THE SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT OF GEORGE WHITEFIELD

by

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This paper considers the ministry of the great British evangelist of the eighteenth century, George Whitefield, who preached to more people than any person up to his day. The subject of spiritual discernment is discussed with examples of characters from the Bible who exhibited this gift of discernment. The theological and moral climate of Great Britain and America prior to Whitefield’s time is examined to introduce the problems that Whitefield faced when he began his ministry. The thesis of this work is that George Whitefield’s gift of spiritual discernment can be clearly seen in his refusal to compromise in areas that he believed were essential theological truths and practices, in his sense of evangelical ecumenicity, and in his use of worldly means to accomplish heavenly goals. The enduring legacy of Whitefield’s ministry is covered along with an application for modern evangelicals to emulate Whitefield’s practices.
CONTENTS

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1

Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW ....................................................... 5

Chapter 3 SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT ................................................. 14
Definition ..................................................................................... 14
Spiritual Discernment in the Old Testament ................................ 15
Spiritual Discernment in the New Testament .............................. 17

Chapter 4 THE THEOLOGICAL CLIMATE IN ENGLAND IN THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ...................................................... 21

Chapter 5 GEORGE WHITEFIELD’S REFUSAL TO COMPROMISE IN AREAS HE DEEMED ESSENTIAL THEOLOGICAL TRUTHS AND PRACTICES ................................................................. 26
In his own sense of calling to the ministry ................................. 27
In his priority of preaching the Gospel ....................................... 30
In the power and necessity of prayer ........................................ 33
In his insistence on the “New Birth” ........................................... 33
as a personal experience ......................................................... 33
as something to be preached to everyone ............................... 36
as a defining mark of the Church .............................................. 38
the a necessity of clergy to be converted ................................. 38
In his belief about “experience” ................................................. 40
In his belief in the doctrine of justification by faith alone .......... 41
In his belief in imputation .......................................................... 42
In his insistence on works as a sign of salvation ....................... 44
in the life of believers ............................................................... 44
in his own life ........................................................................... 44
In his high view of the authority of Scripture ......................... 46
In his refusal to leave the Church of England ....................... 48
In his views on the Doctrines of Grace .................................... 49
the doctrine of election ........................................................... 49
the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints ....................... 52
In his practice of speaking the truth in love ......................... 53
In his practice of listening to the advice of other Christians .... 54
Chapter 6  GEORGE WHITEFIELD’S SENSE OF EVANGELICAL ECUMENICITY .................................................................56

His desire to embrace believers of different denominations, He had close fellowship with:

- Anglicans ................................................................. 59
- Methodists .............................................................. 60
- Reformed .................................................................... 61
- Presbyterians ........................................................... 62
- Dutch Reformed ....................................................... 63
- Congregationalists .................................................... 63
- Moravians ............................................................... 63
- Baptists ..................................................................... 65
- Dissenters ................................................................... 66
- Quakers ...................................................................... 67

His concentration on the New Birth and holy living over titles ......................... 69

His discouragement of disputes over non-essentials ....................................... 70

The uniqueness of his feelings and practice of catholicity ............................. 73

His preaching to diverse groups ..................................................................... 73

- colliers (miners) .......................................................... 73
- the poor and illiterate ..................................................... 74
- prisoners ..................................................................... 75
- slaves ......................................................................... 75
- American Indians ....................................................... 76
- sailors and soldiers ...................................................... 77
- nobility ....................................................................... 78
- children ...................................................................... 79

His methods of preaching ............................................................................. 79

Chapter 7  WHITEFIELD’S USE OF WORLDLY MEANS TO ACCOMPLISH HEAVENLY GOALS .........................................................82

His genius for innovation in the changing marketplace of his day .................. 82

His strategic location for ministry ................................................................. 87

His use of theatrical abilities .......................................................................... 87

His participation in “Letter Days” ................................................................. 89

His use of newspapers and magazines for publicity ................................... 90

His outdoor preaching to large audiences made the revivals national events .......................................................... 92

His use of an advance man (William Seward) ............................................. 92

His appreciation of negative publicity ......................................................... 93

His control via publishing .......................................................................... 94

His business relationship with Benjamin Franklin ....................................... 94

His use of different venues for preaching the Gospel ................................... 95

His reliable system of contacts on two continents ...................................... 97
His distribution of material goods………………………………………………100
His relationships with the wealthy for the benefit of the poor………………101
His use of the court system when necessary………………………………….102

Chapter 8  APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION……………………………………105

