

**“Very Affecting and Evangelical”:  
Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) and the Evangelical  
Renewal of Pastoral Theology<sup>1</sup>**

KEITH S. GRANT  
Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches

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At the end of the eighteenth century, there was a profound transformation of English dissenting churches as they embraced evangelical theology and piety. The expansionist and activist signs of that evangelical renewal have been well catalogued: reinvigorated associational life, the promotion of international missions, voluntary societies for spiritual growth, widespread itinerancy and lay ministry, and initiatives in education.<sup>2</sup> These new emphases and activities changed the shape of the church in important ways. Deryck Lovegrove has argued persuasively, for example, that the new emphasis on evangelistic itinerancy, entailed “the adaptation of the traditional pastorate” by enlarging the scope of preaching ministry and by allowing greater lay involvement.<sup>3</sup> W.R. Ward has similarly noted that the evangelical transformation of the church was compelling a redefinition of pastoral ministry.<sup>4</sup> The direction of the change that Lovegrove and Ward describe is outward: pastors and congregations engaging new hearers, rural villages, social reform, and even the nations.

Andrew Fuller’s (1754-1815) contributions to this evangelical transformation of the church were many: his participation in the Northamptonshire Particular Baptist Association’s cooperative ventures in prayer, itinerancy, education, and social reform; his role in founding, and then as an administrator and advocate for, the Baptist Missionary Society; and especially his articulation of an evangelical and moderate Calvinism which was seen as enabling, even obligating, this more activist

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and expansionist view of the church's ministry.<sup>5</sup>

But if the transformed church had these new expressions of outward-focused ministry, what difference did this evangelical renewal make to the *inner life* of congregations, particularly the regular ministry of pastors in their weekly preaching? What impact did *evangelical* theology have on *pastoral* theology? Andrew Fuller was a *pastor* as well as a theologian, missionary administrator, and frequent village preacher, and an account of the transformation of the church should also include its effects upon that, his primary vocation. So the question arises: Since the transformed church and the redefined pastorate still relied on preaching and pastoral care, did those congregational acts in any way undergo a corresponding evangelical transformation? Was there a renewal of the congregation and its pulpit, as well as the signs of more outward expansion?

In a discussion of Anglican pastoralia in the eighteenth century, John Walsh and Stephen Taylor suggest: "What distinguished the self-consciously 'serious' Evangelical clergy toward the end of the century was less their definition of pastoral duties than their conception of what it was to be a Christian."<sup>6</sup> This study of Andrew Fuller will argue, however, that the particular evangelical "conception of what it was to be a Christian" – its theology and piety – was precisely what *did* have a bearing on pastoral theology. Preaching, perhaps the clearest example of this renewal, remained the central activity of pastoral ministry for evangelicals, but there was an important change in their understanding of what preaching was for, and consequently what its main themes, manner of delivery, and intended audience should be. The change was not primarily in terms of new pastoral duties as much as a renewal of the character of those duties from within.

There are marks of evangelical theology and piety evident in several aspects of Fuller's pastoral theology. First, Fuller's seminal theological text, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, articulated a moderate Calvinism that was urgent in its *conversionism*. Second, he found his congregational ecclesiology well-suited to evangelical *voluntarism*, in a way comparable to Methodist connexions or Anglican religious societies. Third, in his preaching, Fuller emphasized the *centrality of the cross of Christ* and the use of *affectionate language*. Together, these emphases – conversionism, voluntarism, the centrality of the cross, and affectionate language – indicate an evangelical renewal of pastoral theology, alongside other ways in which the church was transformed by evangelicalism.

### ***Conversionism in Fuller's Pastoral Theology***

Fuller urged preachers to have a “zealous perseverance in the use of all possible means for the conversion of sinners.”<sup>7</sup> Such a zeal for conversion, or conversionism, has been identified by David Bebbington as one of the defining characteristics of evangelicalism.<sup>8</sup> The emergence of such urgency about conversion was the most significant development in Andrew Fuller’s pastoral theology. Fuller had grown up in a high Calvinist church in which the preacher had “little or nothing to say to the unconverted,” and as a young preacher himself he did not dare to “address an invitation to the unconverted to come to Jesus,”<sup>9</sup> a reticence grounded in a theological system which did not want to presume spiritual ability. From being reticent to offer his hearers the gospel, Fuller went on to write *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1781), in which he made the case that all people not only have the capacity to respond to the gospel, but indeed, have an obligation to do so: “Unconverted sinners are commanded, exhorted, and invited to believe in Christ for salvation.”<sup>10</sup> This duty on the part of hearers mapped onto the obligation of preachers: “It is the duty of ministers not only to exhort their carnal auditors to believe in Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls; but it is at our peril to exhort them to anything short of it.”<sup>11</sup> In his confession of faith on settling at Kettering, he summarized the central features of his evangelical conversionism:

