

‘A Union of Sentiments in Apostolical Doctrines’: The Catholicity of Andrew Fuller

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Abstract:

Andrew Fuller has been called an example of Particular Baptist catholicity in recent scholarship but was castigated as uncatholic in sentiment by those closer to his own era. This reality, combined with Fuller’s importance to Particular Baptist history, makes his understanding and practice of catholicity a topic worthy of examination. This article examines the writings of Fuller to discern which of the foregoing assertions is correct. While not denying the importance of recent discussions regarding Baptist catholicity, the present work seeks to understand Fuller’s own thoughts on what he would have called a ‘catholic spirit’. Fuller’s nuanced, truth-oriented catholicity is placed in its historical context alongside his contemporaries John Ryland, Jr and John Wesley.

Keywords:

Andrew Fuller; Particular Baptist; catholicity; evangelical; John Ryland; John Wesley

Introduction

The concept of catholicity has been understood in various ways throughout the centuries.¹ It is helpful, therefore, as a way of more fully exploring the concept, to focus on important thinkers and leaders in order to see how their thought and practice sheds light on the overall understanding of catholicity. This article describes the catholicity, or catholic spirit, of Andrew Fuller, a leading pastor and theologian among the English Particular Baptists in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.² At the outset, it is important to understand that

¹ See Willem Van Vlaustin, *Catholic Today: A Reformed Conversation about Catholicity* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2020), pp. 18–161.

² There has been a resurgence of interest in Fuller in recent years. See, for example, Michael A.G. Haykin, “*At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word*”: Andrew Fuller as an Apologist (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004); Peter J. Morden, *The Life and Thought of Andrew Fuller, 1754–1815* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015); and the Works of Andrew Fuller Project under the general

this article does not mean to engage with recent scholarship related to Baptist catholicity,³ but, rather, it aims to provide historical perspective on how one of the chief theologians of the Particular Baptists understood relations to those outside of his theological and denominational tradition. It will focus on the language with which Fuller himself would have been familiar: the language of catholicity, or a catholic spirit.⁴

Studying the catholicity of someone like Andrew Fuller is not a straightforward task, as he did not write a treatise which can be studied for a definition or theological foundation. This is not to say he thought it unimportant; he wrote shorter works about, and made important statements in longer works on a catholic spirit and adjacent topics.

editorship of Michael A.G. Haykin, published by de Gruyter, which aims to publish critical editions of all of Fuller's works. For a more complete account of recent publications about Fuller, see Nathan A. Finn, 'The Renaissance in Andrew Fuller Studies: A Bibliographic Essay', *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 17, no. 2 (2013): 44–61.

³ For more information on this, see Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006); Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014); Barry Harvey, *Can These Bones Live? A Catholic Baptist Engagement with Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, and Social Theory* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008); Paul S. Fiddes, Brian Haymes, and Richard Kidd, *Baptists and the Communion of Saints: A Theology of Covenantated Disciples* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014); and Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne, and Anthony R. Cross, *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009). Of course, this article may also provide supporting material for this ongoing discussion.

⁴ The vocabulary of 'ecumenism' is not appropriate at this point, as it did not come into widespread use until later in the nineteenth century. 'Catholic' and its cognates have a long history in the Baptist world. The seventeenth-century confessions use this language (see chapter twenty-six of the 1677 *London Baptist Confession* and articles twenty-nine and thirty of the 1678 *Orthodox Creed*), as does the Bristol Tradition that came to influence so much of the latter eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century Particular Baptists. Anthony R. Cross has done much to recover the history of the Bristol Tradition. For more information, see: Anthony R. Cross, "'To communicate simply you must understand profoundly': The Necessity of Theological Education for Deepening Ministerial Formation", *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 19, no.1 (2019): 54–67; 'The Early Bristol Tradition as a Seedbed for Evangelical Reception among British Baptists, c.1720–c.1770', in *Pathways and Patterns in History: Essays on Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Modern World in Honour of David Bebbington*, ed by Anthony R. Cross, Peter J. Morden, and Ian M. Randall (Didcot: The Baptist Historical Society, 2015), pp. 50–77; *The Bristol Baptist Tradition, c.1720–2020: Able, Evangelical, Lively, Zealous Ministers of the Gospel* (3 vols; forthcoming). For a use of the term closer to the time of Fuller himself, see the church covenant of the New Road Baptist Church, Oxford (Daniel Turner, *Charity the Bond of Perfection* (Oxford: J. Buckland, 1780), p. 22) and Robert Hall, Jr, *On Terms of Communion* (Philadelphia: Anthony Finley, 1816), p. 128.

These must be studied collectively in order to understand his thought. Adding to the difficulty is the fact that there is some disagreement as to whether Fuller himself even possessed a catholic spirit. On the one hand, he is portrayed in one recent publication as catholic in sentiment because of his friendship with John Ryland, Jr, who did not share Fuller's views on closed communion.⁵ On the other hand, an earlier writer, John Buckley, pastor of the General Baptist church in Market Harborough and later a missionary with the General Baptist Missionary Society, referred to Fuller as possessing 'a mighty intellect, though not a very catholic heart'.⁶ The resolution to this uncertainty will be taken up later in the article.