The legacy of the ministry of George Whitefield……………………………..107
Aspects of the ministry of George Whitefield that the modern
Church should strive to emulate:
  Standing firm for essential doctrine and practices…………………………107
  Embracing brothers and sisters in the faith despite
denominational differences…………………………………………………108
  Using innovative techniques to spread the Gospel………………………110

BIBLIOGRAPHY………………………………………………………………………..111
THE SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT OF GEORGE WHITEFIELD

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Few evangelists in the history of the Church have been as popular in their own time and yet largely forgotten in later generations as the great itinerant preacher of the eighteenth century, George Whitefield. Literally preaching himself to death by delivering approximately thirty thousand sermons on two continents, he pioneered outdoor preaching to thousands of people at a time, without the aid of amplification. This phenomenal man of great energy and conviction led the Great Awakening in Colonial America as well as the evangelical revivals in England, Scotland, and Wales.

Most often, students of history have focused on the work of John and Charles Wesley and Jonathan Edwards; however, it was Whitefield’s work which was the most familiar to his contemporaries. Whitefield often commented that it was his desire to “let the name of Whitefield perish, but Christ be glorified.” It appears that his desire was realized due to the lack of knowledge about him by many modern students of popular history. When addressed, historians have focused on George Whitefield’s great preaching gift, as his most modern definitive biographer, Arnold Dallimore, has done. The definitive nineteenth-century biographer of John Wesley, Luke Tyerman, also completed a two-volume work on Whitefield in which he questioned many of Whitefield’s decisions but declared that his greatest gift was his godliness. Little attention has been given to his gift of spiritual
discernment which allowed him to be used by God to grow and change the Church. Spiritual discernment is a perceptive insight for making God-honoring and God-pleasing decisions. This gift of spiritual wisdom is evident in persons who show in their lives a single-minded goal of the glorification of God that eclipses other relationships and their own personal concerns. An examination of the ministry of the great evangelist, George Whitefield, illustrates his possession of the gift of spiritual discernment in his refusal to compromise essential theological truths and practices of the Christian faith, in his sense of evangelical ecumenicity, and in his use of worldly means to accomplish heavenly goals.

This thesis will analyze the thoughts, writings, and actions of George Whitefield to make a case that he did indeed have a gift of spiritual discernment which showed in his ability to make godly decisions, even at a very young age. He was committed to the Reformed faith and, once he was convinced of its truth, he contended for it faithfully until his death in 1770. This treatment of his life will assume that the Reformed doctrines are the most biblical, evangelical and orthodox.

This work will begin with a brief study of the nature of spiritual discernment as found in the Old and New Testaments. An examination of the theological climate of the eighteenth century will be beneficial to show the world in which Whitefield was entering. It will be necessary to focus on the nature of the Church of England at the time of Whitefield’s ministry to understand his actions and ideas regarding his Anglican loyalties and problems that he encountered within the church.

The initial area of consideration proving Whitefield’s possession of spiritual discernment will be that of his refusal to compromise in areas which he deemed essential theological truths and practices of the true Christian faith. He was unmoving in such issues as the
necessity of the new birth, the doctrines of grace, the doctrine of justification by faith alone, the authority of Scripture, and his belief in works as a sign of salvation. The goal of this section is to illustrate by Whitefield’s own words that he was unmoving in the proper areas of concern. Secondary sources will also be used to evaluate his actions. He followed the example of the early apostles in standing firm for the faith with all his strength, even when it meant speaking out against his closest friends, mentors, and church authorities.

While Whitefield was unmoving in some areas, he was also quite willing to overlook differences with other Christians that he deemed non-essentials. This spirit of catholicity was something unique, especially among Anglicans. He embraced others who loved Jesus Christ and he conducted ministry with them in a spirit of evangelical ecumenicity. This part of the thesis will focus on Whitefield’s relationship with those in his own Anglican body and others of various denominations. He was closely allied with the new “methodists” within the Church of England, Dissenters, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists and even Quakers. He was not so much concerned with titles but was concerned that one should have an experience of the new birth. He was “not willing that any should perish” and so preached to very diverse groups. He had a godly wisdom that enabled him to see the urgency of preaching the Gospel message to all. He was the first to preach to the Kingswood colliers (miners). He also shared the Gospel with the illiterate poor, with black slaves, sailors and soldiers, as well as members of the nobility. His own words will show his spirit of inclusiveness in the Kingdom of God, which influenced the entire evangelical movement.

