

A Vision of God for the Final Era of Frontier Missions

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*Daniel Payton Fuller is Professor of Hermeneutics at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. A group of his former students, called "The Fellowship of the Arc," gathered in Pasadena June 10-12, 1985 to celebrate his sixtieth birthday and to express their affection for his friendship, their admiration for his labor, and their gratitude for his vision of the glory of God. This essay was one expression of that gratitude. The author explains, "'Dogmatics of Redemptive History' is the title I am giving to the theological vision of Daniel Fuller which will, God willing, find its most definitive statement in a major treatise that has been emerging for two decades under the working title, *The Unity of the Bible*. It has served as a classroom syllabus for hundreds of students at Fuller Theological Seminary in a class by that same name—a life-changing class for many of us. In this essay I abbreviate the name of this syllabus, published now in mimeographed form by Fuller Seminary, as *Unity*."*

Daniel Fuller's emerging "Dogmatics of Redemptive History" is a fervent manifesto for the final era of frontier missions.¹ It is a partial fulfillment of the vision of Jonathan Edwards, who wrote the following words just five months before his death on March 22, 1758:

I have had on my mind and heart... a great work, which I call a *History of the Work of Redemption*, a body of divinity in an entire new method, being thrown into the form of a history... introducing all parts of divinity in that order which is most scriptural and most natural; a method which appears to me the most beautiful and entertaining, wherein every divine doctrine will appear to the greatest advantage, in the brightest light, in the most striking manner, showing the admirable contexture and harmony of the whole.²

Edwards wrote *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd*, which has greatly served the cause of frontier missions and which has inspired countless missionaries to give their all for the sake of the gospel. But he did not live to write the "great work." It, too, would have served the cause of frontier missions. For in order to pursue God's great design in history, we have to know what it is. Missions must be sustained by a vision of God's vast purpose for creation. The more clearly we see that great design, the more purposefully and passionately we can pursue it.

Edwards compared God's work in redemptive history to an architect building a palace:

Suppose an architect, with a great number of hands, were building some great palace; and one that was a stranger to such things should stand by, and see some men digging in the earth, others bringing timber, others hewing stone, and the like. He might see that there was a great deal done; but if he knew not the design, it would all appear to him confusion.³

When the design of a builder is clearly understood and you know what he is pursuing, then you can join him in the pursuit. But if you don't know his aim, then the construction crews all appear to be in confusion. You would not know where to participate even if you wanted to. But why would you want to if all appears to be in confusion?

Edwards "great work" would have served the cause of frontier missions by attempting to show how all the acts and ages of redemptive history cohere in the sovereign intention of God to achieve one grand goal. Though Edwards never wrote his *History*, the need for such a work remains undiminished today.

Contemporary Biblically-oriented mission strategists, like Edwards, intuitively sense the need for a deep and full "dogmatics of redemptive history" to display the unifying purpose of God from creation to consummation. Without such a vision, the church militant is like a battalion which can't hear the bugle or a search-and-rescue squad behind enemy lines which can't read their map and manual.

Strategists *have* presented their own brief "histories of redemption." For example, in the essay entitled "The Kingdom Strikes Back: the Ten Epochs of Redemptive History," Ralph Winter sketches the "single coherent drama" of redemption so that the contemporary cause of frontier missions will find strength and guidance in God's assured victory in history. Winter argues that in the Bible

... we have a single drama: the entrance into this enemy-occupied territory of the kingdom, the power and the glory of the living God. From Genesis 12 to the end of the Bible and indeed until the end of time, there unfolds the single, coherent drama of "the Kingdom strikes back." In this drama we see the gradual but irresistible power of God reconquering and redeeming his fallen creation through the giving of His own Son at the very center of the 4000-year period we are now ending.⁴

But a major work is needed—one that comes closer to the vision of Jonathan Edwards. The task before the church is so massive, the stakes are so high, the opposition so great that our roots must sink down into the depths of God's purpose. Our view of his plan must be panoramic enough to sustain us when the final winds blow and when temporary darkness obscures our vision of the whole landscape of eternity.