I believe, it is the duty of every minister of Christ plainly and faithfully to preach the gospel to all who will hear it; and, as I believe the inability of men to be spiritual things to be wholly of the *moral*, and, therefore, of the *criminal* kind – and that it is their duty to love the Lord Jesus Christ, and trust in him for salvation, though they do not; I, therefore, believe free and solemn addresses, invitations, calls, and warnings to them, to be not only *consistent*, but directly *adapted*, as means, in the hand of the Spirit of God, to bring them to Christ. I consider it as a part of my duty, which I could not omit without being guilty of the blood of souls.<sup>12</sup>

This evangelical Calvinism, with its more conversionist bearing, was significant in the emergence of the Baptist Missionary Society and William Carey’s work in India, but Fuller’s theology also had an equally important effect upon preachers at home, freeing them to have a more directly conversionist stance in offering the gospel.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Voluntarism in Fuller's Congregationalism***

Voluntarism contributed to the emergence of evangelicalism as a distinctive strain of piety, expressing a concern for individual agency, free choices, and personal responsibility for spiritual growth.<sup>14</sup> The Evangelical Revival saw the use of creative ecclesiological constructions which particularly emphasized voluntarism. The Methodist construction was a “connexion” of voluntary societies, existing more or less alongside church or chapel.<sup>15</sup> The construction employed by evangelical Anglican clergy and laity was the “religious society,” in which a small fellowship within the local parish voluntarily embraced a more rigorous rule of piety.<sup>16</sup> The pastoral theology of Andrew Fuller demonstrates that there was another method of promoting evangelical experience: the renewal of congregational ecclesiology, neither alongside nor within, but the local church itself and its ordained ministry.

John Wesley's Methodist societies employed voluntary participation and oversight to accomplish their evangelical ends. Frederick Dreyer has argued, for example, that Wesley framed his authority to direct the connexion of societies in consensual and voluntary terms: “I cannot guide any soul unless he consent to be guided by me. Neither can any soul force me to guide him, if I consent not.”<sup>17</sup> Dreyer also observes Wesley's explicit differentiation between voluntary authority and ordination; his authority in the connexion derived not from his ordination as a minister, but rather, from voluntary consent. As a congregationalist, by contrast, Fuller emphasized the voluntary essence of *ordination and the pastoral relationship itself*, rather than circumventing ordination to validate pastoral authority. With characteristic clarity, he said: “The connexion of pastor and people, in dissenting churches, is altogether voluntary. There are no bonds to bring them together, or to keep them together, but love.”<sup>18</sup>

Evangelical Anglicans who scrupled the perceived irregularity of Methodist meetings revived the use of voluntary religious societies within the parish to encourage serious evangelical piety.<sup>19</sup> John Newton planted a number of such societies at Olney, and to one correspondent he offered this enthusiastic evaluation: “I think nothing has been more visibly useful to strengthen my heart, and to unite the people closely together in bonds of love.”<sup>20</sup> Fuller also perceived that a voluntary and affectionate relationship between pastor and people was the most suitable bond for the promotion of evangelical religion: “Christian love is *love for Christ's sake* . . . Personal religion is now to be the bond of union.”<sup>21</sup> “Personal religion”

is a phrase nicely expressing evangelicalism's concern for a sincere and voluntary faith, and it is *this* which is to be, Fuller asserted, the "bond of union." Isabel Rivers suggests that in the evangelical dissenting tradition, the essence of revived personal religion "lay in the relationship between minister and congregation, a relationship based on close knowledge of the heart and close application by the minister of evangelical doctrine to the special circumstances of the individual member of the congregation."<sup>22</sup> So, while Newton and Fuller shared this common concern for the voluntary nature of the bonds which promoted evangelical piety, they differed on the *location* of such a pastoral relationship, with Fuller insisting that the voluntarily-gathered congregation itself could be the place of personal renewal.