The final area that will prove Whitefield’s possession of spiritual discernment will be his use of the secular to advance the divine. He used worldly means to accomplish the heavenly goal of spreading the Gospel message of Jesus Christ as far as he could. He was born with an
ability to act and he used it to bring others to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. People listened to Whitefield preach the Gospel message because he made it understandable, interesting, and relevant - with complete sincerity. He used innovative techniques to shine the Word of God into dark places that had not been previously penetrated, such as preaching outdoors to those who would have never entered a church building. Both primary and secondary sources will both be used in this section to evaluate Whitefield’s techniques and gifts.

The legacy of Whitefield’s ministry will be considered and suggestions made about how the modern, evangelical church should emulate his boldness, his desire to embrace other Christian brothers, and his use of innovative techniques to spread God’s Word.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter will examine the primary and secondary source materials in the research covering George Whitefield’s ministry. The primary sources that will be used in this exposition are the Journals and Works of George Whitefield, which include six volumes of his papers and correspondence. He wrote A Short Account of God’s Dealings with the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, an autobiography of his life from his birth until the time that he entered orders, [1714 until 1736]. He also wrote A Further Account of God’s Dealings with the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, covering the months between June 1736 and December 1737. He wrote journals from December 1737 until March 1745. Whitefield recognized that in his youth he had published some thoughts and words that were unwise; therefore, he republished an edited version of his Journals in 1756. In addition, his youthful entries were marked by some exaggerations for which he later apologized.

Dallimore (20th century) and Tyerman (19th century) both wrote such detailed biographies of the Grand Itinerant that any student would be foolish to neglect a thorough study of these scholars’ works. They both relied heavily upon the primary sources that were available to them at the time of their writing.

The Works of George Whitefield include six volumes which were published by Dr. John Gillies of Glasgow. As a long-time acquaintance of Whitefield, Gillies gathered his literary papers after Whitefield’s death; however, Gillies did not give introductory notes nor
explanations of Whitefield’s works. As a result nothing was given to help the reader understand the context of the documents. In addition, three volumes include Whitefield’s correspondence without names of the recipients; only initials are given. Admittedly the omission of this valuable information and the loss of Whitefield’s original papers, have made it very difficult for Whitefield scholars. Fortunately, many Whitefield biographers have studied the internal evidence of the letters and have determined the identity of some recipients.

Dr. Gillies also completed the first biography of Whitefield in 1772 entitled Memoir of George Whitefield. Having known Whitefield for almost thirty years, Gillies was able to obtain first-hand information about Whitefield from his and Whitefield’s contemporaries. Sadly, the book is only 357 pages and failed to address many areas of Whitefield’s life.

Several of Whitefield’s sermons are included in Select Sermons of George Whitefield. To introduce the sermons British theologian J.C. Ryle offered an account of Whitefield’s life, highlighting his great gifts. Also included in this volume is a “Summary of Doctrine Taught by George Whitefield,” which was written by R. Elliot, who was converted under Whitefield’s ministry and even became a minister himself. Six of Whitefield’s most important sermons are collected in this book including, “Repentance,” “The Lord Our Righteousness,” “The Seed of the Woman and the Seed of the Serpent,” “Walking with God,” and “The Good Shepherd – a Farewell Sermon.” One of the limitations of this study is the fact that Whitefield often spoke extemporaneously and did not have written sermons unless an auditor recorded his words. In Whitefield’s sermons one learns about his theological ideas and illustrations, but it is impossible to know how he delivered his sermons.
Many have tried to describe his voice and inflection, but only by hearing him with one’s own ears could one truly understand Whitefield’s oratory gift.

Scholars of Whitefield owe a great debt to Dr. Digby Jones of Quinta Press in Shropshire, England for his work of collecting the works of Whitefield and placing them on a CD. This is an invaluable tool for the students of Whitefield. This CD includes six volumes of *The Works of George Whitefield*, which were edited by Dr. Gillies for publication in 1771. This CD also includes facsimiles of several biographies of Whitefield included those completed by Tyerman, Andrews, Gillies, Philips, and Gledstone. Whitefield’s *Ancedotes* is also part of the collection.