Daniel Fuller has carried this burden for more than thirty years, and he is soon to publish his vision of God's design in redemptive history. It will be no mere academic treatise. It will be a deep and passionate manifesto for the great final era of frontier missions. As a tribute to the grace and wisdom of God in the life and thought of Daniel Fuller, and for the sake of spreading the hope and joy and glory of frontier missions, I set out here a very personal statement of some of the elements of Dr. Fuller's vision that have captured my heart for the cause of frontier missions. I will first treat his method and then describe the fruit of this method.

I. THE RESEARCH AND TEACHING METHOD OF DANIEL FULLER IS A MISSIONARY METHOD.

There is a direct correlation between the laming of seminary and Bible school students by some professors and the laming of national churches by some missionaries. The pedagogical method that begets dependence on secondary sources produces missionaries whose method of developing leadership backfires and yields dependence and weakness in the pastors of national churches.

Neither the standard lecture method nor the rambling discussion method cultivates in students the power and inclination of independent thought. Yet independent thought is the *sine qua non* of freedom and authenticity both in young students and in young national churches. Pedagogical methods which do not engender "indigenous" Biblical theology in the mind and soul of prospective missionaries can indirectly enslave the churches that these missionaries plant. We are not likely to impart the power to be theologically indigenous if our own theology is secondhand and if the only way we know to teach is by imparting conclusions rather than by empowering independent thought.

In 1912 Roland Allen argued that missionaries often encounter great difficulty in getting young churches to stand on their own two feet because the missionaries have previously been, in a figurative sense, *giving* people fish rather than pursuing the much more difficult work of *teaching them how* to fish. Allen wrote:

Slavery is not the best training for liberty. It is only by exercise that powers grow. To do things for people does not train them to do them for themselves. We are learning more and more in things educational that the first duty of the teacher is not to solve all difficulties for the pupil, and to present him with the ready-made answer, but *to awaken a spirit, to teach the pupil to realize his own powers, by setting before him difficulties, and showing him how to approach and overcome them....* But we are like teachers who cannot resist telling their pupils the answer the moment a difficulty arises.... We cannot resist the temptation to do for them whatever we can do for them. We cannot sit by and see things done ill, or ill in view of our ideas of well. That may be a form of government, but it is not education. The work of the missionary cannot be done by imposing things from without. The one result which he desires is the growth and manifestation of a Spirit from within.⁵

Daniel Fuller's method of research and teaching has been a rare example of one that aims, in Allen's words, "to awaken a spirit, to teach the pupil to realize his own powers, by setting before him difficulties, and showing him how to approach and overcome them...."

Dr. Fuller, however, has gone one step further—he has taught us *how* to see the difficulties for ourselves. A student is still dependent if the only problems he can see are the ones his teacher puts before him. So he has labored to teach us how to be troubled. He has never tired of quoting John Dewey, who observed that "we never think until we are confronted with a problem." But to be free and independent and creative we must see and feel the problems ourselves. However, since by nature most of us try to avoid the exertion of thinking, we are not at all prone to ask the truly troubling questions about life and about the unity of God's work in redemptive history. Therefore, Dr. Fuller has spent himself in class, in discussions, and in his writing to help us be

troubled by the most important questions. This is a great gift—to make us "indigenous" students of the Bible.

Once we began to be perplexed about things that really mattered, Fuller led us into Allen's next step—to show us "how to approach and overcome" the perplexities. He has resisted the temptation to give us his solution before we had our own. In fact, the genius of his teaching has been the humility to again and again expose his own answers to correction by the answers of his students. His method gave us the hope that we might become able to speak the word of God with authentic power and personal conviction—not merely citing the convictions of others.

Dr. Fuller taught us to break through our perplexities and penetrate to the depth and unity of Biblical truth by forcing us to submit to the severe discipline of *seeing*. His efforts echo the maxim of Adolf Schlatter—"Science is first to see, second to see, third to see, and again and again to see." He taught us to slow down and devote the hours that it takes to stare at a puzzling text until we catch on to the connections and relationships and patterns that yield the author's intention. To help us in this task of seeing things in their complexity and unity, he developed a procedure of textual analysis (called "arcing"). It simply involves seeing the parts of a text, the relationships between those parts, and the contributions of the parts and relationships to the unifying point of the text.

