith, which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God.

Like Fuller, the London Baptist Confession rejects the Roman Catholic doctrine of infused righteousness, and the Arminian doctrines of imputed

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faith and evangelical works of obedience as the ground of justification. Instead the Confession states that justification is according to the imputation of Christ's righteousness, which includes his active and passive obedience. The classic Protestant doctrine of imputation is presented along with the specific details of Christ's active and passive obedience.

The specificity in the London Baptist Confession on this point should not be overlooked. There was significant debate over the issue of Christ's active obedience in the seventeenth century and even at the Westminster Assembly. Everyone affirmed the passive obedience of Christ as the atoning work of Christ which satisfied God's wrath and cleanses the believer of all sin. However, Arminians like John Goodwin and Joseph Mede denied the active obedience of Christ. For Goodwin and Mede, the positive reward of eternal life was not exclusively merited by Christ's obedience. Rather, they spoke of justification in terms of a double-justification or a present and future justification, in which the ground of second or future justification would include the works of obedience rendered by the believer in his or her earthly life. Surprisingly, Arminians were not the only ones to deny the active obedience of Christ in the seventeenth century. Some Calvinists like Thomas Gataker and Richard Vines likewise rejected this aspect of the doctrine of justification. For Gataker, eternal reward was likewise not merited by Christ's obedience, but instead of grounding some part of justification in works of obedience, he simply subsumed it under the doctrine of adoption.<sup>31</sup> Part of the motivation for rejecting the doctrine of active obedience in the seventeenth century was the great fear of antinomianism. If Christ fulfilled the law according to his active obedience, and that perfect obedience was imputed to the believer, then some were concerned that believers would no longer feel any need to conform their lives to God's law. Gataker and Vines ardently defended their position at the Westminster Assembly. While the majority of the Westminster Divines held to the active obedience position, the Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter XI does not include the language of active and passive obedience.<sup>32</sup>

It can be argued that the same concerns that produced such vigorous debate in the seventeenth century were present during Fuller's day as well. Implicit antinomianism, as well as Arminianism was of great concern for Fuller.<sup>33</sup> In responding, Fuller explains that the work of Christ provided the ground for justification. Fuller writes,

Justification is ascribed to his blood and to his obedience. By the

blood of Christ is meant the shedding of his blood, or the laying down of his life; and by obedience, all that conformity to the will of God which led to this great crisis.<sup>34</sup>

The righteousness of Christ which is imputed to the believer for justification, for Fuller, includes Christ's passive obedience (obedience unto death) and his active obedience (conformity to God's will). It is important to observe here Fuller's conformity with the active obedience position. Fuller affirms that Christ's active obedience was meritorious and the reward is eternal life for all who believe.<sup>35</sup> Like those in the Reformation before him, Fuller's proof text is Romans 5, the locus classicus, where Paul expounds his two-Adam Christology. Fuller comments,

if the first Adam had continued obedience, God would have expressed his approbation of his conduct, not only by confirming him, but his posterity after him, in a state of holiness and happiness. And thus the obedience unto death yielded by the Second Adam is represented as that with which God is so well pleased, that, in reward of it, he not only exalted Him far above all principality and power, but bestowed full, free, and eternal salvation on all those who believe in him, how great soever had been their transgressions.<sup>36</sup>

Although Fuller affirmed the active obedience of Christ, he was careful to guard against any antinomian inferences. Fuller writes, "The law of God, though not the medium of life, is nevertheless the rule of conduct; and though we are justified by faith alone, yet good works are necessary to prove it to be genuine."<sup>37</sup>

Another aspect of Fuller's doctrine of justification bears similarity with the great Reformer John Calvin. Like Calvin, Fuller discussed the relation between justification and Union with Christ. This relation guards on the one hand against semi-pelagianism of the Roman Catholic or Arminian kind, and on the other hand antinomianism. There is some academic debate over the place Union of Christ takes in Calvin's soteriology. Richard Gaffin and Lane Tipton argue that, for Calvin, Union with Christ is the central soteriological benefit from which all other benefits (like justification and sanctification) are derived.<sup>38</sup> Gaffin states:

what has controlling soteriological importance is the priority... of

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(spiritual, “existential,” faith-) union with Christ. This bond is such that it provides both justification and sanctification (“a double grace”), as each is distinct and essential. Because of this union both, being reckoned righteous and being renewed in righteousness, are given without confusion, yet also without separation.<sup>39</sup>

Gaffin is exegeting Calvin’s third book in the *Institutes of Christian Religion*, 11.1, where Calvin writes: “Let us sum these [‘benefits of God’] up. Christ was given to us by God’s generosity to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, [justification and sanctification].” For Calvin, faith unites the believer to Christ, and the benefits of that union include justification and sanctification. These two benefits, or double grace, are to remain distinct but never separated. Consequently, Calvin’s doctrine of Union with Christ insures that forensic justification with the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is never compromised (e.g. Roman Catholicism and Arminianism), and renovative sanctification with demonstrative works is never ignored (e.g. antinomianism).