The biographical works about Whitefield have been completed by both Reformed and Arminian scholars. The Reformed authors are usually sympathetic with Whitefield while the Arminians usually look upon Wesley as the greater of the two evangelists. The most common area where authors take the side of one or the other Methodists is in their controversy regarding the doctrines of grace. A Reformed Baptist minister, Arnold Dallimore (1911-1998) completed the most comprehensive secondary source of Whitefield’s life. This two-volume work is entitled *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the 18th Century Revival*. The first volume covers the years from 1714 through 1740 and the second volume covers from 1741 to 1770, the time of Whitefield’s death. Dallimore relied heavily upon Whitefield’s letters, journals and sermons for this massive work. His works shows his admiration for Whitefield and his work of ministry, but he does not shrink from discussing Whitefield’s shortcomings. Dallimore also completed a short, condensed version of his two-volume work which describes the highlights of Whitefield’s life and ministry.
Prior to Dallimore’s 1200-page work, the most thorough biography of Whitefield was completed in the nineteenth century by an Arminian, the Methodist clergyman Luke Tyerman (1819 or 1820 – 1889). This work is also a large two-volume treatise on the entire life of Whitefield which Tyerman wrote after his three-volume treatment of the life of Wesley. As a devoted follower of Wesley, Tyerman did not hide his bias in Wesley’s favor when discussing his dispute with Whitefield; however, Tyerman clearly moved from a critical attitude toward Whitefield to an admiration and appreciation for the Grand Itinerant. Tyerman relied heavily on Whitefield’s Works and Journals. Furthermore, Tyerman’s volumes are not easy to find today; however, they are available on the CD by Quinta Press in England.

A biography entitled Selina – Countess of Huntindgon: Her Pivotal Role in the 18th Century Evangelical Awakening, has been authored by Faith Cook. This book chronicles the life of Selina Hastings who greatly affected the evangelical Awakening of the eighteenth century. Cook used many primary source letters to give a portrait of Selina who was one of Whitefield’s most ardent supporters. Selina even called upon Whitefield to serve as her personal chaplain, thus allowing him the opportunity to serve as an itinerant.

J. J. Ellis completed a short biography of Whitefield but the date of publication is not given. Librarians from both Reformed Theological Seminary and Dallas Theological Seminary estimate a date of 1938. This is a sympathetic treatment of Whitefield’s life.

In 1991 Dr. Harry Stout of Yale University published The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism asserting that Whitefield’s success came about primarily because of his theatrical abilities and persuasive power. While many times recognizing Whitefield’s sincerity, Dr. Stout assumes that Whitefield’s goal was his own
personal prominence and self-promotion. He does recognize Whitefield’s oratory skills and defines him as one of the most popular figures of the English-speaking world of his day.

Similarly, Frank Lambert of Purdue University describes Whitefield as self-promoter in his book entitled *Pedlar in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals*. Lambert argues that Whitefield’s success came largely because of his publicity campaign. This book is a case study “into the cultural ramifications of the consumer revolution” (p. 9). Lambert argues that Whitefield exploited the consumer revolution to sell his spiritual goods and that he was a genius at using the print media. He calls Whitefield a “pioneer in the commercialization of religion” (p. 9), and describes many of his marketing techniques. Lambert does assert that Whitefield had pious motives in his ministry and praises Whitefield’s use of the marketplace.

Mark Noll of Wheaton College considered Whitefield’s ministry is the first of his five-volume history of evangelicalism entitled *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys*. While following the growth and development of evangelicalism in Great Britain and America between the 1730’s and the 1790’s, Noll defines evangelicalism by four components: conversion, the Bible, missionary activity and the atonement of Christ. He argues that the time period (1730 – 1790) defined the evangelical approach to Christianity. Whitefield ministry took place within the years in consideration and Noll finds that Whitefield articulated the defining principle of Protestant evangelicalism – an unswerving belief in the new birth. He described Whitefield’s sense of evangelical ecumenicity and flexibility with respect to church forms and titles.

In *Uncontested Boundaries: Itinerancy and the Reshaping of the Colonial American Religious World*, author Timothy Hall explores the changes that came about in America
because of itinerancy. He argues that it was the itinerant preachers who were catalysts for dramatic change in the religious practice and social order of the New World. He shows that itinerancy in the 1740’s came about as a result of Britain’s growing commercial empire. Recognizing Whitefield as the most celebrated of the itinerants, Hall finds that Whitefield’s ministry, as well as others like him, brought about changes in American society. Americans developed a new mindset because of new mobility and multiculturalism.

The Methodist scholar, Timothy L. Smith considered the differences between Whitefield and Wesley in a number of works including a book entitled, *Whitefield and Wesley on the New Birth*, and a journal article exploring “George Whitefield and Wesleyan Perfectionism.” As a Methodist, Smith maintained that Whitefield merely misunderstood Wesley’s ideas and that the two founders of Methodism were actually closer on doctrine than generally believed.