I learned recently, while lecturing to Wycliffe translators in Cameroon, West Africa, that they attribute much of their own method of textual analysis to the seminal work of Daniel Fuller. So his method has proved to be missionary in more ways than one. It is a great asset in the process of Bible translation. But, even more importantly, it is the means by which a student can break through perplexities to gain fresh insight on his own, permit that insight to become personal and "indigenous," and pass on the power of independent thinking to other students and churches.

Behind the development of these research and teaching methods lies a mind with two passions. One passion is to submit to the evidence—wherever it leads—and to honor the truth—whatever it is. The other passion is to discover the coherence and unity of God's work in redemptive history.

Submitting to the Facts

For Daniel Fuller it is morally self-evident that a life which refuses to own up to the facts is inauthentic and undesirable. The ignoring or twisting of data to justify a prior conviction is morally reprehensible. It is the mark of an inauthentic, insecure, and unhappy heart. But that's the way we really are until we experience the forgiveness and acceptance of God and until we receive the *Holy Spirit*. For the fruit of the Spirit is joy and peace and love "which does not seek its own." This is why the Holy Spirit is methodologically crucial for Daniel Fuller. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, making us humble and teachable, we will inevitably ignore or distort the facts of Scripture in order to justify our prior convictions and desires.

Therefore, as a student of Scripture who is realistic about his own sinful and deceptive heart, Daniel Fuller is a man of *prayer*. For "if you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:3). Or, as Fuller puts it, "Those who engage in the task of interpreting the Bible

because of a conviction that it sets forth teachings that are true and beneficial... must look to God to enable them to have and maintain that humble and contrite spirit (Isaiah 57:15) that will welcome what the Bible teaches" (*Unity*, I-11).

Therefore, in the end, it is the Spirit of God who fulfills the passion of Fuller's mind to follow the evidences wherever they lead and to submit to the truth whatever it is. It is not surprising, then, that he imparts to his students the confidence that the same Spirit who enables him to follow (rather than to distort) the footprints of truth will also give to them the same desire to know and obey the truth. Without a similar confidence, could any missionary ever seriously pursue the actual theological independence of younger churches?

Discovering the Unity of God's Redemptive Work

The other passion of Fuller's mind is to discover the coherence and unity of God's work in redemptive history. There are many scholars who passionately pursue the facts in isolated areas of learning. But those who wrestle with the coherence of the whole are few.

The basis for Fuller's quest for coherence in Biblical truth is his belief that the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit. He does not start with this assumption, but he has come to this conclusion by following the evidences that he lays out for his readers to assess (*Unity*, III-9-11). To start with the assumption of inspiration without giving persuasive arguments for it would, in Fuller's mind, be catastrophic for the missionary enterprise. A missionary who requires assent to his religious authority without giving adequate reasons enslaves the young church from the outset to a foreign tradition and thus reduces the probability of authentic faith (which, as Fuller argues, is not an irrational leap in the dark but a resting in the evidences).

Arriving at the conviction that the Holy Spirit has inspired the Bible, Fuller infers that the Bible "sets forth a coherent body of truth affecting doctrine and conduct" (*Unity*, I-2). Paul's phrase, "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), "seems to imply a unified body of teaching" (*Unity*, I-2). However, even though the reasonable conviction that the Bible is inspired continually fuels Fuller's passion to pursue its coherent message, such a conviction does not lead him to short-circuit the painful task of *discovering* (rather than manufacturing) that coherence. He is keenly aware of the danger of forcing a difficult text to say something unlikely in order to make it fit with other texts. In other words, Fuller's two passions do not reside comfortably in one mind. Submitting honestly to exegetical data, on the one hand, and seeing unity in Scripture, on the other hand, are disciplines which are difficult to pursue at the same time for creatures who see through a glass darkly.

For example, he makes every effort to avoid using the so-called "analogy of faith" to solve exegetical difficulties and attain unity. The principle of the analogy of faith says that there are certain parts of Scripture that are clear and central and that these parts should be used to control the other less clear and less central (or even apparently contradictory) parts of Scripture. Fuller's response: "A unity of the Bible attained by interpreting one passage in it in terms of another passage is a contradiction in terms" (*Unity*, II-3). Not only does such a principle turn up only a bogus unity but it also dishonors the inspiration of Scripture by jeopardizing the principle of *sola scriptura*.

