

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 38: George Whitefield: 17th c. Preacher & Revivalist

George Whitefield: Did You Know?

Little-known or remarkable facts about George Whitefield

Though little known today, George Whitefield was America's first celebrity. About 80 percent of all American colonists heard him preach at least once. Other than royalty, he was perhaps the only living person whose name would have been recognized by any colonial American.

America's Great Awakening was sparked largely by Whitefield's preaching tour of 1739–40. Though only 25 years old, the evangelist took America by storm. Whitefield's farewell sermon on Boston Common drew 23,000 people—more than Boston's entire population. It was probably the largest crowd that had ever gathered in America.

In his search for God before his conversion, Whitefield fasted to the point that he broke his health and, under doctor's orders, was confined to bed for seven weeks.

Whitefield preached at both Harvard and New Haven College (Yale). At Harvard it was reported that "The College is entirely changed. The students are full of God." Yet Harvard's leading professors later wrote a pamphlet denouncing Whitefield.

Brutal mobs sometimes attacked Whitefield and his followers, maiming people and stripping women naked. Whitefield received three letters with death threats, and once he was stoned until nearly dead.

Whitefield usually awoke at 4 A.M. before beginning to preach at 5 or 6 A.M. In one week he often preached a dozen times or more and spent 40 or 50 hours in the pulpit.

George Whitefield married a woman he barely knew. Though he and his bride had corresponded, they had probably spent less than a week together before marrying. As many as four different ministers refused to marry the couple.

John Wesley is known as founder of the Methodist movement, but Whitefield formed a Methodist society first. In fact, Whitefield pioneered most methods used in the 1700s' evangelical awakenings: preaching in fields rather than churches, publishing a magazine, and holding conferences.

Whitefield pushed himself so hard and preached with such intensity that often afterward he had "a vast discharge from the stomach, usually with a considerable quantity of blood."

Whitefield became close friends with Benjamin Franklin. Franklin once estimated that Whitefield, without any amplification, could be heard by more than 30,000 people.

George Whitefield traveled seven times to America, more than a dozen times to Scotland, and to Ireland, Bermuda, and Holland.

In his lifetime, Whitefield preached at least 18,000 times. He addressed perhaps 10,000,000 hearers.

When his 4-month-old son died, Whitefield did not stop preaching; he preached 3 times before the

funeral and was preaching as the bells rang for the service itself.

Though Whitefield has been praised as "the greatest preacher that England has ever produced," he spent little time formally preparing sermons. Whitefield's secretary said, "I believe he knew nothing about such a kind of exercise."

Whitefield was made the butt of several off-color songs and a satirical play. Yet he was honored by famous poets Charles Wesley, William Cowper, and later, John Greenleaf Whittier, who described Whitefield as "That life of pure intent / That voice of warning yet eloquent, / Of one on the errands of angels sent."

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George Whitefield: From the Editor - The Original Christian History

Kevin A. Miller

When George Whitefield preached his first sermon, at age 21, someone complained to the bishop that Whitefield (pronounced WIT-field) had driven 15 people insane.

Anglican ministers of the day were controlled, dignified, even stuffy in preaching. Whitefield, though, was intense, emotional, and dramatic. "I could hardly bear such unreserved use of tears," wrote one observer, for Whitefield was "frequently so overcome, that, for a few seconds, you would suspect he never could recover." Whitefield explained, "You blame me for weeping, but how can I help it when you will not weep for yourselves, though your immortal souls are on the verge of destruction?"

In America, Whitefield was a sensation. His impassioned preaching on the "New Birth" in 1739 helped spark what historians have called The Great Awakening. It's easy to "underestimate the effect of the Awakening on eighteenth-century society," writes Richard Bushman in *The Great Awakening, 1740–1745*. "The Awakening was more like the civil-rights demonstrations, the campus disturbances, and the urban riots of the 1960s combined."

But in colonial America, the social upheaval was caused chiefly by one young British field preacher who considered himself "less than the least of all." Whitefield traveled from New Hampshire to Georgia (where he founded America's first charity) and unified the colonies as no one had before. Thousands discovered, as one Connecticut farmer put it, "my righteousness would not save me."

An American First

In Boston, Thomas Prince, Jr., a leading supporter of the Awakening, decided to launch something never seen in the colonies: a religious magazine. *The Christian History* contained accounts of this astounding "propagation and revival of religion."

The premier issue in March 1743 reported awakening in Kilsyth, Scotland: "The bodies of some of the awakened are seized with trembling, fainting, hysterisms in some few women, and with convulsive motions in some others, arising from the apprehension and fear of the wrath of God ... "

Like its historic namesake, today's *Christian History* seeks to provide "authentick accounts" and "give the reader the most remarkable passages, historical and doctrinal, out of the most famous old writers."

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Heavenly Comet

As George Whitefield blazed across England, Scotland, and America, his dramatic preaching caused excitement bordering on panic.

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Perhaps no eighteenth-century religious figure was better known than George Whitefield. He was termed the “marvel of the age”—a preacher capable of commanding mass audiences (and offerings) across two continents, without any institutional support, through the sheer power of his personality. Whitefield wrote best-selling journals and drew audiences totaling in the millions. White and black, male and female, friends and enemies—all flocked in unprecedented numbers to hear the “Grand Itinerant.” Wherever he visited, people could do anything, it seemed, but stay away.

Yet time has not been so kind. Today few people have heard of Whitefield, or if they have, they have little sense of his significance. Whitefield founded no movement or denomination. No college or seminary bears his name. Indeed, he deliberately rejected all attempts to found a movement, preferring instead to serve alone as a self-confessed “fool for Christ.”

Who was George Whitefield? What was his significance?

Mother and Theater

We begin in the urban center of Gloucester, England, where Whitefield was born on December 16, 1714, the youngest child of Thomas and Elizabeth Whitefield. Whitefield’s father died soon after, and his mother remarried. The marriage proved disastrous and culminated in a divorce, leaving Elizabeth with seven children and ownership of the Bell Inn.

Of Whitefield’s childhood, two facts stand out: his mother’s influence and his infatuation with the English theater.

From his mother, Whitefield inherited a strong ambition to be “somebody” in the world, most likely in service to the established Anglican church. He recalled how his mother “endured fourteen weeks’ sickness after she brought me into the world but was used to say, even when I was an infant, that she expected more comfort from me than any other of her children. This, with the circumstance of my being born in an inn, has been often of service to me in exciting my endeavors to make good my mother’s expectation, and so follow the example of my dear Saviour, who was born in a manger belonging to an inn.”

From the stage, Whitefield inherited a dramatic presence that he would later take into the pulpit. As a boy he read plays insatiably and often skipped school to practice for his schoolboy performances. Later in life, though, he would repudiate theater as a false competitor of the church.

But beneath the rejection lay a born actor whose intrinsic need and special gift for dramatic self-expression never disappeared. He would apply the methods and ethos of acting to preaching with revolutionary results. More than any of his peers or predecessors, Whitefield turned his back on the academy to concentrate on perfecting what today we would call “body language.” Passion would be the key to his preaching of traditional spiritual truths.

Through the efforts of his mother, young Whitefield was granted a "servitor's" spot at Pembroke College, Oxford: He would put himself through college by waiting on the wealthier Oxford students. The experience of being a mere servant proved humiliating, but Whitefield soon fell in with a group of pious "methodists" led by the Wesley brothers, John and Charles. Soon Whitefield was lost in the rigors of methodist devotions that culminated in a highly personal and emotional "New Birth."

He determined to use the pulpit to bring others to a conversion experience. At Oxford it became clear to Whitefield he was no scholar, but equally clear he was a communicator without peer. With encouragement from the Wesleys he determined to be a missionary to the new Georgia colony.

Electrifying Delivery

In the summer of 1736, while waiting to embark for Georgia, Whitefield was ordained a deacon in the Anglican church and began preaching in and around London. Wherever he spoke, crowds materialized and hung on every word of the "boy preacher's" dramatic delivery.

Though inexperienced in homiletics, Whitefield possessed dramatic sensitivity that quickly vaulted him into a class of his own. Tears, heightened emotions, agitated bodily movement—and above all, an intensely personal encounter with the New Birth—characterized his preaching and his hearers' responses. A prodigious memory for character and dialogue enabled him to transform the pulpit into a sacred theater that represented the lives of biblical saints and sinners to his captivated listeners. Among the enthralled was great British actor David Garrick, who exclaimed: "I would give a hundred guineas if I could say 'Oh' like Mr. Whitefield."

Soon Whitefield's novel preaching and mass audiences came to the attention of the press. Whitefield possessed an instinct for publicity. He knew it mattered little whether journalistic items were written in praise or condemnation (and there was no shortage of the latter). In either case newspapers generated interest, and interest produced crowds, which produced still further journalistic comment.

To augment newspaper coverage, Whitefield published his first sermon in London in 1737: ***The Nature and Necessity of Our Regeneration or New Birth in Christ Jesus***. The sermon's theme was not new, but lying behind it was an electrifying delivery. Often Whitefield would employ his vivid imagination to bring home gospel truths.

Once, when preaching on eternity, he invited his startled listeners to imagine heaven: "Lift up your hearts frequently towards the mansions of eternal bliss, and with an eye of faith, like the great St. Stephen, see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man with his glorious retinue of departed saints sitting and solacing themselves in eternal joys, and with unspeakable comfort looking back on their past sufferings and self-denials, as so many glorious means which exalted them to such a crown. Hark! Methinks I hear them chanting their everlasting hallelujahs, and spending an eternal day in echoing forth triumphant songs of joy. And do you not long, my brethren, to join this heavenly choir?"

When Whitefield returned to London from Georgia in late 1738, he found many churches closed to him. He then experimented with outdoor, extemporaneous preaching, where no document or wooden pulpit stood between him and his audience. Whitefield did not invent extemporaneous preaching, but he did bring it to its highest art. Where others felt hesitant or at a loss with no notes, he discovered release.

Whitefield moved outside familiar church buildings and denominations and conceived of revivals as outdoor events staged to compete in the secular marketplace. Revivals could become, in effect, a product—part of a growing "Consumer Revolution." Whitefield would "market" the New Birth not primarily in the churches, but in the public square.

Attracting America

On February 2, 1738, young Whitefield departed for Georgia, intending to follow the Wesleys and become a permanent missionary to the colony. This was not to be. Soon after arrival he concluded his calling was as an itinerant preacher to urban areas throughout the Anglo-American world.

Nevertheless, Georgia would remain important to him as the site of an orphan house he founded for wayward boys. That orphan house became Whitefield's American home. Critics of Whitefield argued that the orphan house was merely a fund-raising excuse to invade the parishes of Anglican priests, but Whitefield showed genuine concern for the needy. Alongside Whitefield's evangelical zeal was a powerful charitable instinct that would leave him personally broke but widely admired, even by skeptics like Benjamin Franklin.

In ways Whitefield never could have predicted, the London campaign of 1739 proved to be a dress rehearsal for even more stunning engagements in North America. His first preaching tour of the American colonies, in 1739–40, generated such response that later scholars dubbed it a "Great Awakening."

Whitefield selected Philadelphia as his first American stop. It was a wise choice—a major port city with a thriving market economy, the most cosmopolitan city in the New World. On November 6, 1739, Whitefield read prayers and preached at Christ Church to a "numerous congregation." Soon churches could not hold the vast crowds that came to hear him, and he took his ministry out of doors, where he was always at his improvisational best. Every stop along Whitefield's trip from Philadelphia to New York and back was marked by record audiences, often exceeding the population of the towns in which he preached. From 8,000 in Philadelphia to nearly 5,000 in the village of Neshaminy, Pennsylvania, Whitefield garnered record audiences and unrivaled offerings for the Georgia orphan house.

In America, news traveled rapidly, and Whitefield was often surprised to discover how crowds "so scattered abroad, can be gathered at so short a warning." The advance work of loyal assistants like William Seward and the cooperation of the Tennent ministers in Pennsylvania served him well. Not only were the crowds unprecedented in size, they were virtually spellbound. "Even in London," Whitefield remarked, "I never observed so profound a silence."

Whitefield also spoke often on the needs of the slave community. Despite his outspoken plea to legalize slavery in Georgia, and his employment of slaves at the orphan house, he increasingly sought out audiences of slaves and wrote on their behalf. Historian Gary B. Nash dates "the advent of black Christianity" in Philadelphia to Whitefield's first preaching tour. Perhaps a thousand slaves heard Whitefield's sermons in Philadelphia, often in private supplemental meetings.

They heard from him that they had souls as surely as the white folk who had enslaved them, and that their master owed them the freedom of religious conscience. Unlike the Wesleys, however, Whitefield was unwilling to concede their right to freedom in this life, showing the tragic limits as well as the noble extent of his charitable concerns.