### ***Evangelical Doctrine & Affectionate Language in Fuller's Preaching***

The evangelical transformation of the church did not only mean preaching in new places, but also, preaching in a new way. The pastoral theology of Andrew Fuller demonstrates how evangelical concerns influenced both the *content* and *accent* of his preaching. Fuller's preaching was characterized by the centrality of the cross of Christ, and by the use of the language of the affections. And so he could state not only, "Preach Christ, or you had better be any thing than a preacher," but also, "You had better do any thing than be a minister, if your heart is not engaged in it."<sup>23</sup> Neither the cross nor the heart were negotiable, if pastoral theology and practice were to be evangelical.

#### **1) The Centrality of the Cross of Christ**

The central doctrinal of Andrew Fuller's preaching was the atoning death of Jesus on the cross, a theme described as "crucicentrism" by David Bebbington.<sup>24</sup> Emphasizing the cross, Fuller wrote, "*Every sermon should contain a portion of the doctrine of salvation by the death of Christ . . . A sermon, therefore, in which this doctrine has not a place, and I might add, a prominent place, cannot be a gospel sermon.*"<sup>25</sup> Understanding the atoning death of Jesus to be the unique source of salvation, Fuller urged that evangelical preaching give it repeated emphasis and great prominence.

Fuller's evangelical crucicentrism was also expressed by emphasizing the cross's interrelation with all other themes in preaching. Early in his Kettering ministry, he wrote in his diary, "Christ, and his cross be all my

theme.’ Surely I love his name, and wish to make it the centre in which all the lines of my ministry might meet!”<sup>26</sup> Later, to his father-in-law, Fuller wrote from Ireland, “The doctrine of the cross is more dear to me than when I went. I wish I may never preach another sermon but what shall bear some relation to it.”<sup>27</sup> Fuller believed that the whole of *scripture* bears witness to Jesus, and that, therefore, expositions of any part of the Bible inevitably manifest something of His person or work: “If you preach Christ, you need not fear for want of matter. His person and work are rich in fullness. Every Divine attribute is seen in him. All the types prefigure him. The prophecies point to him. Every truth bears relation to him. The law itself must be so explained and enforced as to lead to him.”<sup>28</sup> Reflecting on *systematic theology*, Fuller asserted that “the centre of Christianity [is] *the doctrine of the cross*,” and that “The whole of the Christian system appears to be *presupposed by it, included in it, or to arise from it*.”<sup>29</sup> Fuller’s preaching could be distinguished from Deistic or moralistic, or even generally orthodox preaching, by the centrality of the cross of Christ, and it is that prominence which marks it as evangelical.

## 2) Affectionate Language and Evangelical Experience

George Wallis, a deacon and diarist in Fuller’s Kettering congregation, described Fuller’s ministry as “very affecting and evangelical.”<sup>30</sup> In doing so he highlighted the language of the *affections* which was so characteristic of Andrew Fuller’s pastoral theology, and which helped to define what he meant by “evangelical.” While to modern readers “affections” usually connotes emotion and feeling *over against* reason and intellect, to Fuller and his eighteenth-century contemporaries the use of the language of the affections was more nuanced and comprehensive, and in fact quite successfully integrated, rather than set at odds, mind and heart.<sup>31</sup>

Wallis’ description of Fuller’s pastoral ministry as “very affecting and evangelical” also suggests the *mutual importance* of the terms, for the language of the heart was a kind of evangelical accent to accompany evangelical doctrinal content. The affections were emphasized in concert with orthodox doctrine, reflecting a concern for a heartfelt response to the gospel – for a voluntary, sincere, and personal Christianity, as opposed to rationalism, nominalism, or cold orthodoxy. Isabel Rivers, who has made a penetrating study of the “Affectionate religion” of early evangelical Dissent in the context of eighteenth century moral philosophy, notes the complementary concerns for orthodox doctrine, personal experience, and

affectionate language:

The evangelical tendency emphasizes the traditional Reformation doctrines of grace, atonement, justification by faith (often covered by the label “orthodoxy”), the importance of experiential knowledge, meaning both the believer’s own experience of religion, and acquaintance with the variety of the experience of others, and the central function of the heart and affections in religion in relation to the will and understanding.<sup>32</sup>