An example of how the "analogy of faith" actually works against the authority of all Scripture is found in Luther's teaching that Paul's theology is the analogy by which we should judge other parts of the Bible.

When he set up his understanding of justification by faith as the basis for suppressing such books as the Synoptic Gospels, Hebrews, and James, he then made it impossible for these books to deepen or improve his understanding of this doctrine. He also made it harder for these books to inform him on other subjects which they taught. So his use of the analogy of faith undercut the *sola scriptura* principle not only for himself but for all those who have followed his hermeneutical lead ever since" (*Unity*, II-6).

Fuller's opposition to the "analogy of faith" principle is important for the cause of missions not only because it preserves the authority of all scripture, but also because it discourages missionary teachers from deductive pedagogy that delivers ready-made systems of theology and ecclesiology. Instead, it encourages an inductive pedagogy which empowers national pastors to construct their own theology from rigorous attention to all relevant texts in their own contexts.

Dr. Fuller's emerging "Dogmatics of Redemptive History" has come into being through the relentless application of these methodological principles—the tireless quest to be troubled about the problems that really count, the pursuit of honest solutions through the severe discipline of seeing, the rigors of careful textual analysis (arcing), submission to the evidences, dependence upon the humbling work of the Holy Spirit, the passionate pursuit of coherence, and the effort to let every text have its full and normal say.

The implications of these principles for the remaining missionary task are tremendous. Fuller's forthcoming treatise, which richly illustrates the fruit of these principles, will therefore, by its methodological foundation alone, inspire and guide a new generation of missionaries in the task of planting churches which can be mighty in the Scriptures as they learn to discover "the whole counsel of God" for themselves.

II. THE FRUIT OF DANIEL FULLER'S METHOD IS A CATALYST FOR THE CAUSE OF FRONTIER MISSIONS.

If God has indeed, as Jesus said, appointed the times and seasons of the end of the age by his own authority (Acts 1:7), then why has he not used this authority to bring history to a close sooner? Why has he permitted so many people to die in unbelief? Why this long delay in the appointed consummation? Why such a long overlap between this age and the age to come?

One of the most stunning revelations of God's age-long strategy is found in Romans 11:30-31:

Just as you [Gentiles] were once disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their [the Jews'] disobedience, so they [the Jews] have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you [Gentiles] they also may receive mercy.

God is orchestrating a long and circuitous redemptive history in order to cause mercy to be experienced by Jews and Gentiles in a way which they would not have experienced if they had

not been the victims of deadly disobedience. God has consigned all to disobedience so that he might have mercy upon all (Romans 11:32).

Dr. Fuller argues that "the one thing, then, that God is doing throughout all redemptive history is to show forth his mercy in such a way that the greatest number of people might come to delight in him with all their heart and mind throughout eternity " (*Unity*, XX-10). He adds,

In looking back over redemptive history, it should be plain that the earth will render proper worship to God not only to the extent that it is filled with those who worship him but also to the extent of the fervency with which its inhabitants worship him. If it had not been important for God to order holy history so that later generations will worship him the more fervently, it is conceivable that there would have been no need to have a redemptive history which consists in an extended overlap between this age and the age to come. However, we know that God's own fervent love for his glory cannot settle for anything less in the world which he has created. Jesus said he would spew out of his mouth those who had mere lukewarm love for him (Revelation 3:16). Therefore God ordained a redemptive history whose sequence fully displays his glory so that all men at the end of the sequence will have all the historical antecedents necessary to have fervent love for God (*Unity*, XX-9).

The unity of Scripture and the coherence of all redemptive history from creation to consummation is found in this purpose of God to manifest his glory in a redeemed people who worship him for all eternity with white-hot affection. "All the events and interpretation of redemptive history which the Bible records are a unity in that they conjoin to bring about this goal" (*Unity*, XX-10).

It is thrilling to discover that William Carey was sustained by this very vision of God's purpose. In 1797 Carey was talking with a Brahman and cited Acts 14:16 and 17:30. He said, "God formerly suffered all nations to walk in their own ways, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." The Brahman responded, "Indeed, I think God ought to repent for not sending the gospel sooner to us."

