

The Diminishing Influence
of John Owen upon Andrew Fuller

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As eighteenth-century British Particular Baptist Andrew Fuller's thought matured concerning the nature of the atonement, his use and appreciation of the insights of seventeenth-century Non-Conformist John Owen waned. Early in his theological development, Fuller wrote concerning Owen, "I never met with any thing of importance in his writings on which I saw any reason to animadvert; so far from it, that I know of no writer for whom I have so great an esteem; it would be a faint expression for me to say I *approve* his principles—I *admire* them."¹ Yet, in large part, scholars have neglected to account for Fuller's theological development, especially his shift from a limited to an unlimited understanding of the extent of the atonement, when examining his reliance upon Owen.²

¹ Andrew Gunton Fuller, *Memoir*, in *The Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller: With a Memoir of his Life by Andrew Gunton Fuller*; ed. Joseph Belcher, 3d ed. (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845; reprinted by Sprinkle Publications: Harrisonburg, VA, 1998), 1:39. Italics his. All subsequent works contained in this three-volume set published by Sprinkle are listed in the following way: author's name, title of the individual work, a reference to *Fuller's Works*, volume number, and page number.

² There is considerable debate concerning the Fuller's mature position on the atonement. All scholars observe a decided shift in Fuller's position as demonstrated in the two editions of Fuller's *Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*. See Andrew Fuller, *The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation: Or the Obligations of Men Fully to Credit, and Cordially to Approve, Whatever God Makes Known. Wherein is Considered the Nature of Faith in Christ, and the Duty of Those Where the Gospel Comes in that Matter* (Northampton, England: T. Dicey, 1785) hereafter designated as *The Gospel of Christ* and Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, *Fuller's Works*, 2:328–416. The debate concerns both the position from which Fuller shifted and the final, mature position of Fuller. Scholars such as Michael A.G. Haykin and Thomas J. Nettles have argued that Fuller shifted from a

The diminishing influence of Owen's thought in Fuller's theology, then, can be demonstrated by evaluating Fuller's reliance upon Owen early, especially in *The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation*, published initially in 1785, and comparing the content of that work and its reliance upon Owen with that of Fuller's second edition of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, published in 1801. Such an evaluation will demonstrate that Fuller's use of Owen has altered due to a shift in Fuller's view of the atonement. This is further exemplified in that Fuller's appropriation of insights gained from Jonathan Edwards increased in Fuller's later works in comparison to his earlier writings.

John Owen in The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation, 1785

Fuller was a self-taught theologian. The resignation of his beloved pastor, John Eve, due to Eve's willingness to call a drunkard in the church to repentance despite the church's antinomian contention that if immoral acts were to be restrained or conquered, "it was altogether to be ascribed to God, and not to us" awakened Fuller to theological

commercial understanding of the atonement to a view more in line with high (or five-point) Calvinism. See Michael A. G. Haykin, "Particular Redemption in the Writings of Andrew Fuller," in *The Gospel in the World: International Baptist Studies*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, ed. David W. Bebbington (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2002), 123–28 and Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life*. Revised and Expanded 20th Anniversary Edition (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2006), 68–77. Opposing that reading of Fuller, David Allen represents a stream of scholarship arguing that Fuller's shift on the atonement was from that of high-Calvinism towards an unlimited view of the atonement in line with a modified (or four-point) Calvinism. See David L. Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 477–97. In like manner, Peter Morden writes that Fuller shifted "from a limited to a general view of the atonement." See Peter J. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth Century Particular Baptist Life*. Studies in Baptist History and Thought 8 (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 76. A full consideration of the different readings of Fuller is beyond the scope of this paper, but the present author is in agreement with the arguments of Allen and Morden for Fuller having ultimately advocated a general, or unlimited, atonement.

controversy, especially concerning the responsibility of man before God.³ This controversy proved formative for Fuller, and alongside Fuller's eventual call to serve as their next pastor, it provided the impetus to begin studying Scripture and trusted authors in search of a biblical answer. During this time, as Fuller's friend and biographer John Webster Morris described it, Fuller developed "a considerable taste for reading" and his studies led to the eventual publication of his first work, *The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation*.⁴

In his description of Fuller's reading habits and library, Morris acknowledged, "[Fuller] was very partial to Owen. . . . [who] displayed, as he thought, a depth of judgment, and a knowledge of human nature, scarcely to be found in any other author."⁵ Historian Michael A. G. Haykin wrote that Owen, alongside John Bunyan and Jonathan Edwards, was "undoubtedly" one of "Fuller's favorite authors."⁶ As such, it is unsurprising to discover that John Owen is an ever-present and trusted source referenced by Fuller repeatedly in *The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation*.⁷ Indeed, less than one year before it was published, Fuller had recorded in his diary: "Much pain at heart today, while reading in Dr. Owen. Feel almost a sacred reverence for his character."⁸

As biographer Peter Morden has observed, this sacred reverence can be demonstrated in that "Owen's works were quoted extensively and with approval by Fuller in the first edition of the *Gospel Worthy*."⁹ In the second section of the work, Fuller argued that faith is "the duty of all

³ A. G. Fuller, *Memoir*, in *Fuller's Works*, 1:2, 8–9.