Some of Whitefield's greatest preaching triumphs were reserved for a whirlwind thirty-nine-day tour of New England towns. Attracted by printed itineraries in the New England press and by word of mouth, audiences grew.

In Boston, he filled the town common repeatedly. At seaport towns such as Marblehead and Salem, and in suburbs such as Charlestown and Roxbury, he generated an enthusiasm verging on panic as crowds "elbowed, shoved, and trampled over themselves to hear of 'divine things' from the famed Whitefield."

On October 17, 1740, Whitefield preached in Northampton, Massachusetts, and stayed with the famed Jonathan Edwards. Edwards attended all of Whitefield's sermons and repeatedly broke down in tears.

Edwards's wife, Sarah, an astute judge of pulpit manner, marveled: "He makes less of the doctrines than our American preachers generally do and aims more at affecting the heart. He is a born orator."

The effects, she continued, were spectacular: "It is wonderful to see what a spell he casts over an audience by proclaiming the simple truths of the Bible. I have seen upwards of a thousand people hang on his words with breathless silence, broken only by an occasional half-suppressed sob.... A prejudiced person, I know, might say that this is all theatrical artifice and display; but not so will anyone think who has seen and known him."

For his part, Whitefield was much taken with Sarah Edwards, whom he found "adorned with a meek and quiet spirit," a model for the type of wife he hoped to find.

Unfortunately, Whitefield's successes in the pulpit were not matched in his private family life. Like many methodist itinerants, Whitefield was suspicious of marriage and feared a wife would become a rival to the pulpit. When he finally married an older widow, Elizabeth James, the union never seemed to flower into a deeply intimate, sharing relationship.

Trans-Atlantic Awakening

Having conquered England and North America, all that remained for Whitefield was to complete a trans-Atlantic revival by awakening Scotland. In many ways, America and Scotland were kindred spirits in the eighteenth century. Both were Calvinist and perceived themselves on the margins of British civilization. Scotland's principal city, Edinburgh, dwarfed Philadelphia and Boston, yet remained tiny in contrast to London.

Whitefield would make fourteen trips to Scotland and grow steadily in popularity. Of all the Scottish revivals in which Whitefield participated, the most dramatic came on his second visit. Throughout the spring of 1742, Whitefield received news of great spiritual enthusiasm from the small village of Cambuslang, outside of Glasgow.

On June 6, he arrived in Cambuslang just in time to catch the revivals at their peak. He began immediately to preach that morning and evening. His evening service attracted thousands and continued until 2:00 A.M. "There were scenes of uncontrollable distress, like a field of battle.... All night in the fields, might be heard the voice of prayer and praise." Whitefield concluded, "It far outdid all that I ever saw in America."

On Saturday, Whitefield, in concert with area pastors, preached to an estimated 20,000 people in services that stretched well into the night. On Sunday, at a special Communion service in the fields, more than 1,700 communicants streamed alongside long Communion tables set up in tents. Whitefield preached again in the evening—by many accounts, the most powerful sermon of the revival. Later he recalled that wherever he walked "you might have heard persons praying to, and praising, God."

American Hero

Throughout his life Whitefield continued to itinerate widely, ignoring friends and doctors who urged him to protect his ailing body from the rigors of transatlantic travel. With every trip he became more popular. Indeed, much of the early controversy that surrounded Whitefield's revivals disappeared, and former foes like Harvard and Yale Colleges or the Georgia legislature warmed to a mellowed Whitefield. Before his whirlwind tours of the colonies were complete, virtually every man, woman, and child had heard the "Grand Itinerant" at least once.

So pervasive was Whitefield's impact in America that he can justly be styled America's first cultural hero. Before Whitefield, there was no unifying intercolonial person or event. Indeed, before Whitefield, it is

doubtful any name other than royalty was known equally from Boston to Charleston. But by 1750 virtually every American loved and admired Whitefield and saw him as their champion.

As colonial tensions with the Mother Country rose, Whitefield clearly sided with the Americans. When Benjamin Franklin appeared before Parliament, Whitefield attended every session and gave his old friend public support. Franklin would go on to win fame as America's "representative man." Time did not so honor Whitefield.

Final Cry of Thunder

Ignoring the advice of doctors, he continued his 1770 preaching tour in the colonies as if he were still a young itinerant. Late summer found him in New England, insisting to friends that "I would rather wear out than rust out." He ignored the danger signs, in particular asthmatic "colds" that brought "great difficulty" in breathing. Instead of resting, he rode on, preaching more rather than less, depending on the moment of preaching to bring out a "good pulpit sweat" that would grant him one more day's reprieve. The pace continued even after he was "taken in the night with a violent lax, attended with retching and shivering."

On Saturday morning, September 29, Whitefield concluded another successful sermon at Portsmouth and immediately set out for the next stop at Newburyport. Eyewitnesses described him as nearly collapsing, being helped onto his horse, and then plodding on despite the entreaties of friends and admirers.

At a midday stop in Exeter, Whitefield was enjoined to preach, and he complied. One friend, on observing the "oppressive heavings of his bosom," counseled, "Sir, you are more fit to go to bed than to preach." Whitefield ignored the warning and answered with a prayer: "Lord, if I have not yet finished my course, let me go and speak for Thee once more in the fields, seal thy truth, and come home and die!"

Whitefield's prayer was answered. His last discourse took place mid-afternoon in the fields, atop a hogshead [large barrel]. His text was "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in faith," and his subject was the New Birth.

A listener recounted for the press, "He rose up sluggishly and wearily, as if worn down and exhausted by his stupendous labours. His face seemed bloated, his voice was hoarse, his enunciation heavy. Sentence after sentence was thrown off in rough, disjointed portions, without much regard to point or beauty. [But then] his mind kindled, and his lion-like voice roared to the extremities of his audience.

"He was speaking of the inefficiency of works to merit salvation, and suddenly cried out in a tone of thunder, 'Works! works! A man gets to heaven by works! I would as soon think of climbing to the moon on a rope of sand.'" The exhortation would be Whitefield's final public words. The following morning he died.

In Whitefield's Wake

In seeking to understand the reasons for Whitefield's success, several factors come to mind.

First, Whitefield's revivals were a new religious form. They were not really a church, nor were they connected to local communities. Whitefield's audiences defied the term congregation. They changed with every meeting and were routinely enjoined to support their local parishes. In effect, they were the first "parachurch"—a religious association, outside of denominational lines, premised on revival. And central to that revival was the highly personal experience of the New Birth.

Whitefield's itinerant ministry taught him—and "evangelicals" in his wake—that rival churches with visions of national hegemony could be a thing of the past. They were old history—the history of a traditional,

aristocratic, and hierarchical culture. A new religious history, fit for a new consumer age, would have to be voluntary, and this meant popular and entertaining. Whitefield's revivals were just that. In them, churches were not supplanted so much as sidestepped to create larger, trans-local associations.

Whitefield's mode of revivalism—theatrical, passion-based, non-denominational, international, experience-centered, and self-consciously promoted through media—outlived him. Whether or not they knew it, generations of evangelical revivalists, chaplains, youth and student parachurch leaders, and religious philanthropists followed a trail first blazed by George Whitefield.

Unlike many charismatic performers who followed in his footsteps, Whitefield remained undistracted by the allure of sex or wealth. Nor was he obsessed with fame and the need for a new denomination to bear his name. His character matched that of the biblical saints he portrayed, and his vast charitable efforts left him perennially near bankruptcy.

If Whitefield was a promoter, he was also a caring minister who directed his work first at the soul and second at charity, and never one without the other. In this sense, Whitefield was his own finest convert to the New Birth he proclaimed.

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I Run For My Horse With All My Might

A farmer races to the sensation.

Nathan Cole, a farmer and carpenter of Kensington Parish (now Berlin, Connecticut), lived about 12 miles from Middletown, where George Whitefield was to preach on October 23, 1740.

I was in my field at work; I dropped my tool that I had in my hand and ran home to my wife, telling her to make ready quickly to go and hear Mr. Whitfield [sic] preach at Middletown, then run to my pasture for my horse with all my might, fearing that I should be too late....

As I came nearer the road, I heard a noise something like a low rumbling thunder and presently found it was the noise of horses' feet coming down the road.... Every horse seemed to go with all his might to carry his rider to hear news from heaven for the saving of souls. It made me tremble....

I turned and looked towards the Great River [Connecticut River] and saw the ferry boats running swift backward and forward bringing over loads of people....

The land and banks over the river looked black with people and horses. All along the 12 miles I saw no man at work in his field, but all seemed to be gone.

When I saw Mr. Whitfield come upon the scaffold, he looked almost angelical—a young, slim, slender youth before some thousands of people with a bold, undaunted countenance. And my hearing how God was with him everywhere as he came along, it solemnized my mind and put me into a trembling fear before he began to preach. For he looked as if he was clothed with authority from the Great God, and a sweet solemn solemnity sat upon his brow, and my hearing him preach gave me a heart wound. By God's blessing my old foundation was broken up, and I saw that my righteousness would not save me.

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Deep Mourning

Cornelius Winter was at Whitefield's orphan house when he learned of the evangelist's death. His report:

You have no conception of the effect of Mr. Whitefield's death upon the inhabitants of the province of Georgia. All the black cloth in the stores was bought up; the pulpit and desks of the church, the branches, the organ loft, the pews of the governor and council, were covered with black. The governor and council, in deep mourning, convened at the state-house, and went in procession to church, and were received by the organ playing a funeral dirge.

In his funeral sermon for Whitefield, John Wesley asked, "Have we read or heard of any person since the apostles, who ... called so many thousands, so many myriads of sinners to repentance?"

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Come, Poor, Lost, Undone Sinner

A persuasive appeal from a powerful evangelist.

George Whitefield

Whitefield preached this sermon, titled "The Kingdom of God," on September 13, 1741, in Glasgow, Scotland. His text was Romans 14:17, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Here are excerpts.

As God shall enable me, first, I shall endeavor to explain what you are to understand by "the kingdom of God"; secondly, I shall endeavor to show that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink"; and thirdly, I shall show you what "the kingdom of God" positively is, namely, "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

We are to take the kingdom of God in the text as signifying that inward work of grace, that kingdom which the Lord Jesus Christ sets up in the hearts of all that are truly brought home to God; so that when the apostle tells us, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink," it is the same as though he had said, "My dear friends, do not quarrel about outward things; for the kingdom of God, or true and undefiled religion, heart and soul religion, is not meat and drink."

Why It Isn't "Meat and Drink"

By "meat and drink," if we compare the text with the context, we are to understand no more than this, that the kingdom of God, or true religion, doth not consist in abstaining from a particular meat or drink. But I shall take the words in a more comprehensive sense, and shall endeavor to show you that the kingdom of God, or true and undefiled religion, doth not consist in any, no, not in all outward things, put them altogether.

Denominations. The kingdom of God, or true and undefiled religion, doth not consist in being of this or that particular sect or communion. Perhaps, my dear friends, were many of you asked what reason you can give for the hope that is in you, what title you have to call yourself Christians—perhaps you could say no more for yourselves than this, namely, that you belong to such a church, and worship God in the same way in which your fathers and mothers worshiped God before you.

There are certainly Christians among all sects and communions that have learned the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. I do not mean that there are Christians among Arians, Socinians, or those that deny the divinity of Jesus Christ—I am sure the devil is priest of such congregations as these—but I mean there are Christians among other sects that may differ from us in the outward worship of God. Therefore, my dear friends, learn to be more catholic, more unconfined in your notions; for if you place the kingdom of God merely in a sect, you place it in that in which it doth not consist.

Baptism. Again, as the kingdom of God doth not consist in being of this or that sect, so neither doth it consist in being baptized when you were young. Baptism is certainly an ordinance of the Lord Jesus Christ—it ought certainly to be administered; but then, my dear friends, take care that you do not make a Christ of your baptism, for there have been many baptized with water, as you were, who were never savingly baptized with the Holy Ghost.

Orthodox doctrine. But further: as the kingdom of God and true religion doth not consist in being baptized, neither doth it consist in being orthodox in our notions, or being able to talk fluently of the Gospel. You may have orthodox heads, and yet you may have the devil in your hearts; you may have clear heads, you may be able to speak as it were, with the tongues of men and angels, the doctrines of the Gospel, but yet, at the same time, you may never have felt them upon your own souls.

And if you have never felt the power of them upon your hearts, your talk of Christ and free justification, and having rational convictions of these truths, will but increase your condemnation, and you will only go to hell with so much more solemnity. Take care, therefore, of resting in a form of knowledge—it is dangerous; if you do, you place the kingdom of God in meat and drink.

Morality. Again, some of you, perhaps, may think I have not reached you yet; therefore I go further, to show you that the kingdom of God doth not consist in a dry, lifeless morality. I do not cry down morality, but so far as this, that you do not rest in your morality, that you do not think you are Christians because you are not vicious—because you now and then do some good action.

