

# “Very affecting and evangelical’: A Review of Keith S. Grant, Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal of Pastoral Theology”

Michael A. G. Haykin

In this new study of Andrew Fuller’s pastoral theology—a revision of a Th.M. thesis written under the supervision of historian, Bruce Hindmarsh, at Regent College in 2007—Keith Grant, currently pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of New Brunswick, has done students of Fuller’s thought an immense favor by detailing the way that Fuller’s

involvement in the revival of the Particular Baptist cause at the close of the eighteenth century also entailed a renewal of pastoral theology, a veritable “transformation within the existing pastoral office” (p. 3).<sup>2</sup> The idea of such a transformation had been suggested by earlier students of this era, notably Deryck Lovegrove and W. R. Ward, but Grant’s work is the first publication to lay out the details of this transformation as it applies to Fuller’s understanding and practice of pastoral ministry, and more generally, as

it relates to the English Calvinistic Baptist scene.<sup>3</sup>

His first chapter, which deals with Fuller’s pathway to conversion and to his pastorates at Soham and Kettering,<sup>4</sup> concludes with the way that Fuller’s groundbreaking *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1st ed.: 1785/2nd ed.: 1801)—David Bebbington once dubbed it “the classic statement of eighteenth-century Evangelical Calvinism”<sup>5</sup>—entailed a rethinking of pastoral theology with regard to conversion (p. 45–49). Grant helpfully shows the way that, although Fuller’s first pastor, John Eve (d. 1782) failed to offer the gospel freely, God was nevertheless gracious to Fuller. Particularly noteworthy is the role that “reading and reflection” played in Fuller’s conversion. Grant points out the tension that thus prevailed in Fuller’s experience between Eve’s “high Calvinist preaching” and his own “Puritan devotional reading” in John Bunyan (1628–1688) and Ralph Erskine (1685–1752) (p. 28–29). The details that Grant gives of what Fuller was reading in Erskine, for example, are quite illuminating to help trace the impact of experiential Calvinism on Fuller’s inner turmoil during this time (p. 30–31).

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One query that I had with this first chapter concerns the influence that Grant accords to high Calvinist preaching like that of Eve. Grant locates its genesis in the Antinomian debates of the 1640s consequent upon the mainstream Puritan reaction to men like Tobias Crisp (1600–1643) and John Saltmarsh (d. 1647) and then in 1690s with the Neonomian controversy (p. 26–27). The development from these controversies of a method of preaching among the Calvinistic Baptists especially that rejected the free offer of the gospel is, in Grant’s perspective, the reason that “Particular Baptists were largely, though not entirely, unaffected by the [Evangelical] Revival [of the 1730s and 1740s] until the late-eighteenth century” (p. 27). This answer to a very important question—why did revival not come to the Baptists till the final quarter of the eighteenth century?—is the old one given throughout the nineteenth century by authors like J. M. Cramp and C. H. Spurgeon. But this is all too simplistic. Like all human events, this question entails a complex answer in which it is clear that a number of factors—political, social, and geographical as well as theological—combined to bring about Baptist stagnation and decline.<sup>6</sup> In fact, despite his own assertion, Grant knows that high Calvinism is not the sole answer for Baptist decline in the eighteenth century. As he notes (p. 63), a concern for ecclesial order dominated Baptist thinking throughout the long eighteenth century, and this, in part, prevented many Baptists from listening to what God might have been saying through Anglican preachers in the Awakening.

Chapter 2 looks at the broad ecclesial context of Fuller’s understanding of the ministry, namely, his view of the local church as independent of state control, autonomous in terms of its relationship with other congregations, and one in which the members of the church are the final locus of authority under Christ. In addition, this chapter deals with Fuller’s view of what constitutes a proper call to ministry and the shape of Baptist ordination in Fuller’s day (the

various steps of which are helpfully delineated; see p. 58–61).<sup>7</sup> Grant stresses a point already noted and for which he uses a quote from Michael Walker: the “one underlying concern that held together Baptist churches until the end of the eighteenth century... was that of church practice” (p. 63). This is vital to grasp: ecclesial convictions, hammered out in controversy, opprobrium, and persecution between the 1640s and the 1680s, were a precious heritage for the eighteenth-century Baptists, never to be lightly regarded or taken for granted. Grant shows how Fuller builds on this heritage as well as recalibrating it for a new day. This recalibration or renewal was marked by deep-seated convictions about connectionalism and a “surprising willingness to understate the uniqueness of ordained ministry in order to foster a more active and evangelistic congregationalism” (p. 72). Also prominent in Fuller’s thinking about the local church is that the bond that links pastor and people is “the maintaining of brotherly love.”<sup>8</sup> The latter is so important to note in a tradition that was shaped largely by a spirituality of the Word and in which preaching (the subject of chapter 3) has been the most important means of grace. In such a tradition, it was, and is, easy for the pastor as preacher to usurp other elements of the pastoral calling. But Fuller saw things differently; hence, his emphasis on the affective nature of pastoral life, including preaching. For the pastor’s sermons to be effective among his people, they must be affective and shaped by genuine affection for the hearers!