⁴ John Webster Morris, *Memoirs of the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (High Wycombe: n.p., 1816), 359.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Michael A. G. Haykin, "'A Great Thirst for Reading': Andrew Fuller the Theological Reader." *Eusebeia* 9 (2008): 16.

⁷ Carl R. Trueman, "John Owen and Andrew Fuller," *Eusebia* 8 (2008): 54. Indeed, Trueman writes, "by the year 1784, . . . it is clear that Fuller was already acquainted with Owen's polemical writings in the matters of Arminianism, atonement, indwelling sin, and the character of God." *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸ Fuller, *Memoir*, in *Fuller's Works*, 1:42.

⁹ Peter J. Morden, *The Life and Thought of Andrew Fuller (1754–1815)*. Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2015), 53.

men . . . under the sound of the gospel."¹⁰ In his advocacy that "every man is cordially to receive, and heartily to approve, whatever God reveals," Fuller noted, "approbation of the gospel, or of God's way of salvation is the distinguishing characteristic of true faith."¹¹ Fuller then urged his reader to consider Owen's writing on Justification, specifically his chapter on the nature of faith.¹²

Further buttressing his claim, Fuller then quoted Owen's *A Display of Arminianism* for more than two pages of text.¹³ Fuller's purpose of quoting Owen was to demonstrate that it is the duty of all men to respond to the gospel in faith, yet as historian Carl Trueman notes, the subject of the quotation stems from Owen's defense against the Arminian charge that "anything required as a duty of Christians cannot be included in the work of Christ."¹⁴ Thus, the context of Owen's writing makes it clear that "Owen's original point is not that which Fuller is making."¹⁵ However, the ideas are related and Fuller clearly believed that Owen's statement on the matter stood in his defense.

In Fuller's rebuttal of the Arminian objection against duty faith, Fuller summarized their argument, writing, "because an innocent creature, who stands in no need of a mediator, cannot while such approach to God in that manner; therefore, when he is become guilty and does stand in need of a mediator, it is not then his duty to come to God through him."¹⁶ He then quoted a paragraph from Owen's *Display of Arminianism* which clarified what Fuller perceived to be the absurdity of their objection: "We have all now, *they tell us*, a power of believing in

¹⁰ Fuller, *The Gospel of Christ*, 36.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹² See John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ, Explained, Confirmed, and Vindicated*, in *The Works of John Owen*, edited by William H. Gould (Reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 5:2–400.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 86–88. See John Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 10:100–08.

¹⁴ Trueman, "John Owen and Andrew Fuller," 55.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Trueman marshals this as evidence that Fuller did not have the theological acumen to understand and utilize Owen rightly.

¹⁶ Fuller, *The Gospel of Christ*, 113.

Christ, that is, Adam, by his fall, obtained a supernatural endowment, far more excellent than any he had before!¹⁷

Elsewhere, Fuller marshaled Owen's *Death of Death in the Death of Christ* in his defense against the charge that if "the blessings of grace" are "all sovereign and free gifts of God through Christ," then it is "a very great absurdity" and "mockery to the Holy One, that God should require men to believe in Christ."¹⁸ Fuller responded to this objection by noting that it "is of *Arminian extraction*, and has been answered long ago by the Calvinists, in their controversies with the Arminians."¹⁹ Fuller then cited Owen's classic work. Mere pages later, Fuller concluded the section "with a lengthy quotation from Owen to the effect that God's hidden will of election is not to be made the basis for public ministerial policy when it comes to preaching the gospel."²⁰

Fuller recommended Owen's *Display of Arminianism* once more near the end of his work as he sought to answer varied objections to his overall thesis. Fuller wrote concerning the consistency of God demanding sinners exercise the gift of faith: "I beg leave to refer the reader to what DR. OWEN has said on this subject, . . . wherein he has fully proved the consistency of the same thing, in different respects, being *God's gift*, and *man's duty*."²¹

Fuller leaned on Owen's *Mortification of Sin* in his defense against the accusation that the non-elect cannot respond to the gospel in faith and, as such, heralds of the gospel are only to call for their outward reformation.²² After again quoting Owen for almost an entire two pages, Fuller wrote that those arguing such "must have very different ideas from these of DR. OWEN."²³ Clearly, Fuller believed Owen to have been a respected authority by his readers sufficient enough to provide the necessary support to conclude the matter.