Why, self-love will carry a man to perform all moral actions. A man, perhaps, will not get drunk for fear of making his head ache; a man may be honest because it would spoil his reputation to steal. And so a man who has not the love of God in his heart may do moral actions. but if you depend on morality, if you make a Christ of it, and go about it to establish a righteousness of your own, and think your morality will recommend you to God, my dear friends, you are building upon a rotten foundation, you will find yourselves mistaken, and that the kingdom of God is not in your hearts.

Piety. A great many of you may think that you go to church, and receive the sacrament once or twice a year (though I do think that is too seldom, by a great deal, to have it administered), you may read your Bibles, you may have family worship, you may say your prayers in your closets, and yet at the same time, my dear friends, you know nothing of the Lord Jesus Christ in your hearts. You may have a token, and receive the sacrament, and perhaps at the same time be eating and drinking your own damnation.

I speak from mine own experience. I know how much I was deceived with a form of godliness. I made conscience of fasting twice a week; I made conscience of praying nine times a day and received the sacrament every Sabbath day, and yet knew nothing of inward religion in my heart, till God was pleased to dart a ray of light into my soul, and show me I must be a new creature, or be damned for evermore. Being, therefore, so long deceived myself, I speak with more sympathy to you who are resting on a round of duties and model of performance.

Others, again, perhaps may be saying, "Well, if a man may go thus far and not be a Christian, as I am sure he may, and a great deal further, you will be apt to cry out, 'Who, then, can be saved?' And O that I could hear you asking this question in earnest!"

What the Kingdom of God Is

I have told you what it [the kingdom of God] is not; I shall now proceed to show you what it is. It is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

First, the kingdom of God is "righteousness." By righteousness we are here to understand the complete, perfect, and all-sufficient righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, as including both his active and his passive obedience. My dear friends, we have no righteousness of our own; our best righteousness, take them altogether, are but so many filthy rags; we can only be accepted for the sake of the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. This righteousness must be imputed and made over to us, and applied to our hearts; and till we get this righteousness brought home to our souls, we are in a state of death and damnation—the wrath of God abideth on us.

You call yourselves Christians, and would count me uncharitable to call it in question; but I exhort you to let conscience speak out, do not bribe it any longer. Did you ever see yourselves as damned sinners? Did conviction ever fasten upon your hearts? And after you had been made to see your want of Christ, and made to hunger and thirst after righteousness, did you lay hold on Christ by faith? Did you ever close with Christ? Was Christ's righteousness ever put upon your naked souls? Was ever a feeling application of His righteousness made to your hearts? Was it, or was it not? If not, you are in a damnable state—you are out of Christ; for the apostle says here, "The kingdom of God is righteousness"; that is, righteousness of Christ applied and brought home to the heart.

It follows, "peace." "The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace." By peace I do not understand that false peace, or rather carnal security, into which so many are fallen. It is a peace of God's making, it is a peace of God's giving, it is a peace that the world can not give, it is a peace that can be felt, it is a peace that passeth human understanding—it is a peace that results from a sense of having Christ's righteousness brought home to the soul.

Did God ever bring a comfortable promise with power to your soul? And after you have been praying, and fearing that you would be damned, did you ever feel peace flow in like a river upon your soul? So that you could say, "Now I know that God is my friend, now I know that Jesus is my Savior, now I can call Him 'My Lord, and my God,' now I know that Christ hath not only died for others, but I know that Jesus hath died for me in particular." O my dear friends, it is impossible to tell you the comfort of this peace.

But there is something more—there is "joy in the Holy Ghost." I have often thought that if the apostle Paul were to come and preach now, he would be reckoned one of the greatest enthusiasts on earth. He talked of the Holy Ghost, of feeling the Holy Ghost; and so we must all feel it, all experience it, all receive it, or we can never see a holy God with comfort.

There are a great many, I believe, who think religion is a poor melancholy thing, and they are afraid to be Christians. But, my dear friends, there is no true joy till you can joy in God and Christ. I know wicked men and men of pleasure will have a little laughter; but what is it, but like the crackling of a few thorns under a pot—it makes a blaze and soon goes out.

I know what it is to take pleasure in sin; but I always found the smart that followed was ten thousand times more hurtful than any gratification I could receive. But they who joy in God have a joy that strangers intermeddle not with—it is a joy that no man can take from them; it amounts to a full assurance of faith that the soul is reconciled to God through Christ, that Jesus dwells in the heart; and when the soul reflects on itself, it magnifies the Lord, and rejoices in God its Savior. Thus we are told that "Zaccheus received Christ joyfully," [and] that "the eunuch went on his way rejoicing."

But, my friends, how few are there here who have been made partakers of this kingdom! Perhaps the kingdom of the devil, instead of the kingdom of God, is in your hearts. Here are many thousands of souls, that must shortly appear with me, a poor creature, in the general assembly of all mankind before God in judgment. God Almighty knows whether some of you may not drop down dead before you go out of the churchyard; and yet, perhaps most are strangers to the Lord Jesus Christ in their hearts.

Perhaps curiosity has brought you out to hear a poor babbler preach. But, my friends, I came to promote God's glory; and if the Lord should make use of such a worthless worm, such a wretched creature as I am, to do your precious souls good, nothing would rejoice me more than to hear that God makes the foolishness of preaching a means of making many believe.

I was long myself deceived with a form of godliness, and I know what it is to be a factor for the devil, to be led captive by the devil at his will, to have the kingdom of the devil in my heart; and I hope I can say, through free grace, I know what it is to have the kingdom of God erected in me. It is God's goodness that such a poor wretch as I am converted; though sometimes when I am speaking of God's goodness I

am afraid he will strike me down dead.

Let me draw out my soul and heart to you, my dear friends, my dear guilty friends, poor bleeding souls, who must shortly take your last farewell, and fly into endless eternity. Methinks the very sight is awful (I could almost weep over you, as our Lord did over Jerusalem), to think in how short a time every soul of you must die—some of you to go to heaven, and others to go to the devil for evermore.

O, my dear friends, these are matters of eternal moment. I did not come to tickle your ears; if I had a mind to do so, I would play the orator; no, but I came, if God should be pleased, to touch your hearts. What shall I say to you? Open the door of your heart, that the King of glory, the blessed Jesus, may come in and erect his kingdom in your soul. Make room for Christ; the Lord Jesus desires to sup with you tonight; Christ is willing to come into any of your hearts that will be pleased to open and receive him.

My dear friends, I would preach with all my heart till midnight, to do you good, till I could preach no more. Oh, that this body might hold out to speak more for my dear Redeemer! Had I a thousand lives, had I a thousand tongues, they should be employed in inviting sinners to come to Jesus Christ! Come, then, let me prevail with some of you to come along with me. Come, poor, lost, undone sinner, come just as you are to Christ, and say, "If I be damned, I will perish at the feet of Jesus Christ, where never one perished yet." He will receive you with open arms; the dear Redeemer is willing to receive you all.

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George Whitefield: A Gallery of Leaders of the Awakening Army

Whitefield's co-workers in the great eighteenth-century revival.

Mark Galli is Associate Editor of Christian History.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) Passionate theologian

At age 14, Jonathan Edwards, already a student at Yale University, read philosopher John Locke with more delight "than the most greedy miser finds when gathering up handfuls of silver and gold, from some newly discovered treasure."

He also treasured spiritual qualities. At age 17, after a period of distress, he said holiness was revealed to him as a ravishing, divine beauty. His heart panted "to lie low before God, as in the dust; that I might be nothing, and that God might be all, that I might become as a little child."

This rare blend of spiritual passion and searching intellect, in fact, characterized Edwards throughout his Connecticut childhood, his marriage (to Sarah Pierpont in 1727), and his ministry.

By 1729, he had become sole preacher of a Northampton, Massachusetts, parish. Five years later his preaching on justification by faith sparked an awakening.

It was not due to theatrics. One observer wrote, "He scarcely gestured or even moved; and he made no attempt by the elegance of his style, or the beauty of his pictures, to gratify the taste, and fascinate the imagination." Instead, he convinced "with overwhelming weight of argument, and with such intenseness of feeling."

In December 1734, there were six sudden conversions. By spring, there were about thirty a week. The revival spread throughout Connecticut. Wrote Edwards in *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1737), "It was no longer the tavern, but the minister's house that was thronged."

Edwards was sought out by Whitefield during Whitefield's 1740 pass through New England. Edwards invited Whitefield to preach and reported, "The congregation was extraordinarily melted ... almost the whole assembly being in tears for a great part of the time." "The whole assembly" included Edwards himself.

During the 1740s, Edwards preached his most well-known sermon (*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*) and defended the emotional nature of the Great Awakening, especially in *A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections* (1746), a masterpiece of psychological and spiritual discernment.

Later, Edwards reversed the tradition in his parish and insisted only converted persons could receive Communion, so his church ousted him. He became missionary pastor to native Americans in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in 1751, and wrote, among other theological treatises, *Freedom of the Will* (1754), a brilliant defense of divine sovereignty. Such were the fruits of his lifelong habit of rising at 4:00 and studying 13 hours a day.

The College of New Jersey (later Princeton) called him as president in 1758. To its great loss and that of the American church, Edwards died of the new smallpox vaccination soon after his arrival. He was 55. Some consider him to be the finest theologian America has produced.

**Selina, Countess of Huntingdon
(1707–1791)
Evangelical “archbishop”**

When her husband died, Lady Huntingdon, age 39, sought advice from leading preacher Howell Harris: “She consulted me about which was it best, to live retired and give up all, or fill her place, and I said the latter I thought was right.” Thus began four decades of strongwilled and generous leadership in the evangelical movement.

Born into English aristocracy, Selina married Theophilus Hastings, ninth earl of Huntingdon, in 1728. Though a devout Anglican, after a period of intense spiritual struggle she converted to the methodist cause in 1739. Her aristocratic friends were dismayed and asked Lord Huntingdon to interfere. He arranged for a bishop to talk with her, but to no avail.

Lady Huntingdon soon became friends with the brothers Wesley (she was a member of their first methodist society) and then with Whitefield. She became, in fact, Whitefield’s closest female friend, closer even than his wife.

After her husband’s death, Lady Huntingdon and some of her titled friends met daily to pray and study the Bible. She invited Howell Harris and George Whitefield to preach at these meetings.

Lady Huntingdon founded a religious society, called a “connexion,” which grew. She built her first regular chapel, in Brighton, by selling her jewels. She also built chapels in Bath, Bristol, and London to attract the upper classes.

She purchased vacant benefices (endowed church offices) and appointed evangelical clergy to them. She also exercised her right to appoint personal chaplains, which afforded legal protection for many “methodist” clergy, including Whitefield, who were harassed by British authorities.

In 1768, she established a seminary in Trevecca, Wales. Over her lifetime, when many parishes paid clergy 40 pounds a year, she donated over 100,000 pounds to the methodist cause. Never afraid of controversy, she engaged in heated discussions with John Wesley, Count Zinzendorf (the founder of the Moravians), and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Lady Huntingdon’s impact on the evangelical movement was undeniable. When Whitefield saw her with many of her chaplains, he wrote, “She looks like a good archbishop with his chaplains around him.” Because of official persecution, she and many of her chaplains were eventually forced to leave the Anglican communion and become dissenting ministers. She died in June 1791, but her connexion is still active today.

**John Cennick
(1718–1755)
Sensational lay preacher**

Though trained as a land surveyor and writing instructor, John Cennick once was asked to fill in for an absent preacher. He wrote, “I was naturally fearful of speaking before such a company, having never done such a thing as this.”

But when he preached, "tears fell from many eyes." When he stood to preach again the next Sunday, 4,000 people gathered. Though never ordained, he soon became one of the top preachers of his day.

Cennick was born in Wales and converted at age 19. After he read a copy of Whitefield's journal, he wrote, "My heart cleaved to him." The next time Whitefield was in London, Cennick walked all night to get there: "I met my dear brother and fell on his neck and kissed him. Our communion was sweet, and I stayed with him several days."

Whitefield soon asked Cennick to be headmaster of a school for coal-mining families. In 1744, Whitefield gave him charge of his Moorfields congregation and the Calvinist branch of methodism. The responsibilities proved too much, though, and coincided with a shift in theology. By late 1745, Cennick joined the Moravians and became a missionary to Ireland.

Before long, as one historian put it, "All walls and windows [of his meeting house] were covered with people, and Cennick had to go in at the window, creeping over the heads of the people to reach his pulpit."

His days were consumed with traveling, and he endured beatings and arrests. Though ill much of the time, he preached up to 20 times a week. All told, he established in northern Ireland 40 societies and 10 Moravian churches. Finally, at age 36, his body could take no more.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788) Lost and found friend

One September morning in 1733, Charles Wesley violated Oxford conventions: He invited a poor servitor, George Whitefield, to breakfast. Servitors worked their way through college by running errands for students of higher social standing. Servitors were excluded from many college functions, even Communion.