Union of Sentiments: The Ground of Union

It will be helpful to begin with Fuller's understanding of the key word 'catholic'. In his *Strictures on Sandemanianism*,⁷ Fuller describes the spirit of primitive Christianity as 'catholic and pacific'.⁸ He elaborates on what it means to be 'catholic' by juxtaposing it with 'sectarian'.⁹ He writes, "True

⁵ Michael A.G. Haykin, "'A Little Band of Brothers': Friendship in the Life of Andrew Fuller – An Essay on the Bicentennial of His Death", *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry*, 12, no. 2 (2015): 10–13. In another place, Haykin comments on Fuller and his circle of friends, "This love of God for who he is, this emphasis on the revelation of his holiness in the cross, this evangelical catholicity that embraces all who are in Christ and this passion to see sinners saved were leading features not only of the spirituality of Pearce, but also of that of Fuller and Sutcliff" (Michael A.G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends and His Times* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1994), 264).

⁶ John Buckley, 'Notes of Visits to the Churches, No. 4', *The General Baptist Magazine, Repository, and Missionary Observer*, 1.3 (March 1854), p. 147.

⁷ Andrew Fuller, *Strictures on Sandemanianism* (New York: Richard Scott, 1812). For more information on Sandemanianism, see John Howard Smith, *The Perfect Rule of the Christian Religion: A History of Sandemanianism in the Eighteenth Century* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008); Michael A.G. Haykin, 'Sweet Sensibility: Andrew Fuller's Defense of Religious Affections', *Puritan Reformed Journal*, 7, no. 2 (2015): 193–211; and Dyron Daugherty, 'Glasite versus Haldanite: Scottish Divergence on the Question of Missions', *Restoration Quarterly*, 53, no. 2 (2011): 65–79.

⁸ Fuller, *Strictures*, p. 236 (emphasis original).

⁹ Fuller seems to have understood these terms in light of one another, as in another place he writes of 'the disinterested testimony of a few people, who are united together, not by a sectarian, but a truly catholic spirit' (Andrew Fuller (A Dissenter), *A Vindication of Protestant Dissent* (London: Button and Son, 1803), p. 31). This work was attributed to 'A Dissenter' when it was first published, but it was subsequently published in Fuller's *Complete Works*.

catholic zeal will nevertheless have the good of the universal church of Christ for its grand object, and will rejoice in the prosperity of every denomination of christians, *in so far* as they appear to have the mind of Christ.¹⁰ To be ‘catholic’, in Fuller’s view, is to have a universal view of the work of Christ, and it is to rejoice when any denomination prospers, regardless of its connection to one’s own theological and ecclesiastical commitments. It is to be broad-minded in affection; indeed, it is to keep in mind the whole of the church and feel the affection of kinship with it. Fuller places an important limit on his catholicity, however, by the introduction of the concept of ‘the mind of Christ’.¹¹ While there is an element of broadness and even openness to Fuller’s thought, the mind of Christ becomes a boundary-establishing element of his catholicity.

Fuller repeats the emphasis on the ‘mind of Christ’ in other works, which help to flesh out his meaning. In his work defending strict communion, he indicates that ‘the mind of Christ’ refers to ‘the precepts and examples of the New Testament’.¹² He summarises these precepts and examples, saying,

If language have any determinate meaning, it is here plainly taught that mankind are not only sinners, but in a *loft* and perishing condition, without help or hope, but what arises from the free grace of God, through the atonement of his Son; that he died as our substitute; that we are forgiven and accepted only for the sake of what he hath done and suffered; that in his person and work all evangelical truth concentrates; that the doctrine of salvation for the chief of sinners through his death, was so familiar in the primitive times, as to become a kind of Christian proverb, or ‘saying;’ and

¹⁰ Fuller, *Strictures*, pp. 237–238 (emphasis original). Fuller goes on to clarify what he does not mean by using the term ‘catholic’, saying that ‘it is not our being of the religion of Rome, nor of any other which happens to be favoured by the state, that determines our zeal to be catholic’ (Fuller, *Strictures*, p. 238). While it is unlikely that any of his readers would mistake Fuller for a Roman Catholic sympathiser, he apparently wanted to leave no room whatsoever for a mistake.

¹¹ He repeats this emphasis on the mind of Christ in a meditation on Ecclesiastes 1:15: ‘There are few things more spoken against in the present times, than *party zeal*; but there are few things more common. To unite with those whom we consider on mature examination as being nearest the mind of Christ, and having done so to act up to our principles, – is our duty.’ (Andrew Fuller, ‘Irremediable Evils’, *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. by Joseph Belcher, 3 vols (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845), 1, 466–69 (p. 467), emphasis original.)

