JOHN OWEN AND ANDREW FULLER

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INTRODUCTION

Writing in his diary on August 21, 1784, Andrew Fuller made the following comment:

> Much pain at heart today, while reading in Dr Owen. Feel almost a sacred reverence for his character. Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man! Oh that I might be led into Divine truth! `Christ and his cross be all my theme.' I love his name and wish to make it the centre in which all the lines of my ministry should meet! The Lord direct my way in respect of publishing. Assuredly he knows my end is to vindicate the excellence of his character, and his worthiness of being loved and credited.[1]

While many students of Owen have no doubt felt pain at heart because of the elaborate, Latinate prose of Dr Owen, it would appear from the passage that what had most struck Fuller was the content, not the rebarbative style, of the great Independent's writing on God. Indeed, by 1784, the year of the publication of *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, 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.

As with all historical actions separated by significant periods of time, those of Owen and Fuller enjoy both points of contextual continuity and discontinuity. Both men stand self-consciously within anti-Pelagian, Calvinist stream of theology; and both men also faced similar challenges from those who attacked both the epistemological and moral foundations of the Christian faith, particularly as these focus on the issue of atonement. Yet there are also significant differences: Owen was educated in the university, the beneficiary of a curriculum with roots deep in both medieval patterns of pedagogy and Renaissance cultural modifications; Fuller, however, received only a `moderate education,' according to Albert Newman.[2] Thus, we should note at the start that the composition of Owen's books, and the development of his own thinking, in the seventeenth century needs to be distinguished from its reception by Fuller in the eighteenth: Owen's texts are classic examples of Reformed Orthodoxy, produced at a time when the theological tradition they represented was deeply embedded in the wider culture of the time; Fuller's writings come after the intellectual paradigms which gave birth to reformed Orthodoxy had lost their dominance, when non-conformists were a disenfranchised minority, and when theologians such as Fuller lacked the Renaissance education which had provide the intellectual foundations to men such as Owen. With all of this in mind, it should not be surprising to us if, in examining the impact of Owen upon Fuller, we find that the latter's approach to the former actually involves significant deviations from the original theological intention of the various works and ideas which he cites.

OWEN AND FULLER ON ATONEMENT

Given the significance of John Owen's 1647 treatise, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (*DoD*) for subsequent statements of the Reformed Orthodox doctrine of the atonement, it is not surprising to find that it features as a significant authority for Fuller in his own discussion of the matter in *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*. This latter work, and its later defense against the criticisms of Rev. Button, contains numerous positive references to, and quotations from, the works of Owen. Indeed, Owen functions in the controversy as something of an authority, with attempts being made to claim his support by both Fuller and his detractors.[3]

For example, Fuller quotes from Chapter 10 of Owen's *A Display of Arminianism*, to the effect that the biblical command to be reconciled to

God is clearly indicative of a *duty* to be so, and thus of a duty to have faith.[4] It is worth noting that the Owen quotation originally functioned in *A Display* as part of an attack on Arminian assertions that anything required as a duty of Christians cannot be included in the work of Christ as this would undermine the imperative of faith. Thus, Owen's original point is not that which Fuller is making; though the brief quotation does not stand in contradiction of the latter's argument; and Fuller clearly regards Chapter 10 of *A Display* as definitively establishing the principle that human duty and divine gift are entirely compatible categories.[5]

Later in the same work, Fuller turns to Owen's *DoD* as a source. When he turns to discuss the classic objection to indiscriminate gospel preaching—that it is pointless to preach the gospel to those for whom Christ did not die—Fuller points to Book 4, Chapter 1 of *DoD* as indicating that this objection was that of the Arminians in the seventeenth century and is now, ironically, that of his Calvinist opponents in the eighteenth.[6] Fuller then concludes his section on this objection with a lengthy quotation from Owen to the effect that God's hidden will of election is not be made the basis for public ministerial policy when it comes to preaching the gospel.[7]