Still, Charles was impressed with the "modest, pensive youth" who had keen spiritual interest. He invited Whitefield to the Holy Club, and thus began a lifelong, though interrupted, friendship.

On Pentecost 1738, Wesley finally found "peace with God, and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ." Thereafter, he preached in homes and prisons. Whitefield urged Charles to join him in preaching outdoors. Wesley refused because of "the fear of man"—how it would look to his cultured friends. Then Whitefield simply informed him that the following Sunday, Charles would be taking his place at Moorfields.

Wrote Charles, "My inward conflict continued." But "I prayed and went forth in the name of Jesus Christ. I found near ten thousand helpless sinners waiting for the Word.... The Lord was with me, even me, his meanest messenger."

Charles's passion, which caused him often to pray with strong cryings and tears, sometimes went to extremes. He consulted "the oracle," opening the Bible at random for guidance.

Once, Charles was dining with John Cennick, Whitefield's close associate, and began "to dispute about election." Cennick wrote, "He fell into a violent passion and affrighted all at the table.... He called Calvin the firstborn son of the Devil, and set all his people into a bitter hatred of me."

As a result, Charles remained aloof from Whitefield for six or seven years. After 1749, he and Whitefield reconciled, addressing each other as "My old dear Friend."

Charles is best known for his 5,500 hymns (some scholars say over 8,000), including "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing," and "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling."

Gilbert Tennent
(1703–1764)
American awakener

Upon hearing Gilbert Tennent preach, Whitefield wrote, "I never before heard such a searching sermon. ... He has learned ... to dissect the heart of a natural man. Hypocrites must either soon be converted or enraged at his preaching." They were both.

Born in Ireland, Tennent graduated from Yale in 1725 and assumed a Presbyterian pastorate in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Impressed with the piety and fervor of Dutch Reformed minister Theodorus Frelinghuysen, Tennent became passionate leader of a minority in the Presbyterian church. When George Whitefield arrived in the Middle Colonies in 1739, he sought out Tennent. After Whitefield started an awakening in Boston, he insisted Tennent continue his work there.

The effect of Tennent's preaching was perhaps as great as Whitefield's—and just as controversial. One minister wrote, "[Then] came one Tennent, a minister impudent and saucy; and told them all they were **damned, damned, damned!** This charmed them; and in the dreadfulest winter I ever saw, people wallowed in the snow night and day for the benefit of his beastly braying."

Soon Tennent preached *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry*, vividly portraying most ministers as plastered hypocrites. Its wide circulation contributed to a 1741 schism in the Presbyterian church, which lasted seventeen years.

In 1743 Tennent became pastor of Philadelphia's Second Presbyterian Church. While continuing to support the Awakening, he eventually led in the reconciliation of his denomination, admitting he had contributed to the schism.

Married three times (his first two wives died), he fathered three children. He was originally buried beneath the middle aisle of his Philadelphia church.

Howell Harris
(1714–1773)
Dread-filled preacher

One frequent listener said of him, "He used to speak of hell as though he had been there himself." And he himself said God filled his mouth "with terrors and threatenings. I was given a commission to rend and break sinners in the most dreadful manner."

Such was the preaching of Howell Harris, the founder of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism.

As a young man in a Welsh working-class family, Harris was indifferent to religion. But at 21, he heard a vicar say, "If you are not fit to come to the Lord's table, you are not fit to live, and you are not fit to die!" Harris wrote, "All my natural faculties were confounded in the shock." After a period of inner turmoil, "I lost my burden; I went home leaping for joy!"

Immediately he began sharing his experience, and in a few weeks his house overflowed with hearers. In

the next few years, he founded 30 methodist societies—groups meeting to pray, study the Bible, and plan evangelism. Harris established his earliest societies, in fact, two years before John and Charles Wesley were converted.

Whitefield called Harris “a burning and shining light.” When they finally met, they agreed to preach in each other’s societies.

Harris’s furious preaching sometimes lasted four hours. His denunciations of clergy (“Many who wear the cloth ... what good they do, I know not”) undermined his efforts to become ordained. Often his life was in peril: once a mob rushed him, swearing and throwing rocks, and once he was shot at.

Perhaps due to such pressures, Harris became paranoid. He also began associating with Mrs. Sidney Griffith, who left her drunken husband to move into Harris’s home (with Harris’s wife’s consent).

After Griffith died, Harris regained his mental poise. He preached two or three times a day and in 1752 began a kind of Protestant monastery that soon attracted about 150 people.

Toward the end of his life, he apologized to evangelical leaders for his aberrant behavior, and he helped establish Lady Huntingdon’s seminary in lower Trevecca. The death of his wife greatly affected him, and he died soon after.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 38: George Whitefield: 17th c. Preacher & Revivalist

Persecuted Preachers

Two evangelists face a mob

On a preaching tour in 1741, John Cennick and Howell Harris found the townspeople of Swindon, Wiltshire (England) less than friendly toward their message.

The mob fired guns over our heads, holding the muzzles so near to our faces that Howell Harris and myself were both made as black as tinkers with the powder. We were not affrighted, but opened our breasts, telling them we were ready to lay down our lives....

Then they got dust out of the highway and covered us all over; and then they played an engine [catapult] upon us, which they filled out of the stinking ditches. While they played on brother Harris, I preached; and when they turned the engine upon me, he preached. This they continued till they spoiled the engine; and they threw whole buckets of water and mud over us.

After we left the town, they dressed up two images, called one **Cennick** and the other **Harris**, and then burnt them. The next day they gathered about the home of Mr. Lawrence, who had received us, and broke all of his windows with stones, cut and wounded four of his family, and knocked down one of his daughters.

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George Whitefield 1714-1770: Christian History Timeline

Richard Owen Roberts is president of International Awakening Ministries in Wheaton, Illinois, and author of *Whitefield in Print: A Bibliographic Record* (Richard Owen Roberts, 1988).

George Whitefield, 1714-1770

1714 Born in Gloucester, England, December 16.

1716 Father, Thomas, dies.

1722 Mother, Elizabeth, marries Capel Longden, an ironmonger, who seizes control of the family tavern (The Bell Inn).

1726 George enrolls at St. Mary de Crypt grammar school, where he enjoys reading plays and acting. Later drops out to help his mother with the inn.

1728 George's mother leaves her husband. Family conflicts cause George to leave the Bell Inn and cease "drawing wine for drunkards."

1730 Returns to his studies at St. Mary's. On Christmas, receives the Lord's Supper for the first time and determines to be more watchful over his thoughts, words, and actions.

1732 Enrolls at Pembroke College, Oxford University. Pays expenses by working as a servitor (errand boy for other students). Begins praying three times a day and fasting weekly.

1733 Invited to breakfast by Charles Wesley and introduced to the Holy Club's 10 or 11 earnest members. Borrows from Wesley *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* by Henry Scougal, which "showed me that I must be born again, or be damned!"

1734 Like his Holy Club friends, seeks salvation through severe discipline and good works, which causes a breakdown of his health from which he never fully recovers.

1735 Following five years of penitence, Whitefield becomes first of the Oxford methodists to experience "a full assurance of faith broke in upon my disconsolate soul!" Begins evangelizing, with converts organized into a society.

1735 Leads the Holy Club (the Wesleys had become missionaries to Georgia). Completes his degree, is ordained a deacon in the Church of England, and preaches his first sermon. Returns to Oxford to pursue graduate studies, but then leaves to substitute preach for various friends. Decides to become a missionary to Georgia.

1737 While voyage is delayed, his preaching electrifies Bristol and London; thousands pack churches to hear him. Publishes six sermons, while opponents publish against him.

1738 Spends three months in Georgia.

1739 Ordained a priest but finds many pulpits are now closed to him. Begins preaching outdoors, and soon tens of thousands hear of Christ in the fields. Some nobility, including the countess of Huntingdon, are drawn to Whitefield. In August, sails for America and preaches to throngs in New York and Philadelphia. Meets Ben Franklin.

1740 In Georgia, selects a site for Bethesda, his orphanage, and preaches at every opportunity. **April:** Preaches in northern cities like Philadelphia and small towns like Fagg's Manor, where 12,000 hear him. **Midyear:** Back in Georgia. **Fall:** Preaching tour takes New England by storm.

1741 Arriving in England in March, meets with great hostility, stirred largely by John Wesley's attacks against his Calvinism. Publishes a counterattack against Wesley. Preaches extensively in England, Scotland, and Wales. **Nov. 14:** Marries widow Elizabeth James.

1742 Itinerates in several parts of England. **June:** Begins five months of ministry in Scotland, and his sermons are "attended with much power" and often "a very great but decent weeping."

1743 Helps form the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Association, serving as first moderator.

1744 His 4-month-old son, John, dies of sickness and is buried February 8. George is attacked in bed and almost killed. **August:** Sails with his wife for America, arriving desperately ill in October, but soon resumes preaching.

1745-1748 Whitefield's third visit to the Colonies, though beset with opposition, inspires a great wave of revival. In early 1748, ministers for a month or two in Bermuda.

1748-1751 Lady Huntingdon appoints Whitefield her chaplain, lessening financial perils of his work. Whitefield ministers throughout England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, with extended ministry at the Moorfields (London) Tabernacle. Persecution slackens.

1751-1752 Fourth visit to the Colonies, arriving in Georgia in October with a group of destitute children. Cancels plans for an extensive preaching tour when the Orphan House's financial needs send him hurriedly back to England.

1752-1754 Tours Wales, visits Edinburgh for the seventh time, and returns to London for the opening of a new, brick Tabernacle.

1754-1755 Fifth trip to the Colonies, with preaching from Boston to Georgia. **Sept. 1754:** Receives honorary M.A. from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton).

1755-1763 Preaches often in London, as well as in Bristol, Gloucester, Edinburgh, Dublin, Glasgow, many places in Wales, and countless towns and villages. Travels briefly to Holland for his health.

1763-1765 Sixth trip to the Colonies. Weak in health, ministers with difficulty in New York, Boston, and other places, generally with greater acceptance than ever.

1765-1769 Devotes attention to London ministries, also traveling to Edinburgh and elsewhere. **August 1768:** Wife, Elizabeth, dies. Visits Trevecca, Wales, to help open Lady Huntingdon's College.

1769-1770 Seventh and final trip to the Colonies is a difficult voyage. Arrives in Charleston and preaches for 10 days to large congregations. **May 1770:** Begins tour from Philadelphia, preaching as often as his frail body permits. **Sept. 29:** In New Hampshire, preaches final sermon and dies the

following morning. Some 6,000 gather for funeral

Whitefield's World

1718 Blackbeard the Pirate beheaded

1727 George II becomes king of England

1729 Ben Franklin begins ***Pennsylvania Gazette***

1733 Georgia, last of 13 colonies, settled

1742 Handel's ***Messiah***

1755 George Washington leads British forces in French and Indian War

1758 First Indian reservation

1770 Boston Massacre

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Pushing to the Point of Exhaustion

A look at one year of Whitefield's whirlwind ministry.

Arnold Dallimore is author of *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the 18th-Century Revival* (Banner of Truth, 1970, 1980).

Arnold Dallimore, well-known biographer of George Whitefield, had agreed to contribute to this issue of Christian History, but regrettably, a recent turn in his health prevented that. In place of that article we offer a chapter, condensed, from his monumental biography, George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the 18th-Century Revival. In this abridged excerpt, Dallimore shows us a single year in Whitefield's life—1750.

—The Editors

Seventeen-fifty opened with Whitefield in London. There his chief duty was the pastoral care of the Tabernacle [his congregation]. This called for preaching at 6 o'clock each morning and again at 6:00 each evening (every day except Saturday), three or four times each Sunday, and several other times throughout the week. During these months Whitefield also preached twice a week at Lady Huntingdon's—a work he found very taxing. He also sometimes conducted funerals and performed weddings, often counseled inquirers, and took the oversight of the several Tabernacle enterprises.

Together with these tasks Whitefield maintained a large correspondence. There were letters relating to Orphan House affairs and letters in relation to his itinerant ministry—arrangements as to place and time of his preaching. And above all there were letters to spiritual inquirers and to persons whom he knew to be in need of exhortation even if they did not write and ask for it, and this correspondence was conducted with people in various parts of Britain and in virtually all the colonies of America.

Whitefield's letter writing was squeezed in at all possible moments between his other labors. Yet it was never finished, and there were always letters he wanted to write but for which there was no time.

Whitefield said of his life in London, "While there I am continually hurried and scarce have time to eat bread." He also spoke of his longing for more time "to read, meditate, and write," yet recognized that it would not be available till he should again take an ocean voyage.

Persecuted Preacher

Thus passed January, but by the first of February, weary of what he called "winter quarters," he set out on a two-month campaign of open-air itinerant evangelism.