¹² Andrew Fuller, *The Admission of Unbaptized Persons to the Lord’s Supper, Inconsistent with the New Testament* (London: H. Teape, 1815), p. 29.

that on our receiving and retaining this, depends our present standing and final salvation.¹³

This brief summary of evangelical doctrine is what Fuller considered to be the mind of Christ that served to bound his catholicity. That he would summarise it so is unsurprising in light of his Calvinistic Baptist convictions,¹⁴ but it is nevertheless worth establishing definitively that Fuller uses the phrase ‘the mind of Christ’ as a kind of shorthand to encompass these propositions. Indeed, he says as much when he comments that the early church ‘considered the doctrine of the person and work of Christ as a golden link, that would draw along with it the whole chain of evangelical truth’.¹⁵

Fuller’s catholicity rests on mutual commitment to these doctrines, as he states that communion with other Christians arises out of ‘a union of sentiments in apostolical doctrines’.¹⁶ His understanding of catholicity is rooted in shared theological convictions. In a letter written to Samuel Palmer on the ‘bond of Christian union’, Fuller makes the connection between a shared understanding of the truth and union explicit, saying, ‘Christian love appears to me to be, “for the truth sake that dwelleth in us.” Every kind of union that has not truth for its bond, is of no value in the sight of God, and ought to be of none in ours.’¹⁷ Agreement as to the truth is the bond of union.¹⁸

¹³ Andrew Fuller, *An Essay on Truth: Containing an Inquiry into Its Nature and Importance* (Boston: Manning and Loring, 1806), p. 5. The quotation here retains the original formatting and spelling. The same will be done, as far as is possible, in the rest of the article.

¹⁴ His friend John Ryland, Jr outlines what he considered essential evangelical doctrine in much the same way (John Ryland, *The Practical Influence of Evangelical Religion* (London: J.G. Fuller, 1819), pp. 6–14).

¹⁵ Fuller, *Essay on Truth*, p. 6. In an essay on the deity of Christ, Fuller again makes Christ the central theme of any Christian union, saying, ‘And where these things are rejected, there is no longer any possibility of christian union: for how can those, who consider Christ to be a mere man, join in the worship of such as are employed in calling upon his name, and ascribing blessing and honour, and glory and power, unto the Lamb for ever!’ (Andrew Fuller, ‘Deity of Christ Essential to Our Calling on His Name and Trusting in Him for Salvation’, *The Complete Works*, 3, 695–697 (p. 696).)

¹⁶ Andrew Fuller, ‘On Spiritual Declension and the Means of Revival’, *The Complete Works*, 3, 615–634 (p. 630).

¹⁷ Andrew Fuller, ‘Agreement in Sentiment the Bond of Christian Union’, *The Complete Works*, 3, 489–492 (p. 490).

¹⁸ Fuller appeals to the King James translation of Amos 3:3: ‘Can two walk together except they be agreed?’ (Andrew Fuller, ‘Agreement in Sentiment’, *The Complete Works*, 3, 489–492 (p. 491)).

The Practice and Limitations of Catholicity

As mentioned above, Fuller often saw a catholic spirit in contrast to a sectarian, or party, spirit. He writes that, while a good person will no doubt unite ‘with that denomination of Christians whose sentiments he believes to be nearest the truth’,¹⁹ such a person will not limit their affection to that denomination but will ‘love all who love Jesus Christ’.²⁰ Fuller makes a distinction here, however, that reveals much about how he practised and limited his openness to others. There is *union* with those whose sentiments are closest to one’s own, but there is only a *general love* for those who love Jesus Christ. While that may seem a pedantic distinction, it proves to be closest to Fuller’s own practice, which showcases both his willingness to bridge the gap between himself and others who differ from him, as well as the boundaries of that willingness.

On the one hand, Fuller could readily overlook significant theological differences in others, affirm them, and even promote their work, so long as he discerned the mind of Christ being expressed in them. Three examples of this may be adduced. First, one may look to Fuller and the Arminians, of whom he was a vocal opponent, asserting in one place that they ‘can find but little use for the doctrinal part of Paul’s Epistles’,²¹ and in another categorising them together with Arians, Socinians, and traitors, whilst characterising them as heady, high-minded, and lovers of their own selves.²² However, he says that he ‘saw those whom I thought to be godly men, both among Arminians and High, or, as I now accounted them Hyper Calvinists’.²³ That Fuller could speak of godly men among the Arminians in light of his words against

He says that this is the ‘force and design’ of that passage, though modern translations reflect a different understanding of the Hebrew, signalling less an agreement as to sentiment and more an agreement as to walk together. For example, the New International Version has ‘Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?’ The New Revised Standard Version translates it, ‘Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?’

¹⁹ Andrew Fuller, ‘Nature and Importance of Christian Love’, *The Complete Works*, 1, 522–524 (p. 523). Once again, Fuller show that truth may be apprehended but never comprehended.

²⁰ Fuller, ‘Nature and Importance of Christian Love’, *The Complete Works*, 1, 523.

²¹ Andrew Fuller, ‘Remarks on Two Sermons by W.W. Horne of Yarmouth’, *The Complete Works*, 3, 583.

²² Fuller, *Vindication of Protestant Dissent*, p. 21.

²³ Andrew Fuller, ‘Letter IV’, in *The Work of Faith, the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope, Illustrated; in the Life and Death of Andrew Fuller*, 2nd edn (London: Button and Son, 1818), pp. 28–29.

them and their theology speaks to his willingness to ‘rejoice in the prosperity of every denomination of christians’,²⁴ even if they differed significantly.