¹⁷ Ibid., 116. Italics his.

¹⁸ Ibid., 123. See John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 10:140–428

¹⁹ Ibid., 124.

²⁰ Trueman, "John Owen and Andrew Fuller," 55.

²¹ Fuller, *The Gospel of Christ*, 153. Italics and emphasis his. Once more, Fuller cites chapter ten of Owen's *Display of Arminianism*.

²² Ibid., 170–71. See John Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, etc.*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 6:33–40.

²³ Ibid., 171. Emphasis his.

In addition to the number of citations and references made to John Owen in Fuller's work, the manner in which Fuller referred to Owen bears observation and indicates his appreciation and reverence for the Puritan divine. Fuller referred to Owen throughout the work as "Dr. Owen," "the Doctor," and "the great Owen."²⁴ Moreover, after presenting a barrage of quotations from Elisha Coles, Thomas Ridgely, John Gill, and Herman Witsius (whom Fuller calls "very respectable writers"), Fuller referred to Owen as "the *last* of these great men."²⁵

It is undeniable that John Owen played a prominent role in Andrew Fuller's thought as he penned *The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation*.²⁶ Fuller's repeated use of Owen in support of his primary argument demonstrates the esteem in which he held Owen and weight he attributed to Owen's writings. Further, the manner in which he referred to the seventeenth-century Puritan demonstrates his respect and admiration for Owen. Yet, as will be demonstrated, both his references to Owen and the manner in which he made those references would be altered dramatically in the 1801 publication of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*.

John Owen in The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation, 1801

In the years following Fuller's 1785 publication, a theological shift is discernible in Fuller's writings. As David Allen has observed, "it is evident" that Fuller "was committed to particular redemption (limited atonement) in the Owenic sense of the term" in 1785.²⁷ Yet, his debates with General Baptist Dan Taylor, resulting from Taylor's objections to Fuller's work, provided the context and cause for a decided shift in his thought.

Rethinking Particular Redemption

Taylor was not content to argue with Fuller's repeated use of revered authors such as John Owen. Instead, Taylor repeatedly drew the debate over the extent of the atonement back to the words of Scripture.²⁸ He

²⁴ Ibid., 49n, 86, 115, 137, 152, 153, 170, 171.

²⁵ Ibid., 138. Italics his.

²⁶ In his draft of the book, "there are no fewer than seven separate mentions of [Owen's] name." Morden, *The Life and Thought of Andrew*, 54.

²⁷ Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 480.

²⁸ Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, 66.

considered the words of men, however respected, to be of little value in comparison to that of Holy Writ. This concern for biblical fidelity over any given tradition “entirely mirrored Fuller’s own.”²⁹ In a reply to Taylor, Fuller commented that Scripture itself, not the pattern laid by respected forerunners in the faith, is that which determined the standard to follow.³⁰ Fuller had been careful to acknowledge that he defended Calvinism “not because of any prior commitment to Calvinism as a system,” but because “he believed the tenets he was defending to be scriptural, and therefore true.”³¹ Yet, “following his debates with Dan Taylor, Fuller was persuaded that particular redemption in the sense of limited substitution . . . did not comport with Scripture.”³² Indeed, concerning his debate with Taylor, Fuller later confessed to his friend, John Ryland, “I freely own that my views of particular redemption were altered in that controversy. . . . I tried to answer my opponent . . . but I could not. I found not only his reasonings, but the Scriptures themselves, standing in my way.”³³

At this point, Fuller felt it necessary to conform his thought concerning the extent of the atonement to his new understanding of Scripture. This is the development in his thought that continues to be debated today. It is clear that in 1785, Fuller had believed that Christ had “died *for some of the human race*.”³⁴ In 1801, however, Fuller’s view had been altered to the point that he felt compelled to write that the atonement of Christ could “be in itself equal to the salvation of the whole

²⁹ Ibid. Indeed, Morden notes, “it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Fuller had more in common with this Arminian Evangelical [Taylor], steeped in the experience of Revival, than with either of his High Calvinist opponents [William Button and John Martin] from his own denomination.” Ibid, 68.

³⁰ Referring to Gill and Brine, Fuller wrote, “I have a high opinion of the respectable characters. . . . At the same time, the successors of these worthy men ought not to set them up as the standards of orthodoxy.” Fuller, *A Defence of a Treatise Entitled The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation Containing a Reply to Mr. Button’s Remarks and the Observations of Philanthropos*, Fuller’s Works, 2:421.

³¹ Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, 69.

³² Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 480.

³³ Fuller, *Six Letters to Dr. Ryland Respecting the Controversy with the Rev. A. Booth*, Fuller’s Works, 2:709.