His journey took him first to Gloucester, then on to Bristol, Exeter, and Plymouth, and at each place he paused for two or three days of preaching. He also reported that his health improved as soon as he left London. March was spent in Devon and Cornwall, in travels that took him nearly to Land's End and that saw great numbers assembled everywhere.

Thereupon he returned to London, resumed his labors there for two weeks, and then set out again—this time for Portsmouth and other places along the Channel coast.

Something of the spirit which motivated him is manifest in a letter he wrote at this time to James Hervey, who had mentioned to him the physical weakness he frequently suffered. Whitefield replied: "Fear not your weak body; we are immortal till our work is done. Christ's laborers must live by miracle; if not, I must not live at all; for God only knows what I daily endure. My continual vomitings almost kill me, and yet the pulpit is my cure, so that my friends begin to pity me less, and to leave off that ungrateful caution, 'Spare thyself!'"

Then again he returned to London. After a week in the capital he was on his way once more, on a journey that was to take him, preaching as he went, to Scotland. He preached at Olney, and then came to Northampton where, the next morning, he preached at the home of Dr. Philip Doddridge and "in the afternoon and evening at Kettering to many thousands."

The following day he reached Ashby, the country estate of Lady Huntingdon. He preached several times in towns and villages round about and also at her home, and during one of the latter services "some of the baser sort rioted before her Ladyship's door."

From Ashby he traveled northward again. He preached at Radcliffe, Nottingham, Sutton, and Mansfield, and while at the latter place he said in a letter to Lady Huntingdon: "I must lie down to refresh this weary body: my soul, through grace, smiles at bodily weakness."

Continuing his northward journey [in May and June] he preached first at Leeds and then at Manchester and at several places in Lancashire and Yorkshire. We notice the following statements:

"[At Rotherham] ... the crier was employed to give notice of a bearbaiting. [You] may guess who was the bear."

"At Bolton a drunkard stood up behind me to preach, and a woman attempted twice to stab the person who was putting up a stand for me to preach on."

"This last night ... some persons got into the barn and stable, and have cut my chaise [two-wheeled carriage] and one of the horse's tails."

"The more we do, the more we may do; every act strengthens the habit; the best preparation for preaching on Sundays is to preach every day in the week."

Reading on the Run

Despite this constant activity Whitefield found a certain amount of time for reading. He provided himself with periods for study directly following his rising at four each morning. He also read while journeying, for at this period of his life he travelled in a two-wheeled chaise. Of course, in an itinerant manner of life such as his he could not be so widely read as a man in a settled pastorate.

Nevertheless, he maintained his familiarity with the writings of the Reformers and the Puritans and also kept abreast of the more important evangelical publications of the time. Moreover, he seems to have been able, after but a short time with a book, to pass a knowledgeable opinion on its contents.

We notice one instance in this regard. William Law had recently produced a new book and, while in Yorkshire, Whitefield wrote [in late June]: "In my way I have read Mr. Law's second part of *The Spirit of Prayer*. His scheme about the Fall I think is quite chimerical; but he says many things that are truly noble ... Several things at the end of his treatise on regeneration, in my opinion, are entirely unjustifiable: but the sun hath its spots, and so have the best of men."

Whitefield's stay in Scotland—his fifth visit—lasted a month. There were the usual tremendous congregations at Edinburgh and Glasgow and other places. By this time September had arrived, but after merely a week in London he set out again, this time for Portsmouth and for Chatham.

Before the middle of the month, however, he was back in London, but soon left on another tour, and this took him to Gloucester, Birmingham, Coventry, Wednesbury, Evesham, and Nottingham. While in the Midlands he spent a day or two at a conference of ministers at the home of Lady Huntingdon at Ashby. The Countess was there, and later she wrote: "It was a time of refreshing from the presence of our God.... Mr. Whitefield's sermons and exhortations were close, searching, experimental, awful, and awakening."

There followed another brief period in London, after which Whitefield was on his way once more [in November], journeying this time to the southeast corner of England—to Canterbury and nearby towns.

Thus Whitefield spent the autumn months, and as the year drew toward its close he was again in London. But during December he became very ill and for two weeks was confined to bed. Yet as soon as he was able, he forced himself into activity and wrote: "My disorder was a violent fever: Jesus hath rebuked it. I am raised up once more. O may it be that I may minister unto him! For me to live is Christ. But alas! how little do I live to his glory! Yesterday [December 16] I entered upon my seven-and-thirtieth year. I am ashamed to think I have lived so long and done so little."

Losing a Child

Amid these physical trials and spiritual labors Whitefield had also his mental burdens. The Tabernacle was ever upon his mind, and the final decision in all its matters invariably rested with him. There was also the constant weight of the Orphan House, the difficulty of obtaining persons to carry on its ministry, and the frustration of trying to conduct its affairs by trans-Atlantic correspondence.

Likewise there was the responsibility he felt in leaving Mrs. Whitefield alone so much of the time. He provided her with a very faithful housekeeper, Mrs. Elizabeth Wood, but his absences could not but have caused her a severe sense of loneliness, especially when he departed on such long missions as the two-months' trip to Land's End and the four-months' journey to Scotland.

Moreover, [his wife] Elizabeth's sense of wanting him near would have been all the greater at this time, for on October 9 he wrote: "I am now waiting for my wife's being delivered of her present burden, and hope ere long to rejoice that a child is born into the world."

As to the outcome of this hope we have no information. But [historian Luke] Tyerman says: "He makes no mention, in any of his letters, of the accouchement of his wife. It is probable that, like her last, the present child was dead."

We sympathize, of course, with Mrs. Whitefield in this experience, but must also consider what the necessity of leaving her so frequently must have meant to Whitefield himself. It is evident that he felt a constant concern for her, particularly during her pregnancy, and his frequent returns to London throughout the latter part of the year were undoubtedly occasioned by her special need of him.

Counseling Thousands

We must notice that to all his other activities there was added the pressure of being constantly sought by those who wanted to talk with him personally. All manner of Christian people sought him to ask his advice and to have the encouragement of so great a man in the affairs of their lives. We notice in this regard the statement made by John Newton [author of the hymn *Amazing Grace*].

Newton's conversion may have been assisted, to some extent, by the reading of Whitefield's sermons. It is certain that when, some time later, he experienced the call of God to the ministry, he felt a deep longing to hear Whitefield preach and to talk with him.

In 1755 Newton went to London for this express purpose and his *Diary* of the event reads: "Reached London on Thursday, June 5. On Friday morning ... waited on Mr. Whitefield; but he being much engaged, I could not see him. The afternoon at Mr. Hayward's. He gave me a letter to Mr. Whitefield.... Heard Mr. Whitefield preach in the evening.... After sermon delivered the letter [to Mr. Whitefield]; but he was so engaged in company, he could neither read that nor several others given him, but desired I should call in the morning.

"Saturday ... I had five minutes converse with Mr. Whitefield, then he excused himself in a very friendly obliging manner from anything further, upon account of his throng of business."

These multiple activities show us something of the background against which the events of Whitefield's life took place. We look at them again in brief:

He began his day at four in the morning. He endeavored to retire at ten each night, but of course there were times when at that hour he was out on the road, riding perhaps through torrential rain or a blizzard of snow. As to his preaching, Henry Venn said that the actual time he spent at this labor was usually from forty to sixty hours a week. To this there were added his travelling, his correspondence and his reading, and finally this "throng of business" mentioned by Newton, as people begged to see him, even for a few moments.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 38: George Whitefield: 17th c. Preacher & Revivalist

The Quotable Whitefield

A sampler of sayings

Compiled by Randy & Cathy Colver

It is better to be a saint than a scholar; indeed, the only way to be a true scholar is to be striving to be a true saint.

The bank of heaven is a sure bank. I have drawn thousands of bills upon it, and never had one sent back protested.

There is not a thing on the face of the earth that I abhor so much as idleness or idle people.

I am burning with a fever, and have a violent cold; but Christ's presence makes me smile at pain; and the fire of his love burns up all fevers whatsoever.

We must be made perfect by sufferings. If we do not meet them in our younger days, we shall certainly have them in the decline of life.

God has condescended to become an author, and yet people will not read his writings. There are very few that ever gave this Book of God, the grand charter of salvation, one fair reading through.

Suffering times are a Christian's best-improving times.

God forbid that I should travel with anybody a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them.

O may God put me into one furnace after another, that my soul may be transparent; that I may see God as he is.

Young Christians are like little rivulets that make a large noise, and have shallow water; old Christians are like deep water that makes little noise, carries a good load, and gives not way.

I have put my soul, as a blank, into the hands of Jesus Christ my Redeemer, and desired him to write upon it what he pleases. I know it will be his own image.

I hope to grow rich in heaven by taking care of orphans on earth.

It is very easy talking what we can bear, and what we can do, but let God lay his hand on us, and we shall see what we are.

When I die the only epitaph that I desire to be engraved upon my tombstone is "Here lies George Whitefield; what sort of man he was the great day will discover."

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The Religious Odd Couple

Benjamin Franklin and George Whitefield: Theologically, they were miles apart, yet they became affectionate friends.

Dr. Frank Lambert is assistant professor of history at Purdue University and author of *The Commercialization of Religion: George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737–1770* (Princeton, 1993). An expanded version of this article appeared in the July 1993 *William and Mary Quarterly*.

Frugal Benjamin Franklin, in his *Autobiography*, wrote, "I happened ... to attend one of his [George Whitefield's] sermons, in the course of which I perceived he intended to finish with a collection, and I silently resolved he should get nothing from me."

The collection was for Whitefield's Georgia orphanage, which Franklin thought ill-planned, and he had told Whitefield so, to no avail. Thus for some time he had refused to give to it.

At this sermon, though, Franklin said, "I had in my pocket a handful of copper money, three or four silver dollars, and five pistoles in gold. As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the coppers. Another stroke of his oratory made me ashamed of that, and determined me to give the silver; and he finished so admirably that I emptied my pocket wholly into the collector's dish, gold and all."

The experience convinced Franklin that Whitefield was an orator who could attract and sway huge crowds. It also was a memorable moment in what was to become a lifelong friendship between two men who were a religious odd couple.

Business First

At first theirs was a simple business relationship. To Franklin, Whitefield was a powerful salesman, capable of overcoming even an avowed skeptic's sales resistance. Franklin disliked Whitefield's Calvinism, but he thought Whitefield would be good business. Franklin was locked in competition with his printing rival, Andrew Bradford, and he saw that publishing the popular Whitefield would be a business coup.

As for Whitefield, he wanted to make use of the American press, just as he had effectively exploited the English press for two years, advertising his services in newspapers and seeing scores of titles published there.

We don't know who originated the agreement, but in November 1739, Franklin advised readers of his *Pennsylvania Gazette*, "The Reverend Mr. Whitefield having given me copies of his journals and sermons with leave to print the same, I propose to publish them with all expedition."

Six months later, Franklin announced the first volume. Unlike earlier subscription publications he had promoted, this one was oversubscribed. Whitefield later informed a London correspondent that his journals and sermons were "bought off exceedingly" in America. He triumphantly announced that his printed works were "now in the hands of thousands in these parts."

Still, Franklin and Whitefield were clearly on opposite ends of the theological spectrum. As Franklin affirmed in his creed, religion consisted primarily of good works. As for theology, he did not speculate on the subject and harbored doubts about the divinity of Jesus. Whitefield, on the other hand, believed that

God alone wrought salvation in people's souls and that conversion was nothing short of a spiritual new birth.

An incident in 1740 illustrates their religious differences. Franklin invited the evangelist to stay in his home when he visited Philadelphia. In his acceptance, Whitefield referred to Franklin's invitation as a "kind offer for Christ's sake." Franklin retorted, "Don't let me be mistaken; it was not for Christ's sake, but for your sake."

Yet the two men became friends for some thirty years. In a letter to his brother, John, written after the Great Awakening, Franklin said of Whitefield, "He is a good man and I love him." They may have found each other useful, but they also developed an affectionate bond, and business alone cannot explain it.

Affectionate Bond

In the 1500s and early 1600s, the word *friend* sometimes meant a "loved one" and other times a "sponsor"—someone who could help you or with whom you could safely do business. By the 1750s, *friend* had assumed its modern meaning. Samuel Johnson defined it as "one who supports you and comforts you while others do not." Though brought together by a joint venture, Franklin and Whitefield moved from a friendship of sponsors to one of mutual trust.

Their correspondence reveals an increasing affection over the ensuing years of Whitefield's life, even after Franklin had left the printing business. In a 1740 letter, Whitefield saluted Franklin formally as "Dear Mr. Franklin." By 1748, Whitefield's correspondence indicated even more affection: in one letter Whitefield saluted Franklin, "My Dear Mr. Franklin" and signed it, "your most affectionate, obliged friend and servant."