Second, Fuller’s catholicity is seen in his promotion of the work of the Edwardsean theologians from America,²⁵ who were, by and large, those with whom Fuller would have refused to share the Lord’s table. Though Edwards was a paedobaptist and his followers tended to move in theological directions with which Edwards himself might have been uncomfortable,²⁶ Fuller admired and did not hesitate to promote their works, sometimes in a very shrewd, calculating manner. At one point in 1802, Fuller had in his possession something written by Jonathan Edwards, Jr, but he delayed in sending it to be published because ‘it w^d. be introducing American divinity in such a form as most English minds w^d. revolt at it. I w^d. rather preserve it as a lump of good materials that may be used in a different form to a good purpose.’²⁷ Fuller’s promotion of Edwards stemmed from his belief that Edwards had captured the essence of the mind of Christ in his work, regardless of Fuller’s disagreement with him on other points.²⁸

Third, Fuller had no problem preaching in the pulpits of those with whom he disagreed. He suffered no qualms about preaching in the pulpits of the Establishment, even admitting that, in so doing, he

²⁴ Fuller, *Strictures*, p. 238.

²⁵ This would include the works of Jonathan Edwards Sr but also those of Jonathan Edwards, Jr, Samuel Hopkins, and Joseph Bellamy.

²⁶ See the series of essays which cover the stream of Edwardsean theology after Edwards in Oliver D. Crisp and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds, *After Jonathan Edwards: The Courses of the New England Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁷ Andrew Fuller, ‘Letter to John Sutcliff’, 11 January 1802, Angus Library and Archive. In the letter, Fuller refers to ‘Dr Edwards’ rather than ‘Jonathan Edwards, Jr’, but ‘Dr Edwards’ was the name used to refer to the son and ‘President Edwards’ was the name used to refer to the father.

²⁸ When he was criticised for his love for Edwards, Fuller responded with words that reveal the reason behind his affection: ‘We have some, who have been giving out of late, that “If Sutcliff and some others had preached more of Christ, and less of Jonathan Edwards, they would have been more useful.” If those who talk thus, preached Christ half as much as Jonathan Edwards did, and were half as useful as he was, their usefulness would be double what it is. It is very singular that the Mission to the East should have originated with men of these principles.’ (John Ryland, *The Indwelling and Righteousness of Christ no Security against Corporeal Death, but the Source of Spiritual and Eternal Life* (London: Button and Son, 1815), p. 34.)

‘materially served the mission’²⁹ of the Church of England. Fuller also preached in the pulpits of General Baptists, most notably that of Dan Taylor, the General Baptist against whom Fuller wrote repeatedly.³⁰ Indeed, when Fuller was given the option of preaching in Taylor’s or another’s pulpit, he commented, ‘I had much rather preach in Mr. T.’s pulpit, to convince the world that perfect cordiality subsists between him and myself.’³¹

While Fuller could be broad-minded in some regards, his catholicity had decided limitations. Again, three examples will suffice to demonstrate this contention. First, his position against open communion has already been mentioned,³² but it is worth considering at this point that his strict communionism meant that whatever ecclesiastical union Fuller sought with those with whom he differed ended with the issue of baptism. While affirming of paedobaptists as fellow believers, he was at variance with John Ryland, Jr, who not only affirmed their faith but welcomed them to the Lord’s table.³³ According to Fuller, while he could respect the principles of those who differed,³⁴ if their sentiments on that subject were not united, then there could be no fellowship in the Lord’s supper. Indeed, his promotion of Edwardsean literature may well have been more ardent because of their geographical distance from Fuller himself: it would be unlikely that he

²⁹ Fuller, ‘Agreement in Sentiment’, 3, 489.

³⁰ See Michael A.G. Haykin, ‘“The Honour of the Spirit’s Work”: Andrew Fuller, Dan Taylor, and an Eighteenth-Century Baptist Debate over Regeneration’, *Baptist Quarterly*, 47, no. 4 (2016): 152–161. It is not clear if Fuller ever returned the favour and allowed either a Church of England minister or Arminian to preach from his pulpit.

³¹ Adam Taylor, ed., *Memoirs of the Rev. Dan Taylor* (London: Baynes and Son: 1820), p. 177. It should be noted that Fuller did not preach during the Sunday services for Taylor’s church. Rather, he preached for their Sunday School and Society for Visiting the Sick.

³² See Fuller, *Admission of Unbaptized Persons*. See also Ian Hugh Clary, ‘Throwing away the Guns: Andrew Fuller, William Ward, and the Communion Controversy in the Baptist Mission Society’, *Foundations*, 68 (May 2015): 84–101.

³³ John Ryland, *A Candid Statement of the Reasons which Induce the Baptists to Differ in Opinion and Practice from So Many of Their Christian Brethren* (London: W. Button, 1814), pp. x–xi.

³⁴ In his work defending strict communion, he writes, ‘I am willing to allow that open communion *may* be practised from a conscientious persuasion of its being the mind of Christ; and they ought to allow the same of strict communion’ (Fuller, *Admission of Unbaptized Persons*, 29.) He is willing to allow that they are seeking to know the mind of Christ and that they are living in light of their understanding. Fuller shows his Baptist convictions here, for each must follow their understanding of the mind of Christ, being bound by their own conscience to do so, and Fuller is not willing to intrude upon the conscience of others.

would ever have to deal with an American Edwardsean at the Lord's table in Kettering.