Fuller condensed the thought thus: “The union of genuine orthodoxy and affection constitutes true religion.”<sup>33</sup>

Fuller’s understanding of the affections bears the particular influence of Jonathan Edwards’ *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746).<sup>34</sup> Sharing Edwards concept of a “sense of the heart,” he wrote that spiritual truths cannot be known by “mere intellect any more than the sweetness of honey . . . can be ascertained by the sight of the eye.” Rather, the gospel can be known only as God imparts a “holy susceptibility and relish for the truth,” by which one can have a “sense of their Divine excellency.”<sup>35</sup>

Fuller made strong assertions about the centrality of the affections in evangelical ministry – “Beware that you do not preach an unfelt gospel”<sup>36</sup> – but was careful to communicate both the subjective and cognitive aspects of evangelical affections. He said, that “Knowledge and affection have a mutual influence on each other . . . Affection is fed by knowledge . . . By the expansion of the mind the heart is supplied with objects which fill it with delight.”<sup>37</sup> That religious psychology mapped onto his pastoral theology: “The two main objects to be attained in the work of the Christian ministry,” Fuller urged, are “*enlightening the minds* and *affecting the hearts* of the people.”<sup>38</sup>

Affectionate preaching had the deeply felt faith of two subjects in view – both preacher and hearer – and the heart to heart manner of the sermon’s delivery from one to the other. Fuller poignantly summarized: “If you would affect others, you must feel.”<sup>39</sup> Or again, “we must preach from the heart, or we shall seldom, if ever, produce any good in the hearts of our hearers.”<sup>40</sup> Fuller’s use of the language of feeling, the heart, and the affections signalled the importance of a sincere, personal experience of faith, and the affectionate communication of evangelical doctrine.

**Summary**

The evangelical transformation of the dissenting churches of the late eighteenth century included, in addition to the more frequently noted aspects of outward expansion and activism, the renewal of their pastoral theology. Evangelical theology and piety certainly issued in international missions, voluntary societies, and itinerant preaching, but was also expressed in Andrew Fuller's recovery of a conversionist pastoral theology, his emphasis on the voluntary nature of the local congregation, and his weekly preaching, which was evangelical in its Christ-centred doctrine and affectionate language. There can be identified in the work of Andrew Fuller one distinctively evangelical pastoral theology – a specifically evangelical contribution to pastoralia and an underappreciated aspect of how the church was transformed by evangelicalism.

**Endnotes**

1. This essay is based on research for *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal of Pastoral Theology*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, in press).
2. W.R. Ward, "The Baptists and the Transformation of the Church, 1780-1830," *Baptist Quarterly* 25 (October 1973): 167-184; L.G. Champion, "Evangelical Calvinism and the Structures of Baptist Church Life," *Baptist Quarterly* 28 (January 1980): 196-208; Deryck Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the Transformation of English Dissent, 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Olin Robison, "The Particular Baptists in England, 1760-1820" (D. Phil. diss., Oxford University, 1963).
3. Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People*, 14.
4. Ward, "Baptists and the Transformation of the Church," 174. See also Haykin, "The Baptist Identity: A View from the Eighteenth Century," *Evangelical Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (1995): 151.
5. Geoffrey Nuttall, "Northamptonshire and the Modern Question: A Turning Point in Eighteenth-Century Dissent," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 16, no. 1 (1965): 101-123; E. F. Clipsham, "Andrew Fuller and Fullerism: A Study in Evangelical Calvinism," *Baptist Quarterly* 20, no. 1-4 (1963-1964): 99-114, 147-54, 215-25, 269-76; Michael Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends and His Times* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1994); and Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English*



*Evangelical Tradition between the Conversions of Wesley and Wilberforce* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 146.