But Carey was not at a loss for words because he had grasped the stunning purpose of God described in Romans 11. He said,

Suppose a kingdom had been long overrun by the enemies of its true king, and he, though possessed of sufficient power to conquer them, should yet suffer them to prevail, and establish themselves as much as they could desire, would not the valour and wisdom of that king be far more conspicuous in exterminating them, than it would have been if he had opposed them at first, and prevented their entering the country? Thus by the diffusion of gospel light, *the wisdom, power and grace of God will be more conspicuous* in overcoming such deep rooted idolatries, and in destroying all that darkness and vice which have so universally prevailed in this country, than they would have been if all had not been suffered to walk in their own ways for so many ages past.⁶

Carey believed that God's great overarching goal in history is to make his wisdom, power, and grace as "conspicuous" as possible. If he must consign nations to disobedience for a season to accomplish his purpose, he will. This is the unifying goal of all the strange events of history.

Fuller's wide-ranging treatise displays the Biblical foundations and implications of this unifying goal of God in history. It entails an enthralling vision of God and a revolutionary picture of his relationship to the redeemed. And for those who have ears to hear, the bugle call to frontier missions is unmistakable.

A Vision of God

From all eternity God has been infinitely happy in the fellowship of the Trinity. He has from all eternity begotten his Son by having "a most perfect idea of himself, as it were an exact image of and representation of himself ever before him and in actual view." Fuller follows Jonathan Edwards, who reasoned that since the Son "is the brightness of [God's] glory, the very image of the Father, the express and perfect image of his Person... therefore the Father's infinite happiness is in Him, and the way that the Father enjoys the glory of the deity is in enjoying Him" (*Unity*, VII-6).

God does not dwell in frustrated solitude, for he knows his own perfections fully and enjoys them fully in the person of his Son. Thus the Father and the Son have been infinitely happy for all eternity. And just here the Holy Spirit comes into view. Again quoting Edwards, Fuller explains:

An infinitely holy and sacred energy arises between the Father and Son in mutually loving and delighting in each other.... This is the eternal and most Perfect and essential act of the divine nature, wherein the Godhead acts to an infinite degree and in the most perfect manner possible. The deity becomes all act, the divine essence itself flows out and is as it were breathed forth in love and joy. So that the Godhead therein stands forth in yet another manner of subsistence, and there proceeds the third Person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit (*Unity*, VII-10).

God the Holy Spirit is the very joy and love of the Father for the Son and of the Son for the Father. No greater "society" can be conceived than the infinite, eternal, and unchanging divine Father and Son delighting omnipotently in each other in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. These three are one God, and he is utterly self-sufficient in the joy of his triune being.

This is important because only a self-sufficient God has the freedom to act in mercy toward his creatures. If there were some deficiency in God, then he would act out of the need to use us to shore up his weaknesses. We could never be sure that he is really for us if he were not totally self-sufficient.

Thus it becomes clear that in creating us, God was motivated by a love "which does not seek its own" (1 Corinthians 13:4). In every way God has worked in order that men might know the joy which God himself knows. As God's creatures we are anything but pawns on his chessboard. He has not created us as a means to his ends, but only that he might know the joy of being a means to our ends. As we share the fellowship that we

have with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3) with those around us, God's purpose in creation, which was to externalize his own glory, becomes fully realized (*Unity*, VII-11).

The sovereign freedom and the self-sufficiency of God are the very foundation of his plan of redemptive history: to display the glory of his freedom by showing mercy to sinners and creating a people for himself from every tongue and tribe and nation to share his triune joy for all eternity.

The Significance of the Vision

The stunning implication of this vision of God is that he does not need us to work for his satisfaction, but makes himself the servant of our need and the source of our satisfaction. Dr. Fuller delivers a resounding warning against the situation "where we reverse roles with God and think of ourselves as the workmen who are rendering great service to God" (*Unity*, XI-2g). The astonishing truth of the gospel is Isaiah 64:4:

From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides thee,
who works for those who wait for him.

The missionary significance of this vision of God is manifold. He is utterly unique among all the gods of the nations. "No eye has seen a God besides thee, who works for those who wait for him!" There are other gods and other lords among the nations. But none is a God who is so free and self-sufficient that he makes himself the servant of his people.