Fuller’s understanding of Union with Christ bears great resemblance to Calvin. Fuller is explicit in noting the connection between Union with Christ and justification in Scripture, particularly the epistles of Paul.<sup>40</sup> He also recognizes that faith unites the believer to Christ and this union grants to the believer all of the benefits found in Christ. One benefit, for Fuller, is justification, which includes the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. Fuller draws an analogy Union with Christ and the marriage union. In marriage a wife is united to her husband. Subsequently the wife has a legal interest in the possessions of her husband. The wealth of husband is now granted to the wife, not as a reward for anything she merited, but by virtue of their marriage union. Fuller writes,

By believing in Jesus Christ, the sinner becomes vitally united to him, or, as the Scriptures express it, “joined to the Lord,” and is of “one spirit with him;” and this union, according to the Divine constitution, as revealed in the gospel, is the ground of an interest in his righteousness.<sup>41</sup>

However, Fuller lacks Calvin’s penetration and nuance in his discussion of the relation of Union with Christ in sanctification. Fuller insists

in his exposition of 1 Peter 1:1–2 that faith and obedience are inextricably linked. Where there is faith, there must be obedience.<sup>42</sup> But Fuller assigns the cause of obedience to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and he does not speak of its relation to Union with Christ. While not constructing his theology exactly like Calvin, nevertheless it does not seem as if Fuller's position was in tension with the Genevan Reformer. If Spirit wrought faith unites the believer to Christ, and if faith initiates the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, it would follow that sanctification is one of the benefits of being united to Christ. This last statement is a conjecture.

Thus far Fuller's consistency with and dependence on the Reformation doctrine of justification has been shown. But it would be helpful to ask one last historical question. Was Fuller's reliance on the Reformation a common practice or was he unique? In order to answer this question it might be helpful to compare Fuller to the theologian that he greatly admired, Jonathan Edwards. Like Fuller, many regard Edwards as an heir of the Reformation. Yet, his doctrine of justification seems to have created some doubt in recent scholarship. Thomas Schafer describes Edwards' doctrine of justification as "ambiguous and somewhat precarious."<sup>43</sup> And George Hunsinger writes:

we may conclude from Edwards' doctrine of justification by faith, Christ is the prime though not the exclusive ground of righteousness in the saints, and that salvation is, in some sense, given as a reward for their inherent holiness, loveliness, and obedience, so long as we see that the reward is not given directly but only indirectly through the primary ground in Christ.

Hunsinger goes on to write:

The idea of faith as a pleasing disposition that God would reward then opened the door to themes that the Reformation excluded. Inherent as opposed to alien holiness, active as opposed to passive righteousness, and Christ's righteousness as benefit de-coupled from his person all entered into Edwards' doctrine in a way that, to some degree, undermined his basic Reformation intentions.<sup>44</sup>

What would lead scholars like Hunsinger to conclude that Edwards' doctrine was essentially a betrayal of the Reformation? In his short treatise

tise on justification, Edwards begins with a strong affirmation that justification is according to God's grace alone. He also insists that justification consists of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. He writes:

Tis evident that the subject of justification is looked upon as destitute of any righteousness in himself, by that expression, "it is counted," or imputed to him "for righteousness"; the phrase, as the Apostles uses it here, and in the context, manifestly imports, that God of his sovereign grace is pleased in his dealings with the sinner, to take and regard, that which indeed is not righteousness, and in one that has no righteousness, so that the consequence shall be the same as if he had righteousness.<sup>45</sup>

The imputation of Christ's righteousness, for Edwards, includes both Christ's active and passive obedience. Edwards is clear that Christ earns a positive reward according to his fulfillment of the law. So far, Edwards seems to be consistent with the Reformation as well.