³⁴ Fuller, *The Gospel of Christ*, 106. Italics his.

world, were the whole world to embrace it."³⁵ Indeed, while the major thrust and line of argumentation from his 1785 *The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation* remains—it is the duty of every lost sinner to respond to the gospel—Fuller deemed it necessary to rewrite the section on particular redemption in its entirety.³⁶

Rewriting Particular Redemption

In the first edition, Fuller had argued, “the act of trusting in Christ does not, in its own nature, necessarily imply that the party should *know* his particular interest in his death at the time; or that he should *have* such an interest at all, in order to make it his duty.”³⁷ Instead, Fuller believed that whether one know himself to be elect or not, submission and worship were appropriate response of sinners to Christ. He illustrated this belief by asking if a man guilty of treason was incorrect “to confess the truth, and cast himself on the mercy of his prince, and trust wholly to his clemency,” even if not guaranteed pardon.³⁸ As such, Fuller wrote, “There is no fear of Christ ever destroying any that thus venture upon him; but if there were, if he only saved *some* who applied for mercy, that would be a sufficient ground for all others to apply too, as not knowing but that they might be the objects of his favor.”³⁹ As Peter Morden observed, “This echoed Fuller’s own conversion experience, and he supported his argument with quotations from the Calvinist writers Coles, Ridgely, Witsius and Owen.”⁴⁰

In fact, in his initial publication, Fuller had quoted Coles twice saying “Christ did not die for all,” and “The first act of faith is *not* that Christ died for *all*, or for *you* in particular: the one is not true; the other not certain to you.”⁴¹ He had quoted Witsius as saying, “All, and everyone in particular therefore, to whom the gospel is preached, are not commanded immediately to believe *that Christ died for them*; for that is a

³⁵ Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, *Fuller's Works*, 2:374.

³⁶ For comparison, see Fuller, *The Gospel of Christ*, 132–39 and Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, *Fuller's Works*, 2:373–75.

³⁷ Fuller, *The Gospel of Christ*, 132. Italics his.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

³⁹ *Ibid.* Italics his.

⁴⁰ Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, 73.

⁴¹ Fuller, *The Gospel of Christ*, 135. Italics his.

falsehood.”⁴² He quoted Ridgely as writing, “Faith and repentance may be asserted to be duties incumbent on all, and demanded of them, when at the same time it don’t follow that all are given to expect salvation upon the bare declaration that they are so.”⁴³ He then concluded with Owen, writing, “When God calleth upon men to believe, he doth not in the first place call upon them to believe that Christ died for them.”⁴⁴ Fuller wrote “that these very respectable writers, whose names are deservedly had in veneration in all the churches,” “allowed repentance and faith to be incumbent on men in general, and this they thought to be consistent with particular redemption.”⁴⁵ Each of these quotations is removed in Fuller’s revision except that of Owen.⁴⁶ Indeed, “There is no statement in quotation or by Fuller in this section of the second edition advocating limited atonement.”⁴⁷

While it is notable that Owen’s quotation remained, the context in which it is placed had been altered entirely. Fuller’s point of emphasis is no longer that Christ did not die for all and that none can know if they are among the objects of the atonement, but rather, Fuller pivoted to argue that the particularity of the atonement does not exist in the provision of the atonement, but in “the sovereignty of its application.”⁴⁸ Fuller clarified this statement in a letter to John Ryland, noting,

the death of Christ *in itself* considered, *i.e.* irrespective of the *design* of the Father and Son as to its application, was sufficient for all mankind; that a way was opened by which God consistently with his justice could forgive any sinner whatever that returns to him by Jesus Christ; that if the whole world were to believe in him, none need be sent away for want of a sufficiency in his death to render his pardon and acceptance consistent with the rights of justice.⁴⁹

⁴² *Ibid.*, 137. Italics his.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Fuller retains a portion of the quote from Elisha Coles, but extracted any reference to a limited substitution or atonement.

⁴⁷ Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 482.

⁴⁸ Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, *Fuller’s Works*, 2:374.

⁴⁹ Fuller, *Six Letters to Dr. Ryland*, in *Fuller’s Works*, 2:710.

Were the atonement limited in its provision, then, according to Fuller's new argument, "it might . . . be inconsistent with indefinite invitations. But it would be equally inconsistent with the free *forgiveness* of sin."⁵⁰ This was an unacceptable conclusion, according to Fuller, and therefore, it could not be the biblical teaching.

Instead, Fuller offered a different understanding of the atonement, arguing, "if the atonement of Christ proceed not on the principle of commercial, but of moral justice, or justice as it relates to *crime*—if its grand object were to express the Divine displeasure against sin, . . . no such inconsistency can justly be ascribed to it."⁵¹ In this scenario, Fuller argued, "There is no contradiction between this peculiarity of *design* in the death of Christ, and a universal obligation on those who hear the gospel to believe in him, or a universal invitation being addressed to them."⁵² Taylor's arguments had borne their fruit and Fuller's shift was complete.