Given the dependence on Owen at key points in the establishment of his case, it is worth noting that the polemical motivation behind Fuller's work and that of Owen is not the same. For Owen, the key concern is the issue of the efficacy of Christ's atoning work, indeed, the efficacy of his action as High Priest. Throughout his career, Owen was preoccupied with the sacerdotal office of Christ in a manner which profoundly shaped his engagement with three particular theological targets: Roman Catholicism; Arminianism; and Socinianism. He regarded each of these three as falling short on the issue of Christ's priesthood: Catholics derogated from it by ascribing priestly powers to the clergy, and sacrificial import to the Mass; Arminians broke the connection between atonement and actual salvation by asserting that the former merely made the later possible; and Socinians, through their radical reconstruction of Christian theology, effectively turned the atonement into something of merely morally paradigmatic significance. In *DoD*, Owen's concern is thus to establish the effectual nature of Christ's atonement, with issues such as duty and gospel preaching being secondary issues. For Fuller, however, the question is somewhat different: his design is to establish the duty of all people to have faith in Jesus Christ, along with the closely related question of the free-, or well-meant, offer of the gospel.

This difference is significant. The question of the free offer of the gospel in the Reformed Orthodoxy of the seventeenth-century is a somewhat vexed issue. Raymond A. Blacketer has mounted a powerful case for arguing that it is not something which can be defended solely on the basis of the creedal documents of Reformed Orthodoxy, and thus was not a point of major confessional discussion; and Jonathan Moore has documented how the universal offer was grounded in the atonement in the seventeenth century by hypothetical universalists such as John Preston, and this in a manner which drew sharp criticism from particular redemptionists such as Thomas Goodwin, an otherwise admirer and sometime editor of Preston's work.[8]

This background should immediately alert us to the fact that Fuller's use of Owen on atonement is actually taking place within a context which runs somewhat counter to the flow of thought in the seventeenth century. Not only was Owen's concern not the free offer of the gospel or the universal duty of faith in Christ; in actual fact, the connection which Fuller was to make between atonement and such matters was one which would have had controversial connotations in the seventeenth century.

The difference between Fuller and Owen on this matter comes out clearly in the discussion of particular redemption. Here, Fuller offers alternative models of atonement. The first he describes as follows:

> If the atonement of Christ were considered as the literal payment of a debt – if the measure of his sufferings were according to the number of those for whom he died, and to the degree of their guilt, in such a manner as that if more had been saved, or if those who are saved had been more guilty, his sorrows must have been proportionably increased – it might, for aught I know, be inconsistent with indefinite invitations. But it would be equally inconsistent with free *forgiveness* of sin, and with sinners being directed to apply for mercy as *supplicants* rather than as claimants. I conclude, therefore, that an hypothesis which in so many important points is manifestly inconsistent with the Scriptures cannot be true.[9]

What is interesting about Fuller's argument at this point is that it would appear to stand in line with the kind of argument we find exhibited by Socinians, and by theologians such as Hugo Grotius, and Richard Baxter, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries whereby the logical consequences of a certain understanding of substitutionary atonement are

deemed to render it unacceptable. For example, Socinus' objections to penal substitution in his major work *De Jesu Christo Servatore*, is rooted in the incompatibility of subsitutionary atonement and merciful forgiveness, given that the former seems to make the pardon of sin a legal right not an act of grace. Then, the issue of the identity of the debt which Christ pays with that owed by the sinners who are redeemed by his action is precisely that which drives Baxter's objections in his first major polemical work, *Aphorisms of Justification* (1649) to Owen's formulation in *DoD*. There, the problem as Baxter sees it is that Owen cannot avoid holding to a doctrine of eternal justification, with its concomitant implications of antinomianism. Before we turn to look at these issues in more detail, it is worth noting Fuller's own alternative to the theory he has just dismissed:

> On the other hand, 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.[10]

Fuller's intention, of course, is to articulate some notion of sufficiency in the atonement which will allow him to offer an objective ground for the moral obligation of all to have faith in Christ. While Fuller ends this section with a substantial quotation from Owen concerning the general offer of the gospel made to sinners by preachers. This has the effect of making Fuller's previous argument look of a piece with that of Owen, yet the use of the Puritan here is somewhat inappropriate. Indeed, as will be argued below, Fuller's positive statement of his position at this point certainly sounds more like that of Richard Baxter than that of John Owen.