In his discussion of the role of faith, scholars like Hunsinger detect an inconsistency. It is true that Edwards does not speak of faith as the instrument by which the believer is justified. Instead Edwards discusses faith as the instrument by which we are united to Christ. Echoing Calvin, Edwards writes, "This relation or union to Christ, whereby Christians are said to be in Christ... is the ground of their right to his benefits."<sup>46</sup> And, of course, the benefits of Christ includes justification. Moreover faith is not a work. Edwards refers to faith as the "grace of faith," which is without value on the part of the one who exercises faith.<sup>47</sup> One can argue that Edwards and Fuller are heirs of Calvin in their theology of Union with Christ.

But where Fuller stops, Edwards pushes forward. Edwards is willing to speak of a future justification. Edwards describes how God regards, in the first act of faith, the believer's continuance in faith. Subsequently, "faithfulness" is virtually contained in the first act of faith. To put it another way, Edwards contends that the "faith" which justifies, likewise has in view the "faithfulness" that will follow. What is he attempting to articulate? Final justification, for Edwards, includes both the first act of faith and the subsequent acts of faithfulness. According to Edwards, the incorporation of works of obedience as the ground of final justification in no way compromises the doctrine of justification through grace alone. He states,

acts of evangelical obedience are indeed concerned in our justification itself, and are not excluded from that condition that justification depends upon, without the least prejudice to that doctrine of justification by faith, without any goodness of our own, that has been maintained, and therefore it can be no objection against this doctrine, that we have sometime in Scripture, promises of pardon and acceptance, made to such acts of obedience.<sup>48</sup>

Edwards is explicit in attributing “evangelical obedience” to the “condition” of justification. But how can Edwards defend this position while still claiming to uphold the Reformation principle of *sola gratia*? Edwards believes that evangelical obedience can serve as the ground for final justification because of Christ’s righteousness imputed in the initial justification. Christ’s righteousness, which is imputed to the believer, now covers or sanctifies the obedience of the believer and this is included in the ground of final justification. This articulation is clearly a departure from Calvin and inconsistent with Fuller. What is surprising is that this theology of future justification bears a strong resemblance to what English Arminians were presenting in the seventeenth century. I would speculate that the same antinomian concerns influenced Edwards on this particular aspect of his theology and moved him in a direction that Fuller did not follow.

In the present day, the doctrine of justification continues to be debated with some intensity. Controversial summations from the New Perspective on Paul, Federal Vision Theology, Post-Conservative Evangelicals, and on going Roman Catholic and Protestant ecumenical dialogues are challenging this historic doctrine. Consequently, the wisdom of the past can help us navigate these issues from a historically informed position and with the necessary theological nuance. For example, does a robust doctrine of Union with Christ make imputation unnecessary or redundant as some in the New Perspective camp have suggested?<sup>49</sup> Clearly, for Calvin and Fuller, the answer is a resounding no! Union with Christ is an organizing structure that includes both the forensic and renovative soteriological benefits which are distinct but not separate. Recognizing the proper relation between Union with Christ and the doctrine of imputation avoids the possibility of marginalizing the forensic character of imputation and subsequently the doctrine of justification, while at the same time insuring that the faith alone by which we are justified, is never alone, but is always accompanied by works of gratitude.

## ESCHATOLOGY

The history of eschatology continues to be a neglected field of study. Most of the recent publications tend to commit the historical errors that were mentioned at the opening of this article. For example, Kenneth Gentry's study gives the impression that every significant Reformed theologian was a postmillennialist.<sup>50</sup> It is important to portray individuals accurately without anachronistically superimposing present labels and positions. It is common today to speak of three major eschatological positions: premillennialism, postmillennialism and amillennialism. These labels are helpful for describing the most popular views in the church today, but they do not always capture the variations and distinctions found in earlier eras. The prophetic and apocalyptic portions of Scripture are indeed mysterious and difficult to interpret. This has led biblical scholars throughout the history of the church to produce sophisticated eschatologies built upon careful exegesis, which was also shaped by their various contexts.

A cursory reading of Fuller's writings gives the indication that he was a postmillennialist. Thus, if you follow Gentry's interpretation, Fuller is simply following in the tradition of the Reformation. However, the connection between Fuller's eschatology and the Reformation is not as obvious, especially when compared to his doctrines of Scripture and Justification. This is due, in part, to the radical changes and development in eschatology during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What were these changes? The medieval period was dominated arguably by the theology of Augustine, including Augustine's eschatology. In his instrumental volume, *City of God*, Augustine repudiated the chiliasm of the ante-nicene Fathers and concluded that the millennium would not be a future event, but the vision in Revelation 20 corresponded to the entire church age.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, the vision is not to be interpreted as a literal one thousand year period, but it is symbolic of the interadventual era. Augustine's method did not look for exclusive, one to one, fulfillments of biblical prophecies in specific historical events. With the notable exception of Joachim of Fiore in the twelfth century, the prevalence of Augustine's symbolic exegesis extended throughout the medieval period and on into the early Reformation.<sup>52</sup>