A second limitation in Fuller's practice of catholicity is seen in the give and take of life as a pastor and denominational leader, for Fuller's relationships with other Christians were not always marked by peace and concord. This is seen clearly in the breakdown of his relationship with the church in Soham. Toward the end of his tenure as pastor of that church, Fuller writes to John Sutcliff regarding the tense situation with the church, 'I continue far from happy, yet not so generally distressed as I was some weeks ago. I know not but I must remove at Michelmas yet can't tell how I shall get through it.'³⁵ This breakdown between Fuller and his church is illustrative of the real-world limitations of catholicity imposed by human frailty.³⁶ Even the most catholic of souls may find their broadness of love challenged by the real world of actual human relationships, though Fuller may have faced greater challenges in that regard than others. His own close friends speak of his temperament as one that could veer towards the severe: 'His natural temper might occasionally lead him to indulge too much severity, especially if it were provoked by the appearance of vanity or conceit [...] He was not a man, however, to be brow-beaten and overborne, when satisfied of the goodness of his cause; nor could he be easily imposed upon by any one.'³⁷

Third, while Fuller gave much of his life to the promotion of the work of missions with the Baptist Missionary Society, he felt no compulsion either to partner with other societies or to allow those with

³⁵ Andrew Fuller, 'Letter to John Sutcliff', 15 August 1781, Isaac Mann Collection, National Library of Wales.

³⁶ Another example of brokenness in relationships between those who were united in sentiments is seen in Fuller's relationship with John Rippon, a fellow Particular Baptist. Fuller did not always have a high view of Rippon, of whom he writes to Sutcliff, 'We are all offended with him and have reason to be so. He had a letter fm. Carey wch he kept back fm us, & yet wanted ours [...] We must desire both the missionaries not to write any thing confidential to Rippon.' (Andrew Fuller, 'Letter to John Sutcliff', 22 January 1795, Angus Library and Archive.)

³⁷ John Ryland, Jr, *Work of Faith*, 2nd edn, p. x. Fuller had been a wrestler in his youth and 'seldom met with a sout man without making an idea comparison of strength, and possessing some of his former feelings in reference to his exercise' (John Webster Morris, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (Boston: Lincoln and Edmands, 1830), p. 306). He seems to have carried the mindset of a wrestler wherever he went.

whom he differed theologically to partner too closely with the BMS. The relationship between the General Baptists and the BMS is illustrative of these limitations. In 1812, J.G. Pike, pastor of the Brook Street General Baptist Church, wrote to Fuller about the possibility of the General Baptists sending one of their own to the mission field through the BMS. Fuller responded to this proposal in the negative, citing the need for unanimity between partners. While he does not explicitly say so in his response to Pike, there can be little doubt that Fuller's ideas about a union of sentiments played a large part in his response. Fuller knew that the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists differed in significant ways with regard to theological sentiments, and, while they might have been able to look past those disagreements at the start, they would not have been able to ignore them forever.³⁸ Therefore, there could be no full partnership between the General and Particular Baptists with regard to missions.

Understanding the Catholicity of Fuller

What emerges from Fuller is a complex picture of catholic thought and practice. On the one hand, he decries a party spirit, but on the other, he could defend partisanship as necessary and good. In a brief letter to the editor of the *Theological and Biblical Magazine*, Fuller writes,

There appears to be a mistaken idea, too commonly prevailing in the religious world at present, respecting what is called a *party spirit*. Many professors, while they endeavour to promote the interests of religion in *general*, too often neglect to pay attention which is due to the interest and welfare of that class or denomination of Christians in *particular*, with which they are or have been connected.³⁹

Fuller here promotes what he considers a necessary partisanship, as a Christian is meant to promote the interests of the denomination to which they are connected, which connection springs from their closer union of sentiments. While he goes on to speak against

³⁸ Indeed, Fuller's word to Pike is, 'Tho' there were no disputes on the subject wherein we differed at present, yet the measures they proposed might occasion them: and unanimity was of great importance' (quoted in G.P.R. Prosser, 'The Formation of the General Baptist Missionary Society', *Baptist Quarterly*, 22, no. 1 (January 1967): 25).

³⁹ Andrew Fuller, 'Party Spirit', *Works*, 3, 797 (emphasis original).

the idea of a ‘candour’ that drives people to abandon ‘*consistency and integrity*’ in the name of unity,⁴⁰ there still exists some tension between this contention of the goodness of party and what he says elsewhere about the evil of a party spirit. The question he leaves unanswered is, where is the line between a good partisanship and a lamentable party spirit?

In light of the evidence, the boundary line of catholicity seems to be in the area of active partnership and practical union. Indeed, for Fuller, while a catholic spirit would lead a person to rejoice in the successes of those who differ, it did not necessarily entail full partnership in the work of the gospel. Again, the relationship between the General Baptists and the BMS is illustrative. When Pike made the suggestion of sending General Baptist missionaries with the BMS, he seems to have anticipated a negative answer from Fuller, for he also suggested that if the General Baptists could not send one of their own missionaries to Bengal, the Serampore missionaries themselves should choose a native believer to whom the General Baptists might send £14 a year as well as send and receive correspondence. To this Fuller assents. His catholicity would not allow him fully to partner with the General Baptists because of their difference in sentiments. However, it did allow him to receive their funds and allow them a lesser participatory role.