In the quotation, Owen roots the general offer in the hiddenness of God's election, and the only reference to the atonement's sufficiency is to the fact that it is sufficient for all who will fulfill the conditions of belief. This is not the point which Fuller is trying to establish: the universal

sufficiency of the atonement. While Owen will talk of universal sufficiency, and will connect this to gospel preaching, this is in a highly qualified manner which differs at significant points from the approach later offered by Fuller. Indeed, to cut to the chase: what is missing in terms of Reformed Orthodoxy in Fuller's discussion at this point is the kind of background of covenantal merit, a point which marks continuity between the theologians of the later Middle Ages and the Reformed Orthodox, and the absence of which distinguishes Fuller from the kind of debates and conceptual landscape which gave birth to the theology of John Owen and his Reformed Orthodox contemporaries. Failure to appreciate this is what forces Fuller to choose between two options which focus primarily upon the quality of the atonement considered in itself, rather than upon the broader Trinitarian matrix which provides its theological context.

Owen does argue for the infinite sufficiency of Christ's atonement, but this is highly qualified. He is clear that Christ's death has infinite value, and this is rooted in the nature of the incarnation and in the quality of the suffering which Christ undergoes.[11] Yet this infinite value is always qualified in Owen's thinking:

> It was, then, the purpose and intention of God that his Son should offer a sacrifice of infinite worth, value, dignity, sufficient in itself for the redeeming of all and every man, *if it had pleased the Lord to employ it to that purpose*.[12]

Here, it is very clear that the divine will is critical to determining the actual salvific worth of the atonement, and that is made explicit just a few lines later in the same passage:

> '[I]t is denied that the blood of Christ was a sufficient price and ransom for all and every one, not because it was not sufficient, but because it was not a ransom.'[13]

In other words, Owen sees Christ's death as of infinite worth, and of no worth at all. He is the God-man, thus the value of his life, suffering, and death cannot be measured; yet the salvific value of the death is determined by its nature as ransom or sacrifice, and this is decidedly limited. This immediately sets the question of the atonement's value within the context of Christ's mediatorship and his appointment to that office, and

for Owen, this means the covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son, a notion which has its roots in Calvin but which only developed as a specific conceptual term in the mid-1640s, immediately before the composition of *DoD*. Only as Christ is appointed as mediator is does his work take on the character of a sacrifice and a ransom; any talk of its value outside of this context is entirely abstract and not to the point.

This is an absolutely crucial point for understanding Reformed Orthodox discussions of atonement, of imputation, and of justification. Only when these matters are set in the context of God's sovereignly established covenants can they be properly understood; and failure so to do leads inevitably to caricature and misunderstanding. Thus, if we imagine a possible world where Christ dies for 100 elect sinners, and compare this to another possible world where he dies for 200 elect sinners, it is simply not the case that Reformed Orthodoxy would require his suffering in the second to be double that of his suffering in the first. It is certainly true that the language of debt and payment pervades Reformed discussion; but the careful reader of a theologian such as John Owen knows that what is understood by the metaphors of debt and payment needs to be co-ordinated both with the notion of the federal headships of Adam and Christ respectively, and with the fact that it is the terms of the various covenants involved, not the intrinsic value of obedience, which determines the nature of sin and the nature of recompense.