As such, the context of Fuller's use of Owen in this section had changed. No longer was Fuller using Owen to defend the inability of the sinner to know that Christ died for him. Fuller believed that this was not the substance of gospel proclamation, indeed, it must not be. As he continued to quote Coles, "He that will know his own particular redemption before he will believe . . . begins at the wrong end of his work, and is very unlikely to come that way to the knowledge of it."⁵³ Fuller understood that this would be to trust in one's election rather than in Christ. Instead, Fuller used Owen's quotation in 1801 to emphasize that Jesus is the way of salvation made available to all men and that Christ had died for sinners in general, rather than any sinner in particular. Again, it is noted that this does not appear to be the original purpose of Owen's writing, but Fuller believed it to conclude his argument powerfully. The quotation by Owen remained in the second edition, but the argument for which it was used to support had altered entirely.

⁵⁰ Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, *Fuller's Works*, 2:373. Italics his.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2:373–74.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 2:374. Italics his.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Removing “The Great Doctor”

This alteration of Fuller’s use of Owen in *The Gospel Worthy All Acceptation* (1801) is not restricted to the section on particular redemption. In the second section of the new edition, where Fuller had referred his reader to consider Owen on Justification, especially the chapter on the nature of faith, no reference is made to Owen whatsoever.⁵⁴ Moreover, Fuller’s quotation of Owen for almost three pages of text in the first edition is struck in its entirety. In its place, Fuller wrote, “This is for the same thing, in different respects, to be ‘man’s duty and God’s gift;’ a position which Dr. Owen has fully established; and somewhere remarks that he who is ignorant of it has yet to learn one of the first principles of religion,” with a footnote referring to Owen’s *Display of Arminianism*.⁵⁵ Thus, three pages of direct quotation is replaced with an acknowledgement and footnote. In his sixth section, “Of the Necessity of a Divine Principle in Order to Believing,” where Fuller had quoted Owen twice and encouraged his reader to read Owen’s *Display of Arminianism*, once again, no mention is made in the second edition to Owen at all.⁵⁶

Fuller does not strike Owen from his revision entirely. Retained in Fuller’s second edition is the use of Owen revealing the absurdity of the Arminian argument against duty faith, as is his reference to Owen’s *Death of Death*.⁵⁷ Finally, Fuller’s use of Owen’s *Mortification of Sin* is retained in the conclusion of his work.⁵⁸ Whereas Owen seems to have been used as an unquestioned and final authority in the first edition, Fuller’s references to Owen are greatly diminished in the second edition

⁵⁴ Compare Fuller, *The Gospel of Christ*, 49, and Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy*, *Fuller’s Works*, 2:349–52.

⁵⁵ Compare Fuller, *The Gospel of Christ*, 86–88, and Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy*, *Fuller’s Works*, 2:366.

⁵⁶ Compare Fuller, *The Gospel of Christ*, 152–53, and Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy*, *Fuller’s Works*, 2:380–82.

⁵⁷ See Fuller, *The Gospel of Christ*, 116 and 124 and Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy*, *Fuller’s Works*, 2:369 and 371.

⁵⁸ See Fuller, *The Gospel of Christ*, 170–71 and Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy*, *Fuller’s Works*, 2:390–91.

and are contained primarily to the refutation of Arminianism and the vast importance of preaching the gospel indiscriminately.⁵⁹

Further, the titles with which Fuller had lauded Owen, such as “the great Owen,” and “the Doctor,” in the first edition were changed entirely in the second edition. Owen was now referred to only as “Dr. Owen” in the second edition—apart from the sections in which his name was struck from the text altogether, even when a citation to one of Owen’s works was retained.⁶⁰ At this point, Alan Clifford’s note that “Andrew Fuller . . . in a letter to Jonathan Edwards’ pupil Samuel Hopkins (1721–1803) dated 17 Mar. 1798, . . . lamented the continuing influence of Owen,” bears consideration.⁶¹

The manner in which Fuller deferred to Owen in the first edition had changed in the second. The language with which Fuller had described “the great Owen” had been subdued. Sections where Fuller continued to use Owen in support of his thesis were restricted to the refutation of Arminianism and Arminian objections to Fuller’s thesis. The view of the atonement which Fuller was defending was no longer in line with that of

⁵⁹ It bears noting that Morden has argued, “there was a continuing influence, with Fuller quoting more from the seventeenth-century Puritan in the second edition of the *Gospel Worthy* than in the first.” (Morden, *The Life and Thought of Andrew*, 54–55.) He supports his argument by noting that the second edition contains a new quotation from Owen that was not present in the first edition. Yet, as this paper demonstrates (it is hoped), the inclusion of one new quotation does not offset the removal of numerous others. Thus, while Owen’s influence continues into the second edition, it is diminished.