Initially, Martin Luther had no interest in eschatology, even speculating about the place of Revelation in the biblical canon. However his attitude changed dramatically in 1528 when he became convinced that the papacy was the fulfillment of the prophetic antichrist.<sup>53</sup> From Luther

on, this identification became a foundational Protestant tenant, which justified separating from Rome, and infused the Protestant cause with an apocalyptic dimension.<sup>54</sup> For the Reformers, prophecy was being fulfilled and time was running out. No matter how difficult the circumstances were for Protestants, whether in battle with the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, under the reign of blood Mary, or persecuted by Francis I, there was an abiding eschatological hope that Christ would return and conquer all his enemies. But it is important not to overlook the methodological shift away from an Augustinian method of interpretation towards a historicist approach.

Successive Reformers followed Luther's lead. From his pulpit in Zurich, Heinrich Bullinger preached 101 sermons from the book of Revelation.<sup>55</sup> Bullinger applied the historicist method to his reading of chapter 20. Instead of interpreting the one thousand years as a symbolic number, Bullinger maintained that the millennium was a literal one thousand years, although it was not to be anticipated in the future. Bullinger dated the millennium in his past, around the time of Constantine, and ending one thousand years after.<sup>56</sup> The millennium ends with the corruption of the papacy and consequently the appearance of the antichrist. Revelation 20:7–8 explains that at the end of the one thousand years, Satan would be let loose from his bondage and allowed to deceive the nations again. If, according to Bullinger, the millennium was in the past, chronologically he placed himself during this period of Satan's release. All that awaited was the return of Christ, the great battle of Gog and Magog, and the Day of Judgment. The influence and impact of Bullinger's interpretations should not be underestimated. His 101 sermons were incorporated into the marginal notes of the Geneva Study Bible. Methodologically, this was a shift away from Augustine's *City of God*. Even Calvin, who was consistent with Augustine in so much of his theology, agreed that the papacy was the literal identification of the beast in Revelation.

The methodological door that Luther, Bullinger and others left ajar in the sixteenth century was kicked wide open in the seventeenth century. Apocalyptic exegetes rigorously applied the historicist methodology with some surprising results. Although a historicist methodology was acceptable in the sixteenth century, all three major branches of the Protestant church condemned chiliasm or millenarianism. The Lutheran Augsburg Confession of 1530, the English Forty-Two Articles of Religion of 1552, and the Reformed Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 all rejected the view that interpreted the millennium of Revelation 20 as a

literal future event.<sup>57</sup> This strict censure was mostly due to the fact that many millenarians used this eschatology to justify radical social and political agendas. Yet, by the seventeenth century, millenarianism was not only an acceptable position, but also a popular one especially amongst the English puritans. What accounts for this change in theological posture?

In 1627 two books were simultaneously published that advocated a millenarian reading of Revelation 20. The first, entitled *Diatribes de mille annis apocalypticis* (later published in English under the title: *The Beloved City*) was written by the Reformed Herborn University professor and delegate at the Synod of Dort, Johann Heinrich Alsted. Alsted witnessed the ravages of the Thirty Years War and was forced to relocate numerous times as a refugee. He concluded that the millennium was not in the past or the present, but it would arrive in the future. For Alsted, this promise of a future millennium provided great hope for the suffering Protestant church.<sup>58</sup>

The Cambridge don, Joseph Mede, wrote the other publication, entitled *Clavis Apocalyptic*, later translated as the *Key to the Revelation*. Mede lived his life in the scholarly comforts of Cambridge University, dying in 1638 before the outbreak of war in England. He was well known and respected for his theological writings and his apocalyptic interpretations. By observing the repetition of numbers and characters in the book of Revelation, Mede intricately aligned the various visions into what he called “synchronisms,” or corresponding visions. When applied thoroughly, these synchronisms would provide the key to unlock the proper chronology in which these events were to occur.<sup>59</sup> Following this method, his chronology, like Alsted, placed the millennium in the future. Mede’s work was received with enthusiasm. William Twisse, the prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, wrote the preface to the English translation, and other puritans like Thomas Goodwin and Jeremiah Burroughes adopted Mede’s interpretations.<sup>60</sup>