Christian missionaries have a unique message of good news because our God is utterly unique. He glorifies his own fullness by refusing to be served by human hands as though he needed anything (Acts 17:25). He sent his Son into the world "*not to be served* but to serve" (Mark 10:45). This is a missionary vision of God because it is the heart of what makes Christianity unique among all the religions of the nations.

It is a missionary vision of God also because the demand of God that flows from it is a demand for all the nations to be *glad in the Lord*. "The Lord reigns; let the earth *rejoice*; let the many coastlands *be glad!*" (Psalm 97:1). "Let the peoples praise thee, O God; let all the peoples praise thee! Let the nations *be glad and sing for joy!*" (Psalm 67:3-4). The demand of God is the joy of the nations. It is not that the nations should work for him, but that they should stop working and let him work for them.

Because man is so sunk in sin, and especially in the Pharisaism of thinking that it is up to him to render service to God and be his workman, men think of God as one who waits to bless those who work hard enough for him. In all the religions of the world, men are like the Pharisee in the temple, boasting before God of all the ways in which they have rendered service to him (Luke 18:9-14)(*Unity*, XI-2h).

The obedience which the gospel demands is not "works," by which we earn wages of blessing from our divine employer. It is the obedience of *faith*. "Our task is like that of a lawyer before a

jury box—we must persuade people (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:11) to the obedience of faith. Whether we are speaking to Christians or non-Christians, our objective is the same: 'to bring about the obedience of faith'" (*Unity*, XI-11).

The ethical demands that missionaries make on new converts do not constitute a job description. God is not an employer in need of employees. Fuller prefers the Biblical analogy of doctor and patient. God is a doctor in search of patients who will let him glorify his skill in saving them from the disease of sin.

One of the most helpful analogies for describing how we are to relate to God is to remember that Jesus regarded himself as a physician in Mark 2:17 and parallels. We are "sons of hell" (Matthew 23:15). And when we commence the Christian life, we enter, as it were, God's sanatorium where for our entire lifetime we will receive treatment to overcome this terrible malady. Because we trust the Doctor in charge of the sanatorium, and believe that He knows how to transform us from sons of hell into the likeness of Jesus Christ, we therefore follow the health regimen that is prescribed for us in the Bible, and the particular instructions that are given to each of us by the Holy Spirit to do what is God's will for our lives (*Unity*, XI-2h).

The liberating conclusion we discover is that the message we take to the frontiers calls people everywhere to seek their own best interest. The nature of our self-sufficient God demands it. He glorifies himself among the nations with the command, "Delight yourself in the Lord!" His first and great requirement of all men everywhere is that they repent from seeking their joy in other things and begin to seek it only in him. A God who cannot be served is a God who can only be enjoyed.

The most exhilarating thought in the world is that God's inexorable purpose to display his glory in redemptive history is virtually the same as his purpose to give his people infinite delight. The glory of a fountain is seen in how many people its water can satisfy and how deeply they are satisfied. Therefore, God is committed to the holy joy of his people with the same zeal that moves him to seek his own glory in all that he does. His honor is at stake in the happiness of those who hope in him (Psalm 143:8,9,11; 147:11).

Daniel Fuller's vision is a missionary vision not only because its God is unique among the religions of the world and not only because its gospel is a thrill to commend among the nations, but also because its sustaining and motivating power for the life of missionaries themselves is extraordinary. How so? Just as God delights in his own glory by pouring it out in mercy for others to enjoy, so the chief end of man is not merely "to glorify God and enjoy him forever" (as the Westminster Shorter Catechism declares). Commenting on this oft-quoted phrase from the Catechism, Fuller says,

This is not quite accurate, for it sets forth only man's penultimate, not ultimate, end. Great indeed will be our joy as we enter into the marvelous fellowship that exists between the Father and the Son. But that great joy will be greatly enhanced as we seek to bring others into the same joy of it. Wolfgang Goethe said, "A shared joy is a doubled joy." Only as we share our joy of the fellowship between the Father and the Son will that

joy become a doubled joy. Jesus himself said (Acts 20:35?) that "it is *more* blessed to give than to receive." Man's truly ultimate end, to use the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, is to be "a man for others." And the best thing which we can do for others is to get them to experience in their own hearts the love whereby the Father has loved the Son (*Unity*, VII-11).