⁶⁰ Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, *Fuller’s Works*, 2:371.

⁶¹ Alan Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640–1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 122n13. While a letter on this date addressed to Samuel Hopkins was located in the Angus Library at Regent’s Park College in Oxford, such lament is completely absent in its content and foreign to its purpose. (See Appendix.) As such, scholars are divided on the manner in which to respond to Clifford’s note. While none would go so far as to accuse Clifford of inventing such a letter, it has been observed that Clifford’s advocacy that Fuller had moved in a Baxterian direction away from the position of Owen would be bolstered by the presence of such a letter. Yet, Clifford is generally considered a trusted and careful historian, and such a letter may, in fact, exist in the archives of the Angus even if the present researcher has not been able to locate it. Thus, Clifford’s statement bears consideration, but cannot be used to settle the matter of Fuller’s final appraisal of Owen.

Owen. Indeed, the observant reader detects a hint of Jonathan Edwards's influence in Fuller's shift from a commercial to a criminal (or governmental) understanding of the atonement. Clifford's note, then, is not an absurd impossibility. Rather, it may provide helpful context and explanation of Owen's diminished role in Fuller's writing.

The Influence of Jonathan Edwards

Any discussion of influences in Fuller's theology is incomplete without a consideration of New England Divine, Jonathan Edwards. At Fuller's ordination at the church in Soham, Robert Hall had recommended "*Edwards on the Will* to [his] careful perusal, as the most able performance on the power of man to do the will of God."⁶² In a humorous reflection, Fuller recalled confusing Hall's recommendation with the work of John Edwards, an Episcopalian Calvinist. Fuller considered John Edwards's *Veritas Redux* "a good book; but it did not seem exactly to answer Mr. Hall's recommendation. Nor was it till the year 1777 that [he] discovered [his] mistake."⁶³

Once Fuller realized his error and read the correct Edwards, as Nettles wrote, "Fuller made sure the world knew [of his appreciation for Edwards] 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."⁶⁴ In 1781, Fuller recorded his appreciation of Edwards: "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."⁶⁵ Further, in 1790, Fuller reflected, "I have read some of Jonathan Edwards' sermons, which have left a deep impression on my heart."⁶⁶

Fuller was reading Owen, especially *Mortification of Sin* and another work on "spiritual mindedness," during the same period as his reading of

⁶² A. G. Fuller, *Memoir, Fuller's Works*, 1:15.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Thomas J. Nettles, "The Influence of Jonathan Edwards on Andrew Fuller," *Eusebeia* 9 (2008): 97.

⁶⁵ A. G. Fuller, *Memoir, Fuller's Works*, 1:25. See Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2., ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:56.

Edwards's sermons.⁶⁷ A comparison of Fuller's remarks in his diary concerning the two authors proves insightful. Morden observed, "When he reflects on something from Owen, with his strong emphasis on rigorous self-examination, there is a tendency to introspection and unhappiness; when he reflects on Edwards, there is generally a much more optimistic tone. This was almost certainly unconscious on Fuller's part. *But he was clearly moving in Edwards' direction.*"⁶⁸

Such movement can be demonstrated further in Fuller's remark to Timothy Dwight, who was president of Yale College when it granted Fuller a Doctor of Divinity in 1805.⁶⁹ Fuller wrote, "The writings of your grandfather, President Edwards, and of your uncle, the late Dr. Edwards, have been food to me."⁷⁰

The image of Jonathan Edwards's works serving as Fuller's food persists, as Nettles has reflected, "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 show the helpful effects of the integration of ideas for which Edwards was largely the catalyst."⁷¹ Indeed, "Fuller's own text duplicated the thought and, at times the exact language, of Edwards."⁷²

Fuller's reliance on Edwards, and that of the circle of friends of which he was a part, had led some to claim in 1814, "If [John] Sutcliff and some others had preached more of Christ, and less of Jonathan Edwards, they would have been more useful."⁷³ Fuller's response speaks to his appreciation of Edwards: "If those who talked thus preached Christ half

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:56, 57. Morden believes this reference to a "work on spiritual mindedness" to refer to John Owen, *The Grace of Duty and Being Spiritually Minded*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 7:267–306. See Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, 165n30.

⁶⁸ Morden, *Offering Christ to the World*, 165. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁹ This was the second time such a degree was given to Fuller from America. In 1798, another institution—the College of New Jersey (later, Princeton University)—had bestowed the title to him under the presidency of Samuel Hopkins.