The final chapter deals with the preaching ministry of the pastor, and the way that Fuller emphasized—in continuity with the Puritans and seventeenth-century Baptists—a “plain style” of preaching, crystallized for Fuller by a famous essay on preaching by the French Huguenot Jean Claude (1619–1687).<sup>9</sup> Fuller used a translation of Claude’s *An Essay on the Composition of a Sermon* (*Traité de la composition d’un sermon*) by the Calvinistic Baptist pastor Robert Robinson (1735–1790), originally done in 1766 though not published in Cambridge for another twelve years.<sup>10</sup> Grant draws attention to Fuller’s own explicit commendation of Claude’s essay in a paper

that he wrote for one of the men of his congregation who was involved in village preaching and supplying destitute congregations in the neighborhood of Kettering (p. 79, n. 9). For some odd reason, this explicit commendation in Fuller's "The Composition of a Sermon"<sup>11</sup> was omitted from what became the standard three-volume edition of his works (1845). In the original commendation, Fuller strongly suggested that those who were eager to read more about how to compose a sermon "will meet with ample information" in Claude's essay and "other publications of subordinate merit."<sup>12</sup> Grant expertly fleshes out what Claude's "plain style" meant for Fuller (p. 78–90) and how this style matched Fuller's commitment to preach Christ, which, in turn, led to Fuller's passion for the conversion of the lost (p. 91–95). And here again, love was seen to be central (p. 95–103): "A Christian minister must love his people, and in proportion as he loves them he will feel concerned for their eternal happiness."<sup>13</sup>

This vital study of Fuller's renewal of pastoral theology has clearly demonstrated that his Evangelical convictions were expressed within the parameters of his Baptist congregationalism (p. 109–110). Moreover, Grant is rightly convinced that this seems to be a better paradigm for understanding the way Evangelicalism reshaped Baptist life at the close of the eighteenth century than strictly interpreting it within the grid of the now-famous "Evangelical quadrilateral" of David Bebbington (p. 3–4, 109–110). And for those of us who share Fuller's belief that Evangelical and congregational convictions are both biblical priorities, this is an important book to both ponder and employ in seeking congregational revitalization today.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Keith S. Grant, *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal of Pastoral Theology* (Studies in Baptist History and Thought, vol. 36; Milton Keynes, UK: Pater-noster, 2013), xx+157 pages.
- <sup>2</sup> See also the statement of this thesis in the first sentence on *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal of Pastoral Theology*, 107.
- <sup>3</sup> There is another study of this subject by Nigel David

Wheeler, "Eminent Spirituality and Eminent Usefulness: Andrew Fuller's (1754–1815) Pastoral Theology in his Ordination Sermons" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Pretoria, 2009). Grant, while aware of Wheeler's thesis, only references it once (*Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal of Pastoral Theology*, 59–60, n. 25), though there were other places where one would expect a reference to Wheeler. For example, when Grant is discussing Fuller's emphasis on the goal of preaching being "enlightening the minds and affecting the hearts" of the hearers of the sermon (*Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal of Pastoral Theology*, 101–102), this is covered by Wheeler as well (see "Eminent Spirituality and Eminent Usefulness", p.181–189).

- <sup>4</sup> *Pace* Grant, *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal of Pastoral Theology*, 2—though cf. *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal of Pastoral Theology*, 56–58—Fuller's pastorate at Soham did not formally begin until 1775.
- <sup>5</sup> *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 64–65. According to Mark Noll, Fuller's work "marks the triumph of evangelicalism among England's Particular Baptists" (*The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* [A History of Evangelicalism, vol. 1; Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2004], 182).
- <sup>6</sup> See my discussion in *One heart and one soul: John Sutcliffe of Olney, his friends, and his times* (Darlington, Co. Durham: Evangelical Press, 1994), 17–24.
- <sup>7</sup> In the four appendices, Grant includes two of Fuller's ordination sermons (*Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal of Pastoral Theology*, 112–130).
- <sup>8</sup> *Churches Walking in the Truth, the Joy of Ministers* (*The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* [ed. Joseph Belcher, 1845 ed.; repr. Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1988], I, 529). Grant discusses this point in *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal of Pastoral Theology*, 67–69.
- <sup>9</sup> For details of Claude's life, see *The Life and Death of Monsieur Claude* (London: Thomas Dring, 1688), and "Claude (Jean)" in Eugène Haag and Émile Haag, eds., *La France protestante ou Vies des Protestants français* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1966), 3:473–477. For his spirituality and theology, see J. Le Brun, "La spiritualité

de Jean Claude (1619–1687)” in *La révocation de l’Édit de Nantes et les Provinces-Unies 1685* (Amsterdam/Maarsen: APA-Holland University Press, 1986), 119–139; and J. Wesley White, “Jean Claude (1619–1687): Huguenot Pastor and Theologian,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, 19 (2008): 203–205.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Claude, *An Essay on the Composition of a Sermon*, trans. Robert Robinson (Cambridge: Francis Hodson, 1778–1779), 2 vols. A third edition, printed in London, appeared in 1788. The French original is

in *Les oeuvres posthumes de Mr. Claude* (Amsterdam: Pierre Savouret, 1688), 1:163–492.

<sup>11</sup> *Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, I, 717–723.

<sup>12</sup> “Essay on the Composition of a Sermon: or, Plain and Familiar Thoughts, addressed to a Young Minister, from his Pastor” in *The Preacher; or Sketches of Original Sermons* (Philadelphia: J. Whetham & Son, 1842), I, 21.

<sup>13</sup> *Ministerial and Christian Communion* (*Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, I, 546). Cited Grant, *Andrew Fuller and the Evangelical Renewal of Pastoral Theology*, 100–101.