The issue for Fuller seems to be the extent of practical union and the conferring of authority to the other. Because of his understanding of catholicity resting on a union of sentiments, Fuller is hesitant to extend the fullness of fellowship, partnership, and authority to those with whom he believed did not fully share (or, at least, significantly share) his theological commitments. If Fuller himself maintains the authority, and the other with whom he does not share sentiments is under that authority, he is more willing to ‘partner’ with them. In other words, without a union of sentiments, Fuller is largely

⁴⁰ Fuller goes on to say, ‘It is not uncommon to see one of these “*candid*” Christian professors keep at a distance from his own denomination, or party, where that denomination stands most in need of his countenance and support; while he associates with another party, which is sanctioned by numbers and worldly influence. And when the inconsistency of his conduct is hinted at, he will excuse himself by saying, in the cant phrase of the day, “That it is his wish to promote the interests of religion in general, and not to serve a party”’ (Fuller, ‘Party Spirit’, *The Complete Works*, 3, 797).

unwilling to treat the other as an equal partner. Union of sentiments, for Fuller, meant equality of partnership and authority.

Fuller's catholicity, then, is two-tiered. On the one hand, he is willing to embrace all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, and he warns against the insidious nature of a party spirit. On the other hand, he reserves co-labouring for those of his theological side, or at least for those with whom he is most in agreement.

Assessing Fuller's Catholicity

This outline of Fuller's catholicity suggests two questions that must be answered. First, there is the question of Fuller's relation to his own historical context: how does Fuller fit into his own time? The catholicity of John Ryland, Jr may function as a contrast and counterpoint to Fuller. Ryland's openness to those outside of his tradition, sometimes well outside, has been noted by both his contemporaries⁴¹ as well as recent scholars.⁴² His catholicity, however, was not like that of Fuller. Whereas Fuller roots his openness in a union of sentiments, Ryland finds his connection with other believers at the level of experience. He writes that 'so far as we can obtain evidence of godly sincerity, and a cordial union with Christ, we ought to take pleasure in the communion of faith, by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in our brethren toward Christ Jesus'.⁴³ Whereas Ryland sought a catholicity in the shared

⁴¹ Robert Hall, Jr, 'A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. John Ryland, D.D. Preached at the Baptist Meeting, Broadmead, Bristol, June 5, 1825', in *The Works of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.*, ed. by Olinthus Gregory, 3 vols (New York: Harper, 1832), 1, 202–224 (p. 217).

⁴² Michael A.G. Haykin, "'The Sum of All Good': John Ryland, Jr. and the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit", *Churchman*, 103 (1989): 343–48; Christopher W. Crocker, 'The Life and Legacy of John Ryland, Jr. (1753–1825), a Man of Considerable Usefulness: An Historical Biography' (doctoral dissertation, University of Bristol, 2018), pp. 331–360; Lon Graham, "'All Who Love Our Blessed Redeemer': The Catholicity of John Ryland, Jr' (doctoral dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2021).

⁴³ John Ryland, 'The Communion of Saints', *Pastoral Memorials*, 2 vols (London: B.J. Holdsworth, 1828), 2, 280. In a letter to Stephen West, Ryland makes the same point in much the same language: 'I trust I do believe that all who are really sanctified have one common interest, and are, indeed, living members of one common body, of which our blessed Emmanuel is really the head, and are really animated by one Spirit' (Ryland, 'Letter to Stephen West', 31 March 1814, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 30.117 (January 1873), p 181.

experience of Christ and the Spirit,⁴⁴ Fuller seeks shared theological convictions. In the end, this leaves Fuller with considerably less openness to those who differ than Ryland, who not only preached in the pulpits of General Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and the Establishment but also supported Wesleyan missionary societies and recommended Arminians to the mission field.

Much the same can be said when Fuller is compared with another contemporary, John Wesley. In his sermon on a ‘Catholic Spirit’, Wesley speaks to the ‘peculiar love which we owe to those that love God’.⁴⁵ While he is keen to maintain a special connection to a local congregation, he nevertheless exhorts his hearers to love others who have a ‘heart right with God’⁴⁶ and who show that right-heartedness both in orthodoxy⁴⁷ and orthopraxy.⁴⁸ This love, according to Wesley, entails more than well-wishing and a general positivity toward the other; in Wesley’s words, it should not be ‘in word only, but in deed and in truth’.⁴⁹ He then says that the person of a catholic spirit will join with others in the work of God, and ‘go on hand in hand’.⁵⁰

While these two contemporaries of Fuller may be said to be more liberal in their catholicity, it should also be recognised that Fuller is not out of line with his Particular Baptist forebears. Indeed, his practice is much closer to the majority of them than is Ryland’s. Michael Haykin has made the argument that the Particular Baptist churches were

⁴⁴ For more on this, see Graham, “All Who Love Our Blessed Redeemer,” pp. 157–84.

⁴⁵ John Wesley, ‘Catholic Spirit’, in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 10 vols (New York: Harper, 1826), 5, 410.

⁴⁶ Wesley, ‘Catholic Spirit’, 5, 414.