Thus, the dynamic of Owen's argument about the atonement relative to unrestricted gospel preaching would seem to be as follows: from the point of view of human knowledge, the *sacrificial* value of Christ's death, as that of the incarnate Son of God is *potentially* sufficient for all and nobody has the right to restrict gospel preaching on that basis; however, it is actually only a sacrifice for the elect, and thus actually limited in its value; therefore, gospel preaching should be unrestricted on the grounds of epistemological limitation (i.e., the preacher does not know who is and who is not elect). In other words, in *DoD* the argument from universal sufficiency is really just another expression of the argument from the unknowability of God's decree.

In his *Conversation on Particular Redemption*, Fuller quotes a passage from Owen which occurs immediately prior to the above quotation, indicating apparent basic agreement with the Puritan divine.[14] Here, Fuller argues that the particularity of redemption lies in its application,

which, if the passage he quotes from Owen is taken in isolation, is what Owen says too. However, rooting particularity in application can take several forms, and the Owen quotation he uses is not enough to bring out the full implication of what Owen is actually saying. Hypothetical universalists, Baxterians, and Amyraldians all offered models of particularism rooted in application. When Fuller makes the following use of Owen, it is tempting to say that the game is up:

> Intention of some kind doubtless does enter into the essence of Christ laying down his life a sacrifice; but that it should be beneficial to this person rather than to that appears to me, as Dr Owen expresses it, 'external to it, and to depend entirely on the will of God.'[15]

Certainly that is the case; but what Fuller seems to miss is the fact that for Owen this external context of God's will does not simply determine the particularity of application; it also constitutes the death of Christ as a sacrifice. In other words, Owen does not think you can talk about the death of Christ as a sacrifice without talking about particulars. The very quality of what takes place on the cross is determined by the particularism of God's salvific will, rendering all abstract talk of sufficiency of *atonement* to be highly specious except as a means of cutting off human attempts to limit the offer of the gospel.

On this level, there is a practical similarity between Owen and Fuller, but the distinction Fuller draws between the two types of atonement serves to distance him from Owen. If we now return to the antithesis Fuller draws between two views of atonement, one where there is a strict quantitative and qualitative identity between the suffering of Christ, and one where the suffering of Christ is seen as a revelation of divine displeasure against sin in a manner which renders God's act of mercy entirely coherent with his righteousness, we can see that a careful reading of John Owen against the background of Reformed Orthodoxy means that he is neither guilty of the crudity of the position Fuller rejects (and which Fuller nowhere imputes to Owen); but neither does he find it necessary to develop his thinking along the apparently Baxterian lines laid out by Fuller in the position which he accepts.[16] It is true that the external context of God's will provides the particularity of atonement for both Owen and Fuller; but for Owen this has an impact on the intrinsic quality of the atonement as well, as is made clear in the seventeenth

century debate on this issue between himself and Richard Baxter.

For Owen and Baxter, one of the primary theological problems they face with regard to the atonement is the Socinian objection noted above: if Christ has paid the specific judicial price for a specific individual's sin, is the acquittal of that individual not an act of justice rather than mercy? This was the point at which Socinus most aggressively pressed his case. For Fuller, this point of Socinian critique is what allows him to mount his argument against the deniers of the free offer: yes, if Christ has paid the specific judicial price for a specific individual's sin, there can probably be no basis for offering the gospel to one whose sin is not dealt with in Christ, or even to one whose sin we cannot be sure has been dealt with in Christ; yet, if this view of the atonement were true, mercy is abolished; *a fortiori*, such a view of the atonement must be false.

The problem with Fuller's argument here is that it forces an antithesis between two views of the atonement when, in fact, the position offered by Owen is in fact a third option, and the one favoured by the Reformed Orthodox.