⁷⁰ A. G. Fuller, *Memoir, Fuller's Works*, 1:85.

⁷¹ Nettles, "The Influence of Jonathan Edwards on Andrew Fuller," 113–14.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 108.

⁷³ A. G. Fuller, *Memoir, Fuller's Works*, 1:101.

as much as Jonathan Edwards did, and were half as useful as he was, their usefulness would be double what it is.”⁷⁴

Jonathan Edwards in *The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation*, 1785 and *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, 1801

Fuller’s son, Andrew Gunton Fuller, wrote that his father’s initial draft of that which became *The Gospel of Christ Worthy of All Acceptation* was penned in 1776.⁷⁵ This provides the contemporary historian difficulty in ascertaining Fuller’s consideration of the place of Edwards in the 1785 publication. As Fuller made evident in his memoirs, he did not read Jonathan Edwards’s work until 1777—one year after the initial penning of his draft.⁷⁶

Yet, Edwards’s inclusion in Fuller’s research is clear. Fuller wrote in the preface, “I have read and considered . . . Mr. Jonathan Edwards’ *Enquiry into the Freedom of the Will*, with some other performances on the distinction of *natural and moral ability, and inability*. I always found great pleasure in this distinction.”⁷⁷ The rediscovery of this draft, once thought lost to history, has brought clarity to the matter.⁷⁸ The handwritten draft is entitled, “Thoughts on the Power of Men to do the Will of God, Wrote in 1777, or 1778.”⁷⁹ Thus, it seems that Gunton Fuller’s statement that his father’s draft was “*endorsed with the date of 1776*,” mandates

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Andrew Gunton Fuller, *Men Worth Remembering: Andrew Fuller* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1882), 168.

⁷⁶ A. G. Fuller, *Memoir, Fuller’s Works*, 1:15.

⁷⁷ Fuller, *The Gospel of Christ*, v. Italics his. See Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁷⁸ The draft, entitled “Thoughts on the Power of Men to do the Will of God, Wrote in 1777, or 1778,” is housed at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Archives at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.

⁷⁹ Indicating the difficulty in reading the handwritten draft, Chun reads the title as, “Thoughts on the Power of Men to do the Will of God,’ dated ‘approx. on 1778.’” Chun, *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards in the Theology of Andrew Fuller*. Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 162 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 40. As such, what one reader reads as “1777, or 1778,” Chun reads as “approx. on 1778.”

clarification.⁸⁰ Fuller's research had begun upon his calling to pastor the church in Soham. According to his son, Fuller began drafting the results of his research in 1776, but the draft was "written *probably* at intervals."⁸¹ It seems that while Fuller began drafting his thoughts prior to his reading of Jonathan Edwards, his son's statement "would increase the likelihood of making *Freedom of the Will* the first exposure that Fuller had to the concept of 'natural and moral inability.'"⁸²

Of Edwards's distinction, Fuller wrote, "it appeared to me to carry with it its own evidence, was 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 to as to afford clear and honourable conceptions of divine government."⁸³ His assessment of the importance of Edwards increased in the appendix that he attached to the second edition, wherein he wrote in a footnote, "no man will be allowed to have possessed a clearer insight."⁸⁴

Further, "it is evident that Edwards's usage of governmental language [concerning the atonement] may have been influential on Fuller."⁸⁵ Fuller's language in the second edition concerning the atonement in the section on particular redemption reflects his appropriation of Edwardsean thought. Fuller wrote,

if the atonement of Christ proceed not on the principle of commercial, but of moral justice, or justice, as it relates to *crime*—if its grand object were to express the Divine displeasure against sin, (Rom. 8:3,) and so to render the exercise of mercy, in all the ways wherein sovereign wisdom should determine to apply it, consistent with righteousness (Rom. 3:25)—if it be in itself equal to the salvation of the whole world, were the whole world to embrace it—and if the peculiarity which attends it consist not in its insufficiency to save more than are saved, but in the sovereignty of its application—no such inconsistency can justly be ascribed to it.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ A. G. Fuller, *Men Worth Remembering*, 168. Italics his.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* Italics his.

⁸² Chun, *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, 41.

⁸³ Fuller, *The Gospel of Christ*, v.

⁸⁴ Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, *Fuller's Works*, 2:411n.

⁸⁵ Chun, *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, 168.

⁸⁶ Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, *Fuller's Works*, 2:373–74. Italics his.

The inclusion of this language alongside the removal of any statement in support of a limited extent of the atonement demonstrates both a decided shift in Fuller's conception of the atonement as well as the theologian whom he was willing to follow in that conception. Chun observes, "Fuller, like Edwards, held to a view of the multifaceted nature of the atonement—and denied the concept of the atonement where penal substitution and governmental theory are necessarily viewed as mutually exclusive concepts."⁸⁷ Though Fuller was determined to advance Scripture's teaching on the matter above that of any man, Edwards's writings provided the vocabulary of Fuller's new understanding.