In other words, the call to be a missionary is the call to maximum joy in this world and in the age to come. Dr. Fuller applies his doctor/patient analogy to the missionary call:

If we go as missionaries to some far-off place, we go there simply for our health. As we are enjoying the marvelous convalescence that we sense we are undergoing as we do nothing else but follow out God's health regimen, there is "a new song in our mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see it and fear and turn to the Lord" (Psalm 40:3). Obviously, such will be excellent missionaries! (*Unity*, XI-2h).

What about sacrifice? Peter once brought up that subject with Jesus. He said, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you." But Jesus would not let this apostolic missionary think of his calling in terms of sacrifice. Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:28-30).

Yes, the missionary call comes "with persecutions." But those are part of our therapy to "yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:11). If we view the medicine of missionary life as a sacrifice, we betray a wrong concept of God. We imply that he is somehow deficient and must conscript people like us to suffer in order to supply his need. No! "He is not served by human hands as though he needed anything!" (Acts 17:25).

God remains ever the benefactor in the enterprise of missions. We remain ever the beneficiaries. When he calls us to penetrate the last frontiers with the gospel, he doubles the joy we have in him by giving us the abundance we need to share with others. When he calls us to "serve," he says, "Serve in the strength *which God supplies* that in everything God may get the glory" (1 Peter 4:11). God will not surrender the glory of his self-sufficiency. He insists on remaining our servant while we serve the world. The more we pour ourselves out for the joy of others, the more God pours into us. It is always *more* blessed to give than to receive.

This has been the testimony of thousands of missionaries over the centuries. David Livingstone spoke for a countless army when said to Cambridge students in 1857,

Is that a sacrifice which brings its own blest reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter? Away with the word in such a view, and with such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger, now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver, and the soul to sink; but let this

only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall hereafter be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice.⁷

The Biblical vision of God in Daniel Fuller's "Dogmatics of Redemptive History" and the vision of that history coming to a climax full of God's glory can be the sustaining vision of the final era of frontier missions. Such a vision is strong food for the growing army of frontier recruits in our day. My prayer is that God might give to his patient, Daniel Fuller, the holy health and stamina to publish the vision. And may the Lord multiply Daniel Fuller's joy in the worldwide extension of the delight that he has found in the all-sufficient mercy of God.

"The one thing, then, that God is doing throughout all redemptive history is to show forth his mercy in such a way that the greatest number of people might come to delight in him with all their heart and mind throughout eternity" (*Unity*, XX-10). When the earth of the new creation is filled with such people from every tongue and tribe and people and nation, then the objective that God wanted to achieve in showing forth his mercy will have been achieved.

And it *will* be achieved! For thus says the Lord,

I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like me...
saying, "My counsel shall stand,
and I will accomplish all my purpose
(Isaiah 46:9-10).

NOTES

1. My references to the "final era" of frontier missions lean on the insights of Ralph Winter, who has identified three major eras in Protestant missions history. The Third and final era, according to Winter, is that period, sparked by Cameron Townsend's and Donald McGavran's pioneering efforts in the 1930's and continuing at least to the year 2000, characterized by a focus on the establishment of church movements among "hidden" or unreached peoples at a *cultural* (but not necessarily *geographic*) distance from existing church and mission outreach. Once such church movements have been established, the distinctively *missionary* task is over, yielding to the "follow-up" initiatives of national churches in evangelism, renewal, and social concern.
2. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974, p. clxxiv.
3. *Works*, vol. 1, p. 535.
4. Ralph D. Winter, "The Kingdom Strikes Back: The Ten Epochs of Redemptive History," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, eds., Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, Pasadena, William Carey Library: 1981, p. 138.
5. *Missionary Methods: Saint Paul's or Ours?*, Grand Rapids: 1962, pp. 145f. (my emphasis).
6. Cited in Tom Wells, *A Vision for Missions* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), pp. 12-13 (my emphasis).
7. William Garden Blaikie, *Personal Life of David Livingstone*, New York: 1895, pp. 243-4.