ATONEMENT AND COVENANT

As noted above, Owen makes a basic distinction between Christ's death considered in itself, where it has infinite sufficiency but cannot be construed as a sacrifice and thus has no actual salvific value at all, and Christ's death considered as a sacrifice. This latter point depends upon the prior appointment of Christ as mediator under the terms of the covenant of redemption, as co-ordinated with covenant of grace. Further, the basic mechanics of this structure are provided by the historic covenant of works. Adam's work in the garden was, strictly speaking, only meritorious as far as he was constituted federal head of humanity under the terms of this covenant. In other words, he could have been born and lived a life of perfect obedience, but this would have had no significance had this not taken place under the terms of the covenant which made his works covenantally meritorious. Thus, had he remained obedient, his reward would have been merited and required of God as an act of justice.

The structural parallel to this in Christology is the appointment of Christ as mediator under the terms of the covenant of redemption. As with Adam, the work of Christ has merit and application as far as the terms of the covenant of redemption allow. The first thing to note, therefore, is that Owen's position differs from the crude commercialism which

Fuller rejects because its understanding of merit is rooted in the will of God, not in some crudely quantifiable `amount' of suffering and punishment, as if such could be totted up like some cosmic overdraft. The focal point of Owen's view of atonement is not primarily on the intrinsic dimensions of Christ's death, significant though they are as providing what one might call the prime matter for atonement. The real context for understanding the value of atonement is the will of God, expressed in the covenant of redemption, paralleled with the covenant of works.

Now, the position of the Reformed Orthodox led to vigorous criticism from the pen of Richard Baxter. Two areas in particular distinguish the positions of the two men. First, Baxter's view of Christ as mediator is not ineradicably particularist in terms of its connection to its origin within the divine covenants. In his massive Latin work, *Methodus Theologiae* (London, 1681), Baxter makes it clear that the object of his appointment as mediator is fallen humanity considered *en masse*, not any elect subdivision of the whole.[17] The discriminating element of salvation is thus not an intrinsically Christological one, as it is with Owen, but is rooted rather outwith the immediate constitution of Christ's mediatorship.

This brings us to the second point which distinguishes Baxter from Owen. As a corollary to the idea of an atonement which is not particularist at a foundational level, Baxter also argues that the atonement is an equivalent payment for human sin, not an identical payment. This is expressed by Baxter using the distinction between *solutio tantidem* ("equivalent payment") and *solutio eiusdem* ("identical payment"). This distinction, originating on Roman law, was used by Hugo Grotius to counter Socinus' criticism of substitutionary atonement: if Christ's death was an equivalent payment, not an identical payment, for human sin, then the application of that payment to human salvation was not automatic, rooted in the nature of the atonement itself, but in a further, logically subsequent act of God's grace. This concept became integral to Baxter's soteriology and formed the core of his earliest objections to that of John Owen. Indeed, in his 1649 *Aphorisms of Justification*, he devoted an appendix to attacking *DoD* on precisely this point.

For Baxter, the notion of a *solutio eiusdem* in the atonement demanded a corollary doctrine of eternal justification for the elect, or at least justification from the moment Christ had completed his work. He regarded this as carrying with it unacceptable antinomian implications. Traumatized by the chaos of the Civil War and the sectarianism which he had

witnessed at first-hand while serving in the army, he was unsurprisingly wary of anything which might seem to reduce the moral imperatives of the Christian life. In this context, his rejection of a *solutio eiusdem* in the atonement had a further doctrinal implication besides the obvious preclusion of eternal justification: it also meant that justification itself could be modified to take account of the fact that imputation dealt with things equivalent, not identical. As this impacted what exactly was meant by imputation to Christ of humanity's sin, so it also impacted what was meant by imputation to the believer of Christ's righteousness. Thus, Baxter's view of atonement as a *solutio tantidem* and his so-called neonomian understanding of justification are intimately connected; indeed, the debate surrounding his theology brings out the connection between atonement and justification in a profound manner.

