CHAPTER TWO

FULLER’S THEOLOGICAL INDEBTEDNESS TO FREEDOM OF THE WILL

It is abundantly, improved for this purpose by President Edwards, in his *Inquiry into the Freedom of the Will*. A book which has been justly said to go further toward settling the main points in controversy between the Calvinists and Arminians, than any thing that has been wrote.1

Andrew Fuller

2.1 Historical Analysis

The period from the early 1770s until publication of the first edition of *Gospel Worthy* (1785) can be seen as the years when Fuller worked through his theology and actively sought to find an adequate intellectual basis for his evangelical understanding of Christianity. Out of this search arose “Fullerism, … this transplanted Edwardsean Calvinism.”2 This evangelical development then became an important source for revival among English Baptists, which ultimately gave birth to the Modern Missionary Movement. In the preface to the first edition of *Gospel Worthy*, Fuller wrote:

I had read and considered, as well as I could, Mr. Jonathan Edwards’ *Enquiry into the Freedom of the Will* ... on the distinction of *natural* and *moral* ability, and inability. I always found great pleasure in this distinction ...3

Why should such an idea have given him so much pleasure? Perhaps Fuller saw in the concept an opportunity to deliver others from a serious theological dilemma, one which Fuller himself knew all too well. His own doctrinal quandary stemmed from personal struggles with the Hyper-Calvinistic4 background in which a “subjective warrant” was

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4 The terms ‘high,’ ‘hyper,’ ‘false,’ even ‘pseudo’ Calvinism are used synonymously by Fuller to describe a strand of ‘Calvinism’ that was prevalent in Particular Baptist
considered necessary for a person to approach God for salvation. However, since Fuller could not find sufficient basis to conclude definitively that he was one of the elect, during the three-year period between 1766 and 1769—when he believed he was not qualified to come to Christ—he suffered intense agony. Fuller understood in retrospect that this painful and delayed conversion experience had been unnecessary. Consequently, his yearning for others to have a “somewhat smoother path” became a significant motivation for his development of an evangelistic soteriology.

As a result, in the midst of a rapid decline among Baptist denomination in England, Fuller's *Gospel Worthy* “fell,” according to Timothy George, “like a bombshell on the playground of theologians, Fuller was pilloried by Arminians and Hyper-Calvinists alike.” While Edwards's original intention for natural and moral distinctions was chiefly used in New England to argue against the “prevailing notion” of Arminianism, Fuller, however, used these distinctions to contend with two opposing fronts and succeeded.

On one side were the Particular Baptists, of which Fuller was a member, and which led—through the influence of John Gill (1697–1771) and John Brine (1703–1765)—to Hyper-Calvinism. After Fuller's publication of *Gospel Worthy*, William Button (1754–1821) and John Martin (1741–1820) of the Particular Baptist camp responded to Fuller in a critical manner. Although Fuller's friendship with Button remained intact, his arguments with Martin appear to be less discreet. However, it was not only the Hyper-Calvinists who accused Fuller of alleged errors. Dan Taylor (1738–1816), a General Baptist minister who published under the pseudonym “Philanthropos,” contested Fuller's arguments in *Observations on the Rev Andrew Fuller's Late Pamphlet*...