⁴⁷ Wesley, ‘Catholic Spirit’, 5, 414. Wesley says that a heart that is right with God will believe such things as God’s being, perfections, eternity, immensity, wisdom, power, justice, mercy, and truth. Such a person will also hold to the divinity of Jesus, justification by faith, and the crucifixion.

⁴⁸ Wesley, ‘Catholic Spirit’, 5, 414–15. Wesley speaks of possessing a faith that is ‘filled with the energy of love’ and which is ‘employed in doing “not thy own will, but the will of him that sent thee”’. He includes a person’s labour, business, and conversation in this description of a right heart.

⁴⁹ Wesley, ‘Catholic Spirit’, 5, 417.

⁵⁰ Wesley, ‘Catholic Spirit’, 5, 417. He summarises his understanding, saying, ‘A man of a catholic spirit is one who [...] gives his hand to all whose hearts are right with his heart’ (Wesley, ‘Catholic Spirit’, 5, 419).

seen as ‘enclosed gardens’, separated from the world.⁵¹ With regard to the majority of such churches and their practice, Haykin is surely correct. In the seventeenth century, Benjamin Keach wrote the following:

Some part of a wilderness hath been turned into a garden or fruitful vineyard: so God hath out of the people of this world, taken his churches and walled them about, that none of the evil beasts can hurt them: all mankind naturally were alike dry and barren, as a wilderness, and brought forth no good fruit. But God hath separated some of this barren ground, to make lovely gardens for himself to walk and delight in.⁵²

In the eighteenth century, John Gill wrote, ‘And the church is like an “enclosed” garden; for distinction, being separated by the grace of God, in election, redemption, effectual calling and for protection, being encompassed with the power of God, as a wall about it; and for secrecy, being so closely surrounded, that it is not to be seen nor known by the world.’⁵³ Fuller’s practice, if not his theological reasoning, reflects this enclosed nature.⁵⁴

While Fuller would not have been considered out of step with those who came before him, his views would find decreasing acceptance in the future of Particular Baptist life. One year after Fuller’s death, Robert Hall, Jr argued for open communion on the basis of catholic principles, stating,

But since the Holy Ghost identifies that body with the church, explaining the one by the other, (“for his body’s sake, which is the church,”) it seems impossible to deny that they are fully entitled to be considered in the catholic

⁵¹ Michael A.G. Haykin, “‘A Garden Inclosed’: Worship and Revival among the English Particular Baptists of the Eighteenth Century”, Manuscript of Lecture 28 February 2008, Louisville Kentucky, <<https://equip.sbts.edu/event/lectures/icw/contemporary-baptist-worship-in-the-18th-century-1680s-1830s/>> [accessed 30 January 2021], pp. 2–4.

⁵² Benjamin Keach, *Gospel Mysteries Unveiled: or, an Exposition of All the Parables, and Many Express Similitudes, Spoken by Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*, 4 vols (London: E. Justins, 1815), 2, 232.

⁵³ John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament*, 9 vols (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1810), 4, 662; cf. Michael Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends and His Times* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1994), p. 20.

⁵⁴ Fuller, however, is more liberal in his openness than Gill. While Fuller was willing to preach in the pulpits of the Establishment, Gill wrote that the Church of England was ‘very corrupt, and not agreeable to the word of God’ (John Gill, *The Dissenter’s Reasons for Separating from the Church of England* (London: n.p., 1760, p. 3), adding that it ‘cannot be a true church of Christ’ (p. 5).

sense of the term, as members of the christian church. And as the universal church is nothing more than the collective [*sic*] body of the faithful, and differs only from a particular assembly of Christians, as the whole from a part, it is equally impossible to deny that a Paedobaptist society is, in the more limited import of the word, a true church.⁵⁵

Hall's argument rests on understanding 'catholic' as referring to the whole, universal church, and such catholicity, argues Hall, entails a much more robust acceptance of differences than that found in Fuller. If a paedobaptist is a member of the universal church, so goes Hall's reasoning, then societies of them must also be considered as expressions of the true church. Therefore, they ought to be treated as such. The belief in the catholic or universal church leads to an openness to, acceptance of, fellowship and partnership with all who are a part of that church. Subsequent history shows that the catholicity of Ryland and Hall would shape the denomination rather than that of Fuller.⁵⁶

The second question concerns the concept of catholicity itself, as applied to Fuller's thinking and practice. This article earlier referred to the comment of Buckley that Fuller did not possess 'a very catholic heart'.⁵⁷ Is Buckley correct? Like Fuller's thoughts on this issue, the answer is not straightforward. If Fuller is allowed to define his own terms, and catholicity is understood as seeking 'the good of the universal church of Christ' and 'rejoic[ing] in the prosperity of every denomination of christians', then there is a sense in which it is proper to call Fuller's thought and practice 'catholic', as he did do those things. Thus, considered on his own terms, it is fair to deem Fuller to have possessed a kind of catholicity.

However, it is worth considering whether Fuller's practice was consistent with his own terms. As noted above, he sets the 'mind of Christ' as an important limitation of his catholicity. According to his own definition of the mind of Christ, Arminians and paedobaptists need not be excluded, yet Arminians did not enjoy full partnership with Fuller, and he did not welcome paedobaptists to the Lord's table. He was, thus, inconsistent within his own definition.