Owen's response to Baxter is of interest in discussion of Fuller. For example, there is his vigorous defence of the notion of atonement as *solutio eiusdem*:

> It [Christ's death] was a full, valuable compensation, made to the justice of God, for all the sins of all those for whom he made satisfaction, by undergoing that same punishment which, by reason of the obligation that was upon them, they themselves were bound to undergo.[18]

This quotation was written in 1647, at a time when Owen still regarded the exercise of divine, vindicatory justice as rendered necessary by an act of God's will, not by the very nature of his being. By 1653, Owen had reversed his opinion on this matter, a doctrinal shift which can only have reinforced his commitment to the notion of *solutio eiusdem*. Yet, for all of this, Owen does not regard his position as necessitating either the dilemma posed by the Socinians regarding God's justice and mercy, nor, therefore, the reconstruction of atonement and justification offered by Baxter as a means of avoiding both Socinianism and antinomianism. Owen sees God's gracious pardoning of sin as comprising the whole dispensation of grace: the imputation of human sin to Christ; and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the elect. These, of course, must be understood against the background of God's free appointment of Christ's satisfaction, in the acceptance of that satisfaction as vicarious for the elect, and in the free application of that satisfaction to the elect. In other words, it must be understood against the background of the cov-

enants of redemption and grace, freely established by God.[19] Thus, it is the fact that the atonement is made by one on behalf of another that guarantees its gracious, free nature. Owen avoids eternal justification, meanwhile, by stressing the need for union with Christ as the context of justification, a union which comes about through the instrumentality of faith and which thus involves an actual transition from a state of wrath to a state of grace at a particular point in time.

Fuller's own preference for a view of the atonement which shies away from the strict substitutionary particularism of the kind embodied in the notion of a *solutio eiusdem* is interesting. For example, it is surprising that his discussion of particular redemption does not engage with these nuances of the Reformed tradition. Further, as a Baptist, he was presumably familiar with similar arguments from within his own tradition. After Reformed Orthodoxy had more or less died out as an influential and theologically sophisticated movement, it yet continued in the voluminous and elaborate theological writings of the Baptist theologian, John Gill. Indeed, Gill is remarkable in being one of the few eighteenth century theologians who continued to articulate a comprehensive and robust theological system rooted in basic Reformed Orthodox paradigms. As with Owen and others, his Christology is built upon a careful delineation of the covenant of redemption. Gill refuses to separate this from the covenant of grace, seeing the accepted terminological distinction as being formal rather than material; but this position is perfectly consistent with the boundaries of Reformed Orthodox discussion.[20] While Gill does not appear to discuss the *solutio eiusdem/tantidem* distinction in his *Body of Divinity*, the whole thrust of his discussion of the redemptive work of Christ would seem to indicate his basic commitment to Owen's position, especially when it comes to his rejection of universal notions of atonement.[21] He is also aware of the kind of Socinian argument which opposes redemption to divine love and mercy and, like Owen, sees the solution of this dilemma as lying not in any discussion of the intrinsic nature of Christ's death but in the overall federal context of Christological discussion.[22] Of course, Gill is not as concerned as Owen to avoid the appearance of teaching a form of eternal justification. Indeed, he argues strongly for considering justification as an immanent act within the divine mind which is eternal; this he calls *active* justification, distinguishing it from *passive* justification which is a divine act in time terminating on the conscience of the believer.[23]

Given all this background, it is now possible to assess what should be

seen as Fuller's basic rejection of the central Reformed Orthodox tradition on this matter. We have already noted that he places in opposition two views of the atonement, the first of which—the vigorously commercial view—is arguably a caricature of what Reformed Orthodoxy taught. That Fuller understood some elements of Reformed Orthodoxy this way seems to be the import of a marginal note in his letter to John Ryland of January 4, 1803, where he imputes the view to the vast majority of what he terms "High Calvinists" in general, and to Dr Gill in particular. This is the first in a series of letters from fuller to Ryland, outlining the dispute in which he has been engaged with Abraham Booth. At the heart of this lies the issue of imputation: Booth sees Fuller's statements about the atonement as a denial of the imputation of sin to Christ; and Fuller suspects Booth of precisely the kind of crude commercialism which he rejects in *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, and which, as I have argued above, is itself a caricature of the Reformed Orthodox position. [24]