Seventh-century millenarianism, shaped by Alsted and Mede, bore a number of unique characteristics. Following the historicist method introduced in the sixteenth century, prophetic signs were sought which would mark the inauguration of a literal and terrestrial one thousand year millennial kingdom. Two signs emerged as distinct markers for the close proximity of the millennium. The first would be the fall of Antichrist. This defeat would begin in the present church age with the defeat of Roman Catholicism and be completed at Christ’s return at the begin-

ning of the millennium. During the Thirty Years War, Protestants eagerly watched the progress of the various battles, hoping that Protestant victories, like the brief success of the Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus, would signal the fall of Antichrist. The second sign would be the national conversion of the Jews to Christianity. Millenarians interpreted the Old Testament prophecies concerning the restoration of God's old covenant people, and the salvation of all Israel, in Romans chapter 11, in conjunction with their understanding of Revelation 20. God's promises to Israel would be fulfilled immediately before the arrival of the millennium.<sup>61</sup> It is important to note that this doctrine was not exclusively millenarian. Some non-millenarians likewise anticipated this event, yet within a millenarian system, it served as a decisive apocalyptic marker. This doctrine was extremely influential and fueled a philosemitic movement in early modern Europe. In 1656, during his reign as Lord Protectorate, Oliver Cromwell called for the readmission of the Jews to England. This was motivated by Cromwell's hope that England would aid in facilitating the conversion of the Jews and thus usher in the millennium.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to seeking signs pointing to the arrival of the millennium, millenarians likewise debated the nature of the millennial kingdom. While the events preceding the millennium, and the literal duration, were not in dispute, much was discussed regarding the specific nature of this kingdom. First, the location of Christ's reign was an important detail. Most millenarians agreed that Christ would appear at the outset of the millennium to destroy Antichrist; however, given the temporary nature of the millennium some, like Mede, taught that Christ would not remain on earth but return to heaven for the duration of the one thousand years.<sup>63</sup> Moreover much was written concerning Revelation 20:5–6 and the nature of the first resurrection. Again some millenarians, building on the patristic tradition, interpreted the first resurrection as a literal corporeal resurrection, where martyrs will be raised to enjoy the millennial reign. This exegesis added a supernatural quality to the millennial period. Yet others, like the New England Congregationalist John Cotton, were convinced that the first resurrection did not refer to a bodily resurrection, instead it prophesied the resurrection or restoration of the churches.<sup>64</sup>

In light of this Reformation background, Andrew Fuller's eschatology can be assessed with greater historical sensitivity. Again, a superficial reading of Fuller's *Expository Discourses on the Apocalypse* would lead readers to conclude that Fuller, like Jonathan Edwards before him, was a

classic postmillennialist. Edwards and Fuller are both explicit in their interpretations that the return of Christ will be at the conclusion of the millennium.<sup>65</sup> Modern day postmillennialists, who proclaim Edwards as the father of American postmillennialism, would trace this eschatological genealogy back through Calvin (given Calvin's vitriolic condemnation of chiliasm) and ultimately to Augustine. Yet, when examined more closely, the characteristics of Edwards' and Fuller's postmillennialism bears little resemblance to the Augustinian tradition. Space in this article restricts our examination to Fuller, but it is worth noting that Fuller and Edwards are in agreement on a number of eschatological interpretations.<sup>66</sup>

Twenty-first century eschatologies are defined and distinguished based upon the timing of the second coming of Christ in relation to the millennium, hence the terms prefixes "pre," "post," and "a." But these distinctions should not be transposed on to sixteenth, seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. Instead differences should be traced along the historical lines of exegetical method and concluding interpretations. Fuller inherited the historicist method first introduced in the sixteenth century and subsequently applied with rigorous consistency by seventeenth-century millenarians. He agrees that the visions in the book of Revelation correspond to specific historical events. Fuller affirms the identification of the papacy as Antichrist and suggests that the slaying of the witnesses in Revelation 11 had occurred just prior to the Reformation with the suppression of Jan Hus in Bohemia, the Waldensians in France, and Wycliffites in England. The resurrection of the witnesses, or these early lights of the Reformation, was fulfilled in Martin Luther and the other magisterial Reformers.<sup>67</sup> But Fuller's application of the historicist method did not stop with past historical events. Revelation 11:13 describes a great earthquake, where a tenth of the city fell. Fuller speculates that the city referred to Europe and the tenth that fell corresponded to the recent French Revolution, where in his understanding a Roman Catholic nation was toppled.<sup>68</sup> It is fascinating to note that Fuller cites Thomas Goodwin and Campegius Vitringa, two unquestionable millenarians, to support his conclusion. There is very little detectable difference between Fuller's historicist methodology and the millenarian methodology of the seventeenth century.