Whitefield admired his friend. In a letter of 1752, he told Franklin with delight how London had reacted to his experiments with electricity: "I find that you grow more and more famous in the learned world." In many letters Whitefield expressed his respect for Franklin's erudition by addressing him as "my dear Doctor."

Franklin's correspondence also reflects a deepening friendship. In the 1740s, he opened his letters with a formal "Dear Sir." By the 1760s, he saluted Whitefield as "Dear Friend." Further, he responded graciously and warmly to the evangelist's continued concern for his soul, a significant change from his earlier attitude. By 1764, he could write, "Your frequently repeated Wishes and Prayers for my Eternal as well as temporal Happiness are very obliging. I can only thank you for them, and offer you mine in return."

Friends in the "Last Act"

One of Franklin's last letters to Whitefield best reveals the warmth and depth of the two men's friendship. Near 50 and growing more aware of his mortality, Franklin shared with the evangelist a dream for his last years: "Life, like a dramatic piece, should ... finish handsomely. Being now in the last act, I began to cast about for something fit to end with."

His vision was a joint venture: "I sometimes wish, that you and I were jointly employ'd by the Crown to settle a colony on the Ohio ... to settle in that fine country a strong body of religious and industrious people!" He concluded, "Might it not greatly facilitate the introduction of pure religion among the heathen, if we could, by such a colony, show them a better sample of Christians than they commonly see in our Indian traders?"

Whitefield's reply has not survived, but he must have been touched that Franklin not only wanted him as

a partner but entrusted him to produce a "better sample of Christians."

In his last surviving letter to Franklin, Whitefield turned his thoughts to friendship beyond the grave. On the eve of his final departure for America in 1769, Whitefield wrote Franklin, expressing his hope that he and his friend would "be in that happy number of those who in the midst of the tremendous final blaze shall cry Amen." Whitefield died in 1770, however, without witnessing his friend's conversion.

Though they occupied different theological worlds, Franklin and Whitefield found common ground in promoting revivals. They were both convinced that print could expand audiences and reach strangers at great distances. Their joint venture succeeded. The subscription publication was profitable: Franklin made money; Whitefield gained souls.

And two men became friends.

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House of Mercy, Prison of Debt

Soon after he began an orphanage, Whitefield found himself chained by expenses he couldn't pay.

Gary Sanseri

On George Whitefield's first journey to America, in 1738, he took "thirteen hundred pounds contributed for the poor of Georgia and for charity schools." Whitefield surveyed the state of Savannah's children and later wrote, "What I have most at heart is the building of an orphan-house."

Returning to America the following year, Whitefield took many gifts, which were sold in Philadelphia to finance the erection of the orphan house. Whitefield also made appeals in his sermons; as Benjamin Franklin put it, "He made large collections, for his eloquence had a wonderful power over the hearts and purses of his hearers." The donations allowed work to begin on what Whitefield called, "Bethesda," the "House of Mercy."

The day after his arrival in Savannah, Whitefield inspected a 500-acre plot ten miles north of town. Soon, Whitefield, along with a carpenter and surveyor, found themselves forced to make architectural decisions. Many of the laborers came from English prisons and proved incapable. Added expenses drained the treasury. One writer openly questioned, "Where is the fund for its support: and what service can an orphan-house be in a desert and a forsaken colony?"

On March 25, 1740, Whitefield noted in his journal that "nearly forty children are under my care, and nearly a hundred mouths are daily supplied with food from our store.... The expense is great, but our great and good God, I am persuaded, will enable me to defray it." Whitefield believed assistance would come from wealthy friends in Britain and America.

Before long, though, disagreement arose between Whitefield and the trustees, who withdrew their support. Then supplies bound for the orphanage were stolen. Soon Whitefield owed about 500 pounds—20 years' wages.

Worse, William Seward, who had supported the endeavor, died without a will. A distraught Whitefield confessed: "I was embarrassed with Mr. Seward's death. He died without making any provision for me, and I was at the same time much indebted for the Orphan House." Earlier that same year, in near total despair, Whitefield declared: "I am almost tempted to wish I had never undertaken the Orphan House."

The debt against Bethesda put Whitefield in jeopardy of being jailed. In a letter to one creditor, Whitefield pleaded, "If possible I shall discharge the debt within six months, but I am afraid it will be out of my power, having met with many disappointments. As we are brethren of the same Lord, and as the debt was contracted for him, I hope you will be patient with me." Whitefield felt the debt as "lying like a dead weight upon me." To relieve his debt, Whitefield even purchased a plantation and slaves in South Carolina.

Many years later, in Scotland, in 1768, Whitefield received a legacy. "The Orphan House shall have it all," he said. Whitefield the debtor was free at last.

Whitefield's Curious Love Life

Mark Galli is Associate Editor of Christian History.

"I believe it is God's will that I should marry," George Whitefield wrote to a friend in 1740. But he was concerned: "I pray God that I may not have a wife till I can live as though I had none."

That ambivalence—believing God willed a wife, yet wanting to live as if without one—brought Whitefield a disappointing love life and largely unhappy marriage.

First Love

When 25-year-old Whitefield met young Elizabeth Delamotte, he struggled to reconcile his love for Christ with the strange new sensation he felt toward her. Sailing to America in 1739, he resolved to put her out of his mind. But when he arrived in Georgia, a letter from her awaited him.

"What room can there be for God," he wrote her, "when a rival hath taken possession of the heart?" Still, "I could almost drop a tear, and wish myself, for a moment or two, in England. But hush, nature." Whitefield's *Journals* soon report "unspeakable troubles and anguish of soul." Finally, he decided to marry.

His proposal letter to Elizabeth began by cataloguing the sufferings she would endure as his wife, concluding with, "Can you, when you have a husband, be as though you had none, and willingly part with him, even for a long season, when his Lord and Master shall call him forth to preach the Gospel?" He smothered romantic notions: "I write not from any other principles but the love of God.... The passionate expressions which carnal courtiers use ... ought to be avoided by those that would marry in the Lord."

As one historian put it, "Had he tried to design his proposal in such a way as to ensure its failure, he could hardly have done better."

Love Triangle

Though his proposal was rejected, Whitefield still felt called to marriage. When he mentioned this to fellow evangelist Howell Harris, Harris discerned "an amazingly providential solution."

Harris had fallen in love with one Elizabeth James, a Welsh widow in her mid-thirties. Though her affection for him was equally strong, he, like Whitefield, wanted "no creature between my soul and God." He had labored to break off the relationship but failed time after time.

Harris arranged a meeting between Whitefield and Elizabeth James. Whitefield was impressed with her devotion to Christ, so both Harris and Whitefield wrote her, suggesting an exchange of suitors.

She was furious, writing Harris, "If you were my own father you had no right of disposing me against my will." Still, she didn't close the door to Whitefield, and as they corresponded over the next months, Whitefield became convinced the match was right. James "objected much," Harris reported, because of "her regards to me & that she could not help it still."

Yet, four days later, she agreed to marry Whitefield. At the wedding a few weeks later, Harris gave away the bride.

Whitefield had vowed that he "would not preach one sermon less in a married than in a single state." During the week-long honeymoon in Elizabeth's home, he preached twice a day. From then on, she usually remained in London during his travels. Once he was gone for two years.

But the obligations of marriage couldn't help but constrain Whitefield's ministry. Within two months of his wedding, he wrote, "O for that blessed time when we shall neither marry nor be given in marriage, but be as the angels of God." Years later he warned a young man, "Marry when or whom you will, expect trouble in the flesh." After Elizabeth's death, though, he said, "I feel the loss of my right hand daily."

Elizabeth James's letters show it took her ten years to get over Harris. She suffered four miscarriages, and her only child with Whitefield, a son, died when 4 months old. A man who lived with the couple during their last years put it well: "He did not intentionally make his wife unhappy. He always preserved great decency and decorum in his conduct towards her."

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Wesley Vs. Whitefield

When George Whitefield left England in 1739, he was the recognized leader of the evangelical awakening, and he entrusted his thousands of followers to John Wesley's care.

When he returned, in early 1741, he found that "many of my spiritual children ... will neither hear, see, nor give me the least assistance: Yes, some of them send threatening letters that God will speedily destroy me. "

What had happened? Wesley had preached and published on two subjects dividing the leaders: predestination (whether God foreordains people's eternal destiny) and perfection (whether sinlessness is attainable in this life).

Whitefield met with both Charles and John Wesley in early 1741, but they could not find common ground. Wrote Whitefield, "It would have melted any heart to have heard Mr. Charles Wesley and me weeping, after prayer, that if possible the breach might be prevented." The movement had been forever divided between the followers of Wesley and the followers of Whitefield.

Christian History asked J. D. Walsh to explain how Whitefield and Wesley met, how their conflict began, and how their relationship changed.

The relationship between George Whitefield and John Wesley, the two great leaders of the eighteenth-century revival, cannot be neatly described. Their association passed through very different stages.

Deference: Oxford Methodists

Whitefield arrived at Pembroke College, Oxford, in 1732, a raw, provincial youth with a West Country accent. (He never lost it; accounts of his preaching describe his "twang through the nose" and the way he pronounced "Christ" as "Chroist.") Whitefield had come from the tap-room of the family inn and was working his way through college, waiting on richer students. "As for my quality, I was a poor drawer" [of ale], he wrote.

Whitefield had heard of the "Holy Club" before he arrived, and after Charles Wesley kindly asked him to breakfast, he was swiftly drawn into the fellowship. It was Charles, open-hearted and emotional, rather than the steely-willed and self-controlled John, who was his chief Oxford mentor.

Whitefield spoke "with the utmost deference and respect" of the brothers Wesley, who had been to famous boarding schools and were his seniors. During a period of acute distress, Whitefield was sent for advice to John, and thanks to his "excellent advice and management," Whitefield "was delivered from the wiles of Satan." This was a somewhat subservient relationship. Whitefield wrote, "From time to time Mr. Wesley permitted me to come to him and instructed me as I was able to bear it." Whitefield deferred to John Wesley as his "spiritual father in Christ" and his letters addressed Wesley as "Honoured sir."

Partnership: Revival Takes Off

In 1736 John Wesley entrusted the newly ordained Whitefield with the oversight of the Oxford methodists, while he was away in Georgia. Whitefield soon soared to national fame as "the boy preacher." Autograph hunters besieged him. A flood of pamphlets attacked him. He was lavishly praised and compared to Moses, to David, and to Wycliffe as the "morning star" of a second Reformation. As Whitefield freely confessed, fame went to his head. He wrote one minister in 1739: "Success, I fear, elated my mind. I did not behave to you, and other ministers of Christ, with that humility which became me."

Although Whitefield's evangelistic success far outstripped that of his former instructor, he showed Wesley deep respect. "I am but a novice; you are acquainted with the great things of God," he told him in March 1739. Before inviting Wesley to join him in Bristol that year, he told his converts that "there was one coming after him whose shoes' latches he was not worthy to unloose."

Yet at this critical phase of the revival, young, exuberant, Whitefield took the lead, dragging behind the older, more cautious Wesley. In spring 1739 Whitefield took the momentous step of preaching outdoors—first to the grimy coalminers around Bristol, and then to the street poor of London. This turned methodism outward, from respectable Anglican societies toward the huge unchurched mass. Whitefield now pushed the reluctant Wesleys into following him as field preachers.

In 1739, as vistas of astonishing evangelistic success opened up, Whitefield and the Wesleys worked in the closest harmony, as brothers and equals. When Whitefield won converts through his amazing oratory, he relied on Wesley to help organize and instruct them.

Discord: Fight over Grace

A few months later, however, the two leaders were locked in angry debate. By 1740 the infant methodist movement was split irrevocably into two camps.

It was inevitable that the issue of predestination would trouble the movement. The Wesleys were unshakable "Arminians" who denied predestination, yet the revival drew zealous recruits from areas in which Puritan Calvinism was much alive. At first, Whitefield was no predestinarian, but by the time he sailed to America in the summer of 1739, he was reading Calvinist books. Contact with fervent American Calvinists filled out his knowledge.

Even before Whitefield departed, John Wesley had decided to attack the Calvinist theory of grace. In March 1739 he not only preached but published a passionately Arminian sermon entitled **Free Grace**. This step was taken with great unease; only after seeking a sign from heaven and drawing lots twice, did Wesley go into battle.

John Wesley feared that Calvinism propagated fatalism and discouraged growth in holiness. Charles Wesley feared that predestination (and particularly the idea of reprobation, that God predestined some to damnation) represented a loving God as a God of hate. In his famous hymn **Wrestling Jacob**, he deliberately capitalized the sentence "Pure Universal Love Thou Art."

Whitefield, who was always more irenic than John Wesley, demurred before replying. He made it clear he was no follower, but a leader, and in some respects in front of his old adviser: "As God was pleased to send me out first, and to enlighten me first, so I think he still continues to do it." Even now, however, he recognized Wesley's enormous talent for the nurture of souls: "My business seems to be chiefly in planting; if God sends you to water, I praise his name."