⁵⁵ Hall, *Terms of Communion*, p. 105.

⁵⁶ Interestingly, Raymond Brown has argued that it was Fuller's modification of Calvinism that allowed this merger to occur (Raymond Brown, *English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 112).

⁵⁷ Buckley, 'Notes of Visits', p. 147.

This then raises a final question: was Fuller's practice simply denominationalism without party spirit, rather than a version of catholicity?⁵⁸ If 'denominationalism' refers to a commitment to one's own denomination over against others, then Fuller's restrictions are more than mere denominationalism. Ryland was committed to the same denomination as Fuller, and sought to advance its interests as well, but that did not bar him from extending his partnerships to those outside of it.⁵⁹ Fuller's limitations were less about denomination and more about theological commitments, as he was concerned more about doctrinal sentiments than denomination. Indeed, in one letter, Fuller explicitly denies what might be called 'denominationalism'. Writing to the pastor of the Baptist church in New York, John Williams, Fuller thanks Williams for the kindness that the Americans had shown to unnamed BMS missionaries on their way to Bengal.⁶⁰ Fuller explained to Williams the importance that he attached to this particular mission, saying,

We consider the mission to Bengal as the most favourable symptom attending our denomination. It confirms what has been for some time with me an important principle, that where any denomination, congregation, (or individual) seeks only its own, it will be disappointed: but where it seeks the kingdom of God and his righteousness, its own prosperity will be among the things that will be added unto it.⁶¹

His interest was more about doctrinal purity than denominational protectionism.

⁵⁸ With thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this phrase.

⁵⁹ To make matters more complex, according to John Ryland, Jr, the 'Particular Baptist' denomination contained some Arminian churches among them (John Ryland, 'Letter to Unknown Recipient', 26 February 1806, Yale University Library). Ryland notes that there were ten or twelve such churches that leaned toward Arminianism.

⁶⁰ Based on the date of the letter, these missionaries were most likely Richard Mardon, John Biss, William Moore, and Joshua Rowe, along with their wives (Francis Augustus Cox, *History of the Baptist Missionary Society, from 1792 to 1842*, 2 vols (London: T. Ward, 1842), 1, 137).

⁶¹ Andrew Fuller, 'Letter to John Williams', 1 August 1804, American Baptist Historical Society Archive. This letter has been published several times: Andrew Fuller, 'Interesting Intelligence from India', *The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine*, 1, no. 4 (May 1805), pp. 97–98; Leighton and Mornay Williams, eds., *Serampore Letters: Being the Unpublished Correspondence of William Carey and Others with John Williams* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1892); and Michael A.G. Haykin, *The Armies of the Lamb: The Spirituality of Andrew Fuller* (Dundas, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2001), pp. 193–195.

Conclusion

Fuller's catholicity was nuanced. It possessed limitations that kept it from being expressed in significant ways. While he could support the efforts of those with whom he differed, he did so from a distance, never entering into a full partnership with them, nor embracing them fully as a fellow believer at the table of the Lord. His concept of a union of sentiments demonstrates that he could not unite with those with whom he truly differed, thus showing that his attitude was shaped less by a robust catholicity and more by a tolerance based on an unwillingness to violate another's conscience.⁶² While conscience-based tolerance is important, it is, arguably, not necessarily catholic.

He was open in his love for all those who called on the name of Christ and rejoiced in their prosperity, but he was careful not to cast his net too wide, as he also describes approach to union with other Christians in contrast to what he has heard others promote, saying,

I have heard a great deal of *union without sentiment*; but I can neither feel nor perceive any such thing, either in myself or others. All the union that I can feel or perceive, arises from *a similarity of views and pursuits*. No two persons may think exactly alike; but so far as they are unlike, so far there is a want of union.⁶³

This speaks clearly to the distinctions to be found in Fuller's thought: unity is on a sliding scale of agreement as to the mind of Christ, and the greater the unity, the greater the equality in partnership enjoyed. For Fuller, if there was sufficient agreement between believers, then full (or

⁶² The literature on 'tolerance' is voluminous. Just a selection of more recent works reveals a wide array of approaches to its history and theory: Teresa M. Bijan, *Mere Civility: Disagreement and the Limits of Toleration* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017); John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (London: Routledge, 2000); Jakob De Roover and S.N. Balagangadhara, 'John Locke, Christian Liberty, and the Predicament of Liberal Toleration', *Political Theory*, 36, no. 4 (August 2008): 523–549; Ole Peter Grell and Roy Porter, *Toleration in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Marjoka van Doorn, 'The Nature of Tolerance and the Social Circumstances in Which It Emerges', *Current Sociology Review*, 62, no. 6 (2014): 905–927; Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500–1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Robert Louis Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2019); and Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005). Future research into the influence of the Enlightenment on Fuller's thinking would no doubt prove fruitful.

⁶³ Fuller, 'Agreement in Sentiment', *The Complete Works*, 3, 491.

a fuller) fellowship and partnership could be extended and fostered. However, in the absence of such agreement, Fuller, while not willing to treat other believers with indifference, would not extend the fullness of fellowship to them.