In his response to Booth on both imputation and justification, Fuller signally fails to set his discussion within any kind of covenant context. Though he will cite Owen, he gives no indication that he really understands the nature of Owen's theological argument on these points. For the Reformed, imputation cannot be understood unless centre stage is given to the Rom. 5 parallel between Adam and Christ, and this in terms of the covenant of works. Thus, when Fuller ends his letter to Ryland on imputation with a challenge to Booth to demonstrate what medium there can possibly be between Christ being treated "*as though he were a* transgressor and his actually *being one*" the Reformed Orthodox would surely answer that an approach which sees him as the last Adam in the context of the parallel of the covenants of works and grace allows for the reality of imputation as men like Gill have articulated it without demanding that Christ be an actual sinner, and without having to conceive of sin and its punishment in crudely quantitative ways that fail to appreciate the metaphorical dimension of language about debtors and creditors. The problem is that Fuller's failure to follow the Reformed Orthodox paradigm means that he appears to miss key nuances of the Reformed Orthodox position.

The same kind of problem attends Fuller's approach to atonement. In his letter to Ryland on substitution, he speaks about an *objective fullness* of the atonement and roots the discriminating factor between elect and non-elect in God's decision not to change the state of the individual's

mind. Clearly, this approach precludes the kind of notion of atonement as *solutio eiusdem* which was so important to John Owen's scheme, and also fails to see the important distinction in Reformed Orthodoxy between the kind of abstract universal sufficiency of Christ's obedience and death rooted in his constitution as the God-man, and the *salvific* value of the same under the terms of the covenant of redemption. For Owen, the logical priority of the particularism of God's will to save is the very foundation of atonement; and co-ordinated with his notion of *solutio eiusdem* has a profound impact on how he understands language of sufficiency. True, Fuller comes verbally close to Owen's position in his fourth letter to Ryland, on his change of sentiments, but even here he does not appreciate the full impact of the kind of theology which Owen represented and which really rendered abstract discussion of sufficiency of atonement to be irrelevant: atonement in the abstract was, for Owen and the Reformed Orthodox, no atonement at all, and the value of Christ's death in such a context mere specious verbiage. Thus, Fuller can say the following:

> I…placed the peculiarity of redemption wholly in the *appointment* or *design* of the Father and the Son, which, if I understand my own words, is the same thing as placing it in 'the sovereignty of its application.'[25]

This is the argument he makes at greater length in his *Reply to Philanthropos*, where, under pressure from his critics, he is careful to stress the particularist aspects of his understanding of atonement. Yet the particularism of Owen is linked to the notion of *solutio eiusdem*, a position which seems incompatible with Fuller's views on imputation and his rejection of what he sees as a crudely commercial view of atonement in favour of what seems a more Baxterian model of equivalency not identity. Thus, the particularism which Fuller has in mind seems to be logically—and this is speaking logically not *chronologically*—subsequent to Christ's death and not an intrinsic quality of said death.

CONCLUSION

Fuller's selective use of Owen is indeed interesting, in part because Owen's arguments on the atonement do not really correspond to either of the two forms of atonement between which he forces the reader to choose. There are a number of reasons that allow us to make sense of this.

First, Fuller reads Owen without the kind of thorough schooling in late medieval thought patterns which allow for a nuanced understanding of covenantally determined merit. Thus the crude debtor-creditor and the moral equivalency models can be set up as the only two viable orthodox alternatives. In fact, an understanding of covenantal merit, combined with a careful structuring of Christ's mediatorship as the soteriological complement to the Adamic covenant of works would have at least allowed him to avoid the crudity of the former model which, of the two he sets out, is probably closer to Owen.

Second, Fuller is clearly operating in a context where, quite possibly, the Reformed Orthodox view of atonement is caricatured in the way in which it has been appropriated and articulated by ministers. This does not apply to the approach of John Gill, to whom Fuller imputes the view he rejects; but it is understandable that, if Fuller does not understand the background to the classic view that he rejects, the same would be true of those who adopt this position and lack Fuller's theological skill.