Abraham Booth, a contemporary of Fuller, objected to this move in Fuller's second edition of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* and accused him of "having changed [his] sentiments; with agreeing with [Richard] Baxter in several of his leading peculiarities; and with denying the doctrines of imputation and substitution, in the sense in which Calvinists commonly hold and have held them."⁸⁸ Indeed, Booth observed in Fuller's writings an increasing-similarity with the theology coming from America, especially from the followers of Edwards.⁸⁹

Note Booth's accusation of Fuller being in agreement with Baxter; this is regarded as being in opposition to the position advocated by none other than John Owen, whom Booth cites repeatedly in his writings against Fuller.⁹⁰ In 1803, Fuller acknowledged such, writing, "It is true, I

⁸⁷ Chun, *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, 172.

⁸⁸ Fuller, *Six Letters to Dr. Ryland*, in *Fuller's Works*, 2:702.

⁸⁹ Thus, when Booth took aim at Samuel Hopkins in *Glad Tidings to Perishing Sinners*, in *The Works of Abraham Booth: Late Pastor of the Baptist Church Assembling in Little Prescott Street, Goodman's Fields, London: With Some Account of his Life and Writings* [London: J. Haddon, 1813], 2:1–232., Fuller confided to William Carey, "I believe it was his intent to oppose our Sentiments, and that he chose to attack us under Hopkins' name." "A. Fuller to W. Carey, 6 Sept 1797," *The Letters of Andrew Fuller*, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford. The next year, Fuller lamented that Booth was "rigidly set against everything from America." "A. Fuller to W. Carey, 22 August, 1798," *The Letters of Andrew Fuller*, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford.

⁹⁰ Indeed, such was Booth's reliance upon John Owen in his criticism of Fuller's new view that at times, Owen's words take over multiple pages Booth's work.

have found several of my own sentiments maintained by Mr. Baxter."⁹¹ Booth's accusation developed into a public debate in which the two Particular Baptists represented two streams of thought: Booth defended the Reformed English tradition of John Owen, whereas Fuller stood squarely in the lineage of Jonathan Edwards.

Conclusion

Andrew Fuller had once cited John Owen in defense of his position and even advocated that his own theology could properly be termed "Owenism."⁹² Owen, alongside Gill and Bunyan, gave Fuller a theological vocabulary and had provided Fuller with the theological foundation upon which he constructed his own understanding of Scripture. There is no denial that Owen was critical to Fuller's theological development. Yet, Abraham Booth marshaled John Owen's words against Fuller's new position on the atonement and Fuller answered with those of Jonathan Edwards. In his sixth letter to Ryland, responding to Booth's accusations and written in 1803, Fuller remarked, "The greatest, though not the only, instruction that I have received from human writings, on these subjects, has been from *President Edwards's Discourse on Justification*. That which in me has been called "a strange or singular notion" of this doctrine is stated at large, and I think clearly proved, by him."⁹³

As such, while Owen helped lay the initial foundation for Fuller's theology, he was not the most instrumental in the construction of his mature theological thought.⁹⁴ Indeed, Owen's influence, once so prevalent in Fuller's thought and writings, continued, but in a very diminished capacity.

See Booth, *Glad Tidings to Perishing Sinners*, in *The Works of Abraham Booth* (London: J. Haddon, 1813), 2:103–09.

⁹¹ Fuller, *Six Letters to Dr. Ryland*, in *Fuller's Works*, 2:714.

⁹² *Theological and Biblical Magazine* (London: Button & Son, 1804), 112.

⁹³ Fuller, *Six Letters to Dr. Ryland*, in *Fuller's Works*, 2:715. See Jonathan Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 19, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 143–242.

⁹⁴ Clint Sheehan, "Great and Sovereign Grace: Fuller's Defence of the Gospel against Arminianism," in *"At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word": Andrew Fuller as an Apologist*. *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* 6, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2004), 85.

Andrew Fuller's Letter to Samuel Hopkins, March 17, 1798

To Dr. Hopkins, New England.

Kettering. March 17, 1798.

One of our ministers has told the world that a *diploma* was conferred upon me by the College of New Jersey. I do not know that it is so, as I have received no direct account of it. If I had, I should have written them a respectful letter, expressive of my gratitude for their having offered such a token of respect, and acknowledging what is the truth; that I should esteem it as coming from that quarter which, beyond any other in the world, I most approved, but declining to accept it, partly because I have not those qualifications which are expected to accompany such titles, and partly because I believe all such titles *in religion* to be contrary to our Lord's command, Matt. xxiii, 8."