Similarities between Fuller and seventeenth century millenarians did not stop with methodology. Fuller agrees that the millennium would be a future event, extending for a literal one thousand years.<sup>69</sup> He also

maintains that this event would be preceded by the fall of Antichrist. Fuller writes, "And as to the Millennium, one of its characters is, that the beast and the false prophet shall first have gone into perdition, and Satan be bound; but neither of these has taken place."<sup>70</sup> Additionally, Fuller anticipates the nation conversion of the Jews as another event signaling the proximity of the millennium. Fuller establishes this doctrine from the Old Testament prophecies and Romans 11 and he even suggested that the Jews would be restored to their original land in Palestine.<sup>71</sup> On this point Fuller should not be confused with a proto-dispensationalist eschatology. There are significant exegetical differences between Fuller and John Nelson Darby.

Nevertheless, Fuller's placement of the return of Christ at the end of the millennium and his discussion on the nature of the millennium does reveal some unique traits in his eschatology. Fuller outlines two possible interpretations of Revelation 20. The first holds to a personal reign of Christ on earth, with a bodily first resurrection, and a day of judgment after the millennium. Fuller rejects this view because he believes that the person reign of Christ diminishes the spiritual reign, which is the reign of the Gospel, which will result in a golden age of true religion and an end to all earthly wars. Likewise he logically concludes that a corporeal resurrection would result in a state of immortality. Yet, the millennium is a finite kingdom, therefore, according to Fuller, the immortal existence in the resurrected body should be assigned to the immortal kingdom in the New Heavens and New Earth. Likewise the battle of Gog and Magog, at the end of the millennium, is also inconsistent with a bodily resurrection unto immortality. Finally, Fuller argues that the return of Christ, the bodily resurrection and the last Day of Judgment are all coincident events. The first scheme separates these events by a thousand years.<sup>72</sup>

The second interpretation of Revelation 20 is Fuller's own view. He contends that the millennium will be governed by the spiritual reign of Christ. By that Fuller means that the Gospel will go forth with such success and power that nearly all will embrace Christianity and a period of worldwide unprecedented peace will ensue. The raising up of godly leaders during this glorious period will manifest the first resurrection and this will end with the release of Satan, the battle of Gog and Magog, the return of Christ and the Day of Judgment.<sup>73</sup> Fuller believes this articulation is more logically consistent and more faithful to the biblical text.

One could argue that Fuller is rejecting the millenarianism of the seventeenth century in its entirety and affirming a new distinctive post-

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millennial eschatology. However, what Fuller is actually rejecting is one brand of millenarianism while advocating another eschatology that still displays elements of the millenarian tradition. For example, Fuller criticizes the first view because it temporally separates the return of Christ, the bodily resurrection and the Day of Judgment. Joseph Mede offered an alternative interpretation that avoided this apparent problem. Mede asserted that in the prophetic genre one day was equal to a thousand years. Thus, the Day of Judgment extended for the entire millennial period. Consequently, both the first and second resurrection and the return of Christ could be considered coincident with the Day of Judgment.<sup>74</sup> Likewise, as stated earlier, Mede taught that Christ would not personally reign on earth during the millennium. Thus, it would seem plausible that Fuller was rejecting one form of millenarianism, while at the same time utilizing the same millenarian method, and producing similar interpretations. Perhaps, instead of labeling Fuller a postmillennialist, it is more accurate to describe him as a modified millenarian?

Eschatological positions continue to be debated in Evangelical circles. The popularity of the *Left Behind* series testifies to the ongoing interest in end time speculations. The study of the history of eschatology forces one to be aware of how one's context shapes theology by often influencing biblical interpretation. The study of eschatology brings this into sharper focus, because the interpreter's context is not limited to theological and philosophical contexts, but often includes significant political and social events. Self-awareness is important for studying eschatology, and observing other interpreters in different eras will help use identify our own biases.

## CONCLUSION

The theology of Andrew Fuller no doubt demonstrates that he was an eighteenth-century heir of the Reformation. But theological development is never static. While Fuller dependence on the Reformation is undeniable, he was also shaped by the theological questions, philosophical challenges, and pressing ecclesiastical issues of his own time. Historical continuities and discontinuities must be accounted for and doing so gives one a more nuanced and accurate understanding of the past; and this provides a helpful comparison for present theological challenges. **E**

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