Nonetheless, on Christmas Eve 1740 Whitefield wrote his riposte to Wesley, defending the Calvinist doctrine of grace.

The controversy was fueled when Wesley provocatively published *Free Grace* in America. Whitefield, when invited to preach in Wesley's headquarters at the London Foundery, scandalized the congregation by preaching "the absolute decrees [of election] in the most peremptory and offensive manner," while Charles sat beside him, fuming.

From 1740 the revival moved along parallel lines. Wesley's "United Societies" were matched by the growth of "Calvinistic Methodist" societies in England and Wales. In London, Whitefield's followers set up his Tabernacle in the same street as Wesley's Foundery, and in rivalry with it.

Cooling: Agreement to Differ

By 1742 tempers were beginning to cool. Open-hearted evangelist Howell Harris worked to reunite the two parties, but he found this impossible, partly because "neither of the sides can submit to ... the other head—Mr. Wesley or Mr. Whitefield." Indeed, the followers of both men often proved more partisan than their champions.

Far more united the antagonists than ever separated them. Whitefield was a moderate Calvinist; he did not let the doctrine of predestination hinder him from offering grace to all, or from insisting on the need for holiness in believers. John Wesley allowed (for a time) that some souls might be elected to eternal life. When not overheated, both men saw such issues as non-essentials. At the height of the controversy, Whitefield quoted the reformer John Bradford: "Let a man go to the grammar school of faith and repentance, before he goes to the university of election and predestination."

No merger of the two camps occurred, but there was at least reconciliation between the leaders. This "closer union in affection" continued with hiccups, but no serious interruption, to Whitefield's death. In 1755, Charles Wesley could write happily, "Come on, my Whitefield! (since the strife is past) / And friends at first are friends again at last."

The relationship was described by one of Wesley's preachers as "agreement to differ." Whitefield was welcomed to preach among Wesley's societies. Wesley lent Whitefield one of his best preachers, Joseph Cownley, for work at the Tabernacle. Whitefield refused to build Calvinistic chapels in places that already had a Wesleyan society. Wesley agreed to the reverse. More than once Whitefield acted as mediator when the Wesley brothers fell out, notably when Charles sabotaged John's marriage prospects to Grace Murray.

This friendship continued even though the old split was not forgotten. Writing his *Short History of Methodism* in 1765, John Wesley did not conceal his conviction that Whitefield and the Calvinists had made "the first breach" in the revival. Whitefield felt that the idyllic harmony of early 1739—"heaven on earth" when all were "like little children"—had been broken by Wesley's sermon on *Free Grace*.

Complementary Gifts

Ultimately, what eased relations between the two great leaders was Whitefield's decision, in 1749, to abandon formal leadership of the Calvinistic Methodist societies. He thus posed no threat to Wesley as chief organizer of the revival.

Whitefield was certainly not inadequate as a pastor and organizer, but he realized his primary calling lay as a "wayfaring witness." His determination to shuttle continually between England, Scotland, and America meant he could never, like Wesley, provide oversight for a great connection of societies. "An itinerant pilgrim life is that which I choose," he wrote, so he cheerfully let other pastors gather the lost sheep he had found.

Wesley, in contrast, insisted his converts be organized and built up in the faith. He resolved not to send preachers where he could not form societies, because failure to support new converts was like "begetting children for the murderer." In Wesley's view, the Great Awakening subsided largely because Whitefield's converts did not receive adequate spiritual oversight.

Both Whitefield and Wesley (and the Moravians) deserve credit as Founding Fathers of the great revival. What is most striking is the providential complementarity of the two men's gifts. More than any evangelist before him, Whitefield was given the ability to scatter the seed of God's Word across the world. To Wesley, preeminently, was granted the ability to garner the grain and preserve it.

In 1770, the year of his death, Whitefield wrote to Charles as "my very dear old friend" and described John as "your honoured brother." To each he bequeathed a mourning ring, "in token of my indissoluble union with them in heart and Christian affection, notwithstanding our difference in judgment about some particular points of doctrine." On Whitefield's death, Charles penned a noble elegy. And at Whitefield's request, his funeral sermon was preached by none other than his former opponent, John Wesley.

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War of Words

Wesley on Free Grace

From his March 1739 sermon:

Nothing but the strongest conviction, not only that what is here advanced is the truth as it is in Jesus, but also that I am indispensably obliged to declare this truth to all the world, would have induced me openly to oppose the sentiments of those whom I highly esteem for their works' sake: at whose feet may I be found, in the day of the Lord Jesus.

The grace or love of God, whence cometh our salvation, is free in all, and free for all. To this some have answer'd, "No: it is free only for those whom God hath ordained to life; and they are but a little flock. The greater part of mankind God hath ordained to death; and it is not free for them. Them God hateth; and therefore before they were born, decreed they should die eternally. And this was his good pleasure."

This doctrine represents our blessed Lord, "Jesus Christ the righteous," "the only begotten son of the Father, full of grace and truth," as a hypocrite, a deceiver of the people, a man void of common sincerity.

This is the blasphemy clearly contained in the horrible decree of predestination. And here I fix my foot. On this I join issue with every assertor of it. You represent God as worse than the devil: more false, more cruel, more unjust.

Whitefield's Response

From his 31-page pamphlet, December 1740:

Jonah could not go with more reluctance against Nineveh, than I now take pen in hand to write against you. But what can I say? The children of God are in danger of falling into error. Nay, numbers have been misled.

And when I remember how Paul reprov'd Peter for his dissimulation, I fear I have been sinfully silent too long. O then be not angry with me, dear and honoured Sir, if now I deliver my soul, by telling you that I think in this you greatly err.

The most important objections, which you have urged against this doctrine, as reasons why you reject it, being seriously considered, and faithfully tried by the word of God, will appear to be of no force at all.

Indeed had not your name, dear Sir, been prefixed to the sermon, I could not have been so uncharitable as to think you were the author of such sophistry.

For Christ's sake be not rash! Give yourself to reading. Study the covenant of grace. Down with your carnal reasoning.

It often fills me with pleasure, to think how I shall behold you casting your crown down at the feet of the Lamb, and as it were filled with a holy blushing for opposing the divine sovereignty in the manner

you have done.

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The Startling Puritan

The message of the greatest communicator of his age.

Dr. J.I. Packer is a professor of theology at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, and author of more than a dozen books, including *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Crossway, 1990).

In 1829 an English publisher issued a compendium of George Whitefield's sermons and letters titled *The Revived Puritan*—a very apt description, in fact, of what Whitefield was.

Whitefield was an intelligent, clear-headed, articulate communicator, but he was not original or innovative in his theology. Like all evangelical clergy in eighteenth-century England, he insisted that he taught the doctrines of the Church of England (defined in the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, the two *Books of Homilies*, and the *Book of Common Prayer*). The five-point Calvinism of his preaching came to him through the Puritans. His biblical interpretation followed Puritan Matthew Henry, whose *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* was Whitefield's lifelong companion. At every point the substance of his message was conventionally Protestant and Puritan—no less, no more.

Yet the things Whitefield took from this tradition came out in his own way, cast into a direct message calling for present response. His message consisted of five principal themes.

Face God

People live thoughtlessly, drifting from one day to another, never thinking of eternity. But God the Creator—mankind's lawgiver and holy judge, the sovereign Lord who made us for himself and has us in his hands every moment—has revealed in Scripture that a day of judgment is coming when he will either welcome us into heaven's eternal joy or banish us forever to hell.

Thus, Whitefield delivered urgent imperatives with agonized compassion for fellow mortals in dreadful danger: "Before ever ... you can speak peace to your hearts, you must be brought to see, brought to believe, what a dreadful thing it is to depart from the living God."

Know Yourself

G. K. Chesterton described original sin as the one Christian doctrine that admits of demonstrative proof, and that was how Whitefield presented it. From Genesis 3 and Romans 5 he analyzed it in the standard Reformed way: the sin of Adam was imputed to his posterity, and we all now share the penalties for his sin—physical decay, mortality, and a morally twisted disposition.

Whitefield testified, "Our first parents contracted [original sin] when they fell from God by eating the forbidden fruit, and the bitter and malignant contagion of it hath descended to, and quite overspread, their whole posterity.... All the open sin and wickedness, which like a deluge has overflowed the world, are only so many streams running from this dreadful contagious fountain."

Before salvation can be known, "You must be made to see, made to feel, made to weep over, made to bewail your actual transgressions against the law of God."

See Jesus

"Would you have peace with God?" Whitefield asked. "Away, then, to God through Jesus Christ, who has purchased peace; the Lord Jesus has shed his heart's blood for this. He died for this; he rose again for this; he ascended into the highest heaven, and is now interceding at the right hand of God."

Whitefield's preaching, like his personal faith, centered upon the person of "dear Jesus," the once-crucified, now glorified God-man, the gift of the Father's love and the embodiment of divine mercy. Through plain biblical exposition, Whitefield set forth the Incarnation, Jesus' friendship with sinners, his pity for the needy, his atoning death, bodily resurrection and ascension, his present heavenly reign and future judgment.

It has been said that nineteenth-century evangelist Charles Finney rode down sinners with a cavalry charge. Whitefield's way, however, was to sweep them off their feet with an overflow of compassionate affection; as Christ's ambassador he modeled his master's goodwill toward the lost.

Understand Justification

By Whitefield's time, Anglican minds had taken up with a moralistic, indeed legalistic, recasting of justification by faith. Faith had ceased to be self-despairing trust in the person, work, promises, and love of Jesus Christ. It had become, in the words of influential Bishop Bull, "virtually the whole of evangelical obedience"—a moral life of good works lived in hope of acceptance at the last day.

Through the cross, in Jeremy Taylor's grotesque phrase, "Christ has brought down the market"—that is, made it possible to secure final salvation through a devotion that is not flawless. The effect of Christ's death was thus to rehabilitate self-righteousness. Works were the way to heaven, after all.

This was in essence the theology of young John Wesley and the Holy Club in Oxford, which Whitefield had at one time imbibed. It produced a religion of aspiration, perspiration and, in sensitive souls, periodic desperation. Whitefield came to see it as blasphemous and destructive nonsense, the religion of the natural man masquerading as Christianity: "This is ... the most common evil that was ever under the sun," an evil that "cannot sufficiently be inveighed against."

Whitefield focused not on human works but on the life and death of Jesus Christ: "Behold, what man could not do, Jesus Christ, the Son of his Father's love, undertakes to do for him." Thus, "The Lord Jesus Christ is our righteousness.... This, this, is gospel, this is the only way of finding acceptance with God."

Grasp God's Grace

The conversion process involved a change of moral nature called regeneration, or new birth.

Psychologically, the praying and decision making that repentance and faith involve are human acts (done with the Holy Spirit's help); **theologically**, one's conversion should be understood as a work of the Holy Spirit from first to last.

Whitefield described God's irresistible grace, which dissolves our resistance: "Never rest till you can say, 'the Lord our righteousness.' Who knows but the Lord may have mercy on, nay, abundantly pardon you? Beg of God to give you faith; and if the Lord give you that, you will by it receive Christ, with his righteousness, and his all."

Whitefield admonished the converted to realize they were objects of God's special, eternal love to his elect, and this love guaranteed their protection and preservation till they came to glory. "None, none can tell, but those happy souls who have experienced it," he said, "with what demonstration of the Spirit this conviction comes—Oh, how amiable, as well as all sufficient, does the blessed Jesus now appear! With what new eyes does the soul now see the Lord its righteousness! Brethren, it is unutterable."

To know this, Whitefield insisted, will prompt wholehearted holiness: "Those who live godly in Christ, may not so much be said to live, as Christ to live in them.... They are led by the Spirit as a child is led by the hand of its father.... They hear, know, and obey his voice.... Being born again in God they habitually live to, and daily walk with God."

It was this mature Puritan orthodoxy that God blessed in Whitefield's evangelistic and pastoral ministry.

"Other ministers could, perhaps, preach the Gospel as clearly, and in general say the same things," wrote John Newton, "but ... no man living could say them in his way." That is fair: Whitefield was free of doctrinal novelties, while unmatched in application to the conscience.

All that George Whitefield ever preached, or desired to preach, was personal salvation and godliness, and for that Puritan orthodoxy served him superbly well.

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Slaveholding Evangelist

Whitefield's troubling mix of views.

Mark Galli is Associate Editor of Christian History.

When George Whitefield first journeyed through America's southern colonies, he was deeply disturbed by how slaves were brutalized by their masters. In 1740, in an angry, open letter to three southern colonies, he wrote: "Your dogs are caressed and fondled at your tables; but your slaves who are frequently styled dogs or beasts, have not an equal privilege. They are scarce permitted to pick up the crumbs which fall from their masters' tables.... Although I pray God the slaves may never be permitted to get the upper hand, yet should such a thing be permitted by Providence, all good men must acknowledge the judgment would be just."