Third, Fuller is clearly driven by a rejection of anything which he thinks will interfere with the free offer of the gospel. His concern in this matter is different to that of Owen's day. Certainly Owen uses the standard argument from the hypostatic union to preclude *a priori* limitations on the extent of the atonement, and thus to preclude limitation of gospel preaching on that basis; but the question of the free or well-meant offer in the seventeenth century is a more vexed question and not really one to which Owen addressed himself. For Fuller, universal sufficiency of atonement is important as a means of impressing the universal duty of faith in Jesus Christ and as a means of undergirding the free offer of the gospel. Given this, his commitment to reading Owen in seventeenth century context is automatically qualified and shaped by contemporary concerns and questions which do not fit easily into the original thought world of Owen's texts.

In conclusion, therefore, it would seem fair to say that Fuller used and adapted Owen in ways that the latter might well not have recognized. That Fuller's view of the intrinsic nature of the atonement seems more akin to that of Baxter surely speaks eloquently of the difficulties that surround his connection to earlier Reformed Orthodox patterns. Fuller may well have been a great church leader, but his grasp of seventeenth-century theological issues is certainly not as great as that of John Gill; and he is almost certainly not as close to Owen in his view of the atonement as his frequent citations from the Puritan would seem to indicate

he believed himself to be. E

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ENDNOTES

1 *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller: with a memoir of his life by Andrew Gunton Fuller. Reprinted from the third London edition; revised with additions, by Joseph Belcher, D.D. in three volumes*. (Reprint of 1845 edition, Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988), I, 42.

2 *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (New York: Funk and Wagnalis, 1909), 409.

3 See Fuller's comments, *Complete Works* II, 422.

4 *Complete Works,* II, 353, quoting John Owen, *The Complete Works of John Owen*, edited by William H. Goold. 16 vols. (Reprint of 1850–53 ed., London, England: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965–68), X, 102.

5 *Complete Works,* II, 366.

6 *Complete Works,* II, 371.

7 *Complete Works,* II, 373, quoting Owen, *Works*, X, 299–300.

8 Raymond A. Blacketer, "The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed: A Reexamination of the So-Called Well-Meant Offer of Salvation," *Calvin Theological Journal* 35 (2000), 37–65; Jonathan D Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 116–24.

9 *Complete Works,* II, 373.

10 *Complete Works,* II, 374–75.

11 Owen, *Works*, X, 295–96.

12 Owen, *Works*, X, 295–96.

13 Owen, *Works,* X, 296.

14 *Complete Works,* II, 694.

15 *Complete Works,* II, 694.

16 Cf. *Complete Works,* II, 697.

17 *Methodus Theologiae*, 1.2.73–74.

18 Owen, *Works,* X, 269.

19 Owen, *Works*, X, 268–69.

20 See John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (Reprint of 1809 ed., Paris, AK: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1987), II.vii (pp. 216–17); also VI.ii (pp. 458-59). The term *covenant of redemption* and its Latin equivalent, *pactum salutis*, only gains currency in theological circles in mid-1640s and thus does not appear in

the Westminster Standards. Further, confessional Reformed Orthodox theologians after the 1640s exhibit diversity on the issue, with some making, such as John Owen, making a clear distinction between the covenants, others simply using the covenant of grace to make the same theological point—the federal headship of Christ as the last Adam.

21 Gill, *Body of Divinity,* II.ix-xi (pp. 226–37); V.iv (pp. 401–06); V.x (pp. 427–31); VI.ii-ii (pp. 457–67).

22 Gill, *Body of Divinity,* II.xi (pp.231–32).

23 Gill, *Body of Divinity,* II.v (pp. 205–09).

24 *Complete Works,* II, 699.

25 *Complete Works,* II, 710.