6. John Walsh and Stephen Taylor, "Introduction," in *The Church of England, c.1689-c.1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism*, eds. John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 14.
7. Andrew Fuller, *The Last Remains of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. Joseph Belcher (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1856), 34.
8. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 5-10; and 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 (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 19.
9. John Ryland, *The Work of Faith, the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope, Illustrated; in the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, Late Pastor of the Baptist Church at Kettering, and Secretary to the Baptist Missionary Society, from its Commencement, in 1792*, 2nd ed. (London: Button & Son, 1818), 11, 32.
10. Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller with a Memoir of His Life by Andrew Gunton Fuller*, ed. Joseph Belcher (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publications, 1845), ii.387.
11. Fuller, *Works*, ii.386.
12. Ryland, *Life of Fuller*, 32, 68.
13. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 64-65.
14. For a concise statement of voluntarism and individual commitment as a background to the emergence of evangelicalism, see Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys*, volume 1 of *A History of Evangelicalism: People, Movements and Ideas in the English-Speaking World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 147-148.
15. John Walsh, "Religious Societies: Methodist and Evangelical, 1738-1800," in *Voluntary Religion*, eds. W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood, Studies in Church History (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 284-295, esp. 287; Fuller, *Works*, iii.477; and Frederick Dreyer, *Genesis of Methodism* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1999), 93-109.
16. Walsh, "Religious Societies," esp. 280-284, 295-302; and Hindmarsh, *John Newton*, 199-202.

17. Dreyer, *Genesis of Methodism*, 104; see also 93, 100-101.
18. Fuller, *Works*, i.529; see also i.478, 497.
19. Walsh, "Religious Societies," 297.
20. As cited in Hindmarsh, *John Newton*, 200.
21. Fuller, *Works*, i.523.
22. Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*, vol. 1, *Whichcote to Wesley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 171.
23. Fuller, *Works*, i.503, Fuller, *Remains*, 361.
24. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 3, 14-17.
25. Fuller, *Works*, i.716.
26. Fuller, *Works*, i.503. See also "The Uniform Bearing of the Scriptures on the Person and Work of Christ," *Works*, i.702-704.
27. Fuller, *Works*, i.83.
28. Fuller, *Works*, i.503.
29. Fuller, *Works*, i.690.
30. George Wallis (1775-1869), "Memoirs, etc, of State of Mind, continued," mss diary (15 March 1805 - 1 June 1817), Fuller Baptist Church, Kettering, 14 July 1811.
31. Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 64-65; "Theology, Anti-theology and Atheology: From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions," *Modern Theology* 15 (July 1999): 3, 301-305; Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 5-6; Michael J. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England's Revival Tradition in its British Context*, Religion in America Series, ed. Harry Stout (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 81-90; and Alan Brinton, "The Passions as Subject Matter in Early Eighteenth-Century British Sermons," *Rhetorica* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 51-69.
32. Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, i.167.
33. Fuller, *Works*, i.549.

34. Fuller, *Works*, ii.641; and *The Diary of Andrew Fuller*, ed. Michael M. McMullen, vol. 1 of *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller*, ed. Michael Haykin (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, forthcoming), 3 February 1781; Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* [1746], ed. John E. Smith, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 2, ed. Perry Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959). For Edwards's psychology of the affections and the sense of the heart, see further his "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733*, ed. Mark Valeri, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol 17, ed. Harry Stout (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 405-426; and "Miscellany 782. Ideas. Sense of the Heart. Spiritual Knowledge or Conviction. Faith." in *The "Miscellanies, 501-832*, ed. Ava Chamberlain, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol 18, ed. Harry Stout (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 452-466; and for analysis and discussion: John E. Smith, "Religious Affections and the 'Sense of the Heart,'" in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Perry Miller, "Jonathan Edwards on the Sense of the Heart" *Harvard Theological Review*, 41, no. 2 (April 1948): 123-145; Roland André Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards: An Essay in Aesthetics and Theological Ethics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); Terrence Erdt, *Jonathan Edwards, Art and the Sense of the Heart* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980); Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought*; Brad Walton, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Affections and the Puritan Analysis of True Piety, Spiritual Sensation and Heart Religion* in *Studies in American Religion*, Volume 74 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002); and Louis J. Mitchell, *Jonathan Edwards on the Experience of Beauty*, in *Studies in Reformed Theology and History* (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2003).
35. Fuller, *Works*, ii.410, 413, 602.
36. Fuller, *Works*, i.489.
37. Fuller, *Works*, i.169.
38. Fuller, *Works*, i.479.
39. Fuller, *Works*, i.479.
40. Fuller, *Works*, i.546.