Whitefield was genuinely concerned for blacks: "Their consciences are awake, and consequently prepared in good measure for hearing the gospel." When preaching to mixed crowds, he often addressed African-Americans as a group, and he chastised slaveholders for not teaching their slaves about Christ.

He also purchased 5,000 acres in Pennsylvania to build a school "for the instruction of these poor creatures." He intended to do the same in South Carolina. (Neither project succeeded.)

Many African-Americans felt Whitefield's concern. During a stay in Charleston, he reported, "Several of the Negroes did their work in less time than usual, that they might come to hear me."

For the most part, though, Whitefield's sermons avoided talk about masters' duties to slaves, though not the reverse: "Though [God] hath now called you [slaves] into his own family ... he doth not call you thereby from the service of your masters according to the flesh."

Later, Whitefield took an unfortunate stand. In 1740, he had established an orphanage, called Bethesda, in Georgia. By 1747, both colony and orphanage were suffering economically. The reason, according to Whitefield?

"The constitution of that colony [Georgia] is very bad, and it is impossible for the inhabitants to subsist without the use of slaves."

The solution? Whitefield allowed some friends to purchase for him "a plantation and slaves, which I propose to devote to the support of Bethesda.... One Negro has been given me. Some more I purpose to purchase this week."

By the late 1740s, Whitefield advocated legalizing slavery in Georgia. His concern for orphans had won out over his concern for blacks: "Had Negroes been allowed, I should now have had a sufficiency to support a great many orphans without expending above half the sum that has been laid out."

Whitefield was not out of step with the times. By 1776, only one denomination in America—the Quakers—had declared slaveholding a sin.

As an evangelist, Whitefield was unconventional and remarkable. Lamentably, his views on slavery were

conventional and unremarkable.

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Father of Modern Evangelicals

We still feel Whitefield's influence today.

interview with Mark A. Noll

For most modern Christians, the names of John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards come quickly to the tongue. Not so the name of George Whitefield. Yet in many ways, Whitefield has had greater lasting significance. Christian History editors Kevin Miller and Mark Galli met with Dr. Mark A. Noll, McManis Professor of Christian Thought at Wheaton (Illinois) College, to discuss Whitefield's impact. Dr. Noll is the author of A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada (Eerdmans, 1993) and a member of Christian History's advisory board.

Christian History: In America, in 1740, Whitefield was a religious phenomenon without equal. Why did he draw such huge crowds?

Mark Noll: Let me suggest a few factors, not necessarily in order of importance.

First, Whitefield was a Calvinist, and the strongest theological tradition in the American colonies was Calvinism. Whitefield drew upon themes (human depravity, perseverance of the saints) that resonated with many colonists.

Second, Whitefield was a spellbinding orator. He was seemingly born with capital-C charisma, and he drew on his natural gifts in drama to enhance his message. He could light up a crowd, several times a day, day in and day out.

Third, people were impressed with Whitefield's spirituality, with his longing for God. That came through in his published journals and in his preaching—especially when he cried, as he often did, for the spiritually lost.

Fourth, he was a social phenomenon. Colonial America was a wilderness; the population was dispersed, and there were few good roads. It was difficult to see anybody except your family and your nearest neighbors. The cities were small: Boston and Philadelphia were only about 20,000 each. There was not a lot of entertainment. When Whitefield arrived in the colonies, he was simply an event. Today, a President or rock star coming to a small town would generate a similar intense interest.

Fifth, Whitefield made effective use of the techniques of the modern market. In the 1700s, businesses were beginning to manufacture and sell products in large numbers. To sell, they depended less on personal relationships than on their ability to mass produce and keep the price low. Whitefield used techniques of the theater to impact large audiences, and he learned how to get his cause in newspapers, which were just becoming a popular medium. In fact, he created some newspapers, and he wrote his journal knowing it would get published.

Whitefield was a phenomenon in his day, but did his impact last?

In New England in 1740 and 1742, during the Great Awakening and the preaching of Whitefield, the number of new church members rose dramatically.

But when we look long-range, we see something different. From 1730 to 1750, the number of people joining churches is about the same as in earlier decades—if not lower. Historian Gerald Moran has theorized that Whitefield and the revivals accelerated the number of professions of faith, which traditionally were spread out over a longer period.

On the other hand, where there's the greatest excitement about Whitefield, we see the membership of Baptist churches rise. That number rises slowly until the 1770s and rapidly thereafter. And Baptists now compose the single largest Protestant group in America.

Compared to John Wesley or Jonathan Edwards, Whitefield is not well known today. Why?

John Wesley was an organizational genius, as was his brother Charles. They built up Methodist societies in Britain, nurturing something stable for the long-term. They also left tremendous literary remains, and in the case of Charles, a great body of hymnody.

Today, the Methodist and Holiness churches (for example, the Church of the Nazarene and the Church of God) as well as some Pentecostal groups look to Wesley as their father in the faith. They have a vested interest in keeping his work alive.

By contrast, Whitefield did not create lasting institutions. There is no Whitefield church. While he did "gather" the Calvinistic Methodist societies, he turned leadership over to John Cennick.

Nor was Whitefield a profound thinker, like Jonathan Edwards, whose works are studied today for their lasting content. Whitefield was a tremendous preacher, and his sermons and diaries are interesting, but he left no body of writing that commands scholarly admiration.

The person to compare Whitefield with in the 1700s is not Wesley or Edwards but actor David Garrick. He was the greatest actor of his day, a charismatic figure critical in the development of the stage. But he is no longer a household name.

Would you agree with historians who consider Whitefield the "father of evangelicalism"?

I wouldn't call him the "father of evangelicalism," but he has had an enormous impact.

Whitefield made popular the idea of bringing the gospel message directly to ordinary people. And if there is a defining characteristic of evangelicals, it is the popular and direct presentation of the gospel.

When Whitefield and others started preaching outdoors, it was considered rabble-rousing radicalism. It was as inflammatory and seditious as anything any Communist did in the United States in the 1950s.

When Whitefield encouraged John Wesley to preach outdoors, John was very reluctant. He wrote in his journal that finally, in April 1739, he "submitted to be more vile" and preach the gospel out-of-doors. He stood on a little hill and preached to Bristol workers coming probably from the shipyards.

Evangelicals since have had a driving concern to reach the common person, even if it means using unorthodox methods. Today, for instance, evangelical churches are more likely to have a bass guitar and drums in a worship service than are any of the longer-established denominations.

In what ways did Whitefield set a pattern for today's evangelical leaders?

As historian Harry Stout makes crystal clear in his recent biography, Whitefield was a celebrity. Why go out and hear Whitefield? Not because he represents the established church, or even a dissenting church. Not because he's going to give you a learned theological discourse. People go because he is going to speak the Word of God directly to you, in a powerful and moving manner. You go to hear **Whitefield**, and you want to be in the presence of a great person.

Evangelicals since the 1700s, especially in America, have been marked by charismatic leaders: Charles Finney, Dwight Moody, Billy Sunday. Today, Billy Graham, Bill Bright, Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and Jim Dobson, among others, are bigger-than-life persons who have more influence than many denominations or theological schools.

What other features of evangelicalism can be traced to Whitefield?

Whitefield set the precedent for exploiting technology. In his day, that meant the printed media. He started several newspapers and published books on the run.

Also, Whitefield helped shift the theological emphasis in preaching. Up to the early 1700s, British Protestants preached on God's plans for the church. From the mid-1700s, though, evangelicals emphasized God's plans for the individual. The idea that "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life" is more prominent after Whitefield.

Finally, Whitefield was an "evangelical ecumenical" who worked with people from several denominations. To paraphrase one of Whitefield's great lines: "There aren't going to be any Presbyterians or Baptists or even Anglicans in heaven. Who's going to be there? Christians. Just Christians." And Whitefield once said something to the effect, "If the Pope would let me preach from his pulpit, I would preach the gospel of Christ from there"—an amazing statement considering the animosity between Protestants and

Catholics of the day.

This trans-denominational ministry is characteristic of many evangelicals since, especially Charles Simeon, Dwight Moody, and John Stott. When Billy Graham started working with mainline Protestant and even Catholic churches, he was criticized for being liberal. But actually he was following evangelical tradition.

How did Whitefield influence America in general?

Whitefield was the first person to help the thirteen colonies—independent nation-states—to transcend their differences. Whitefield was the best-known American until George Washington. People began to see him as an American—a new way of thinking about inhabitants of the thirteen colonies.

Furthermore, interesting arguments have been made that Whitefield's style of public speaking helped shape political speeches during the American Revolution. Samuel Davies, a Presbyterian revivalist in the 1750s and 1760s, spoke very much in the Whitefield mode, and we know Davies influenced the speaking style of Patrick Henry. By the time of the Revolution, many leaders used Whitefield's mode of speaking directly to people to influence their wills.

Has Whitefield's influence in any way been harmful to American Christianity?

Whitefield should not be criticized for not being an intellectual. But I think his emphasis on religious *experience* conveyed the message that hard thinking was not important. As a result, many evangelicals have emphasized religious experience at the expense of the mind.

What aspect of Whitefield might we fail to appreciate?

One great thing about Whitefield (and Finney, Moody, and Graham,) is his integrity. There were religious scalawags and scoundrels in the 1700s just as there are today. Some of the early methodists went off the rails financially, sexually, or in other ways. But Whitefield, the Wesleys, and Jonathan Edwards were people of sterling integrity.

Whitefield handled large sums of money; everywhere he went, he collected money for his orphanage. Though he sometimes hired bad business managers, Whitefield never kept money for himself beyond what he needed for the bare necessities. He never bought the eighteenth-century equivalent of a Mercedes or summer home in the Bahamas. Nor did he ever chase skirts, though no doubt the temptation for a charismatic figure then was no less than it is today.

Furthermore, though Whitefield enjoyed being in the public eye—and was savvy about promoting the message of the New Birth—he was never duplicitous. He believed the gospel needed to be shared, and he sacrificed with great integrity to share it.

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George Whitefield & His World: Recommended Resources

Dr. Allen C. Guelzo is associate professor of history at Eastern College in St. Davids, Pennsylvania. He is author of *Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate* (Wesleyan, 1989).

George Whitefield became a legend early in his life and has remained a popular subject for historians since.

The earliest source on Whitefield is Whitefield himself. He wrote two autobiographical sketches, *A Short Account of God's Dealings with the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield* (1740) and *A Further Account* (1747). More famous are his *Journals*, a running commentary on his early ministry (1737–1745). An excellent modern edition of these is *George Whitefield's Journals* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1960).

Whitefield's sermons are another important source for understanding him. Among many collections available is *Select Sermons* by George Whitefield (Banner of Truth Trust, 1958).

Whitefield's Biographers

The first Whitefield biographies began circulating within a year of his death, and surprisingly, the early ones are often his best.

- John Gillies's *Memoirs of the Reverend George Whitefield, M.A.* (1771) is a lengthy, detailed, and admiring account. Gillies, a Scot, knew Whitefield personally.
- Robert Philip's *The Life and Times of the Reverend George Whitefield* (1837) is another weighty biography, the first to note how Whitefield successfully borrowed techniques of English drama.
- Daniel Newell's *The Life of Rev. George Whitefield* (1846) was the first important American biography of Whitefield, peculiar for its woodcut illustrations.
- The centennial of Whitefield's death set off renewed interest in Whitefield, culminating in Luke Tyerman's monumental *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield*, 2 vols. (1876–1877). The great Methodist historian lavishes 1,200 pages on Whitefield, and the book remains (after Gillies's) the most important study of Whitefield.

Modern biographies include:

- Stuart Henry's compact and readable *George Whitefield: Wayfaring Witness* (1957), which concentrates on Whitefield's life rather than his message.
- John Pollock's well-written *George Whitefield and the Great Awakening* (1973), probably the best work for a beginner.
- Arnold Dallimore's *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival*, 2 vols. (1970, 1980) is so well written that the length is no burden. He treats Whitefield as a serious theological thinker, rather than a stump preacher, and leaves no detail

unexamined.

- Harry S. Stout's *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (1991) returns to a theme first suggested by Robert Philip in 1837; he argues that Whitefield's dramatic methods and his use of the media were as awakening as his message.

Whitefield's World

Biographies are not the only way to learn more about Whitefield. E. Gordon Rupp's *Religion in England, 1688–1791* (1986) surveys English Christianity in Whitefield's time. Edwin S. Gaustad views the New England background in *The Great Awakening in New England* (1957).

For those interested in Whitefield's co-workers in the revivals, David L. Jeffrey collects their writings (with some of Whitefield's) in *A Burning and a Shining Light: English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley* (1987). Finally, an excellent introduction to Wesley and his relationship to Whitefield is Henry D. Rack's lively *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (1989).

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