Many journal articles also praise or criticize Whitefield based on the author’s views on the doctrines of Grace. Dr. R. Scott Clark of Westminster Theological Seminary praises Whitefield’s ministry and claims that he was a pioneer in the modern methods of mass evangelism in an article entitled “At Work in the Fields of the Lord” in the Reformed monthly periodical *Tabletalk* (October 2003). This particular issue is devoted to the ministry and work of George Whitefield and contains several articles of interest to the student of Whitefield including, “Dear John” by Curt Daniel which examines the controversy between Whitefield and Wesley noting Wesley’s inconsistencies. Russ Pulliam’s article entitled “Seeds of the Gospel” addresses how Whitefield’s evangelism laid the foundation for social changes in the future, including his influence upon the abolitionist William Wilberforce.

In 1973 Professor Stephen Stein of Indiana University wrote an article considering Whitefield’s views and actions toward slaves. He hypothesized that Whitefield was the
author of a 1743 anonymous letter entitled *A Letter to the Negroes Lately Converted to Christ in America*. He discussed Whitefield’s ambiguity in his attitude toward blacks and asserted that the anonymous letter reflected insensitivity to the human rights of slaves. Stein claimed that Whitefield became fearful of slaves because of specific incidents in his travels through the southern colonies and Bermuda. Stein admitted that the evidence directly linking Whitefield with the letter was scanty but held that Whitefield could not be considered a great humanitarian because his philanthropy was often purchased at the price of men’s freedom. Stein discussed Whitefield open letter to the residents of the southern colonies dated January 23, 1740 where Whitefield castigated the slave holders for their treatment of their slaves. Whitefield stopped short of condemning the institution of slavery and later did become a slaveholder.

In the dissertation *Whitefield and His Critics*, Princeton scholar Roderic Pierce, examined the criticism that Whitefield’s contemporaries leveled against him. While exploring the complaints that Whitefield was guilty of enthusiasm, antinomianism, having unnecessary scruples, maladministration of humanitarian funds, eliciting excessive emotion, and abetting disorder, Pierce identified Whitefield’s critics as conservatives who did not appreciate his part in the disturbance of the status quo. Pierce believed that some of the criticisms of Whitefield were valid but that his detractors failed to appreciate his “singleness of heart, his wide love for mankind, and his positive Christian influence throughout English-speaking lands” (p. 3).

During a commemoration of the 225th anniversary of Whitefield’s death, Geoffrey F. Nuttall gave an address to the congregation of Whitefield Memorial Church. This tribute was published in *Churchman* and praised the Grand Itinerant’s persistence, devotion and his
remarkable preaching skills. He spoke of Whitefield’s singleness of purpose and his influence upon the following generation. Addressing the Grand Itinerant’s preaching skills, Nuttall spoke about Whitefield’s simplicity of language and use of illustrations.

Reformed teacher, J.I. Packer, wrote a short article entitled “Great George” which appeared in *Christianity Today* in 1986. Counting Whitefield as one of Gloucester’s noblest sons, Packer explained that he and Whitefield were from the same town and university. He placed Whitefield in a preaching class by himself - even before the great Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Noting Whitefield’s gift of communication, Packer expressed his own admiration for the evangelist and desire for new revival.

In 2000 Dr. James Schwenk of Evangelical School of Theology presented a paper entitled “‘And the Holy Catholic Church’: A Paradigm for Evangelical Catholicity,” holding up Wesley and Whitefield as examples to contemporary Evangelicals of looking beyond denominations in an effort to recognized true religion of the heart. While showing his own bias toward the Arminian viewpoint, Schwenk delineated the differences between Whitefield’s Calvinism and Wesley’s Arminianism, arguing that their differences were more of a matter of emphasis than complete disagreement. In holding up the two giants as examples of evangelical ecumenicity, Schwenk found that neither man sacrificed the sanctity of their theological systems and found that they could work together.

An article by Billy Vick Bartlett of Baptist Bible College appeared in the *Fundamentalist Journal* in November 1985 which described Whitefield as a “Gospel Rover.” Bartlett considered the conditions in America at the time of the Great Awakening and saw Whitefield as the revival’s “most prolific purveyor of truth.” While briefly tracing Whitefield’s life from his birth in Gloucester to his death in America on September 29, 1770, Bartlett wrote of
the impact of the ministry of the evangelist on America, including changed habits, new freedom from ecclesiastical as well as political shackles, and the spread of the gospel across the continent.

Susan O’Brien authored an article entitled “A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735-1755,” where she examined the broad appeal of the revivals of the eighteenth century. In looking beyond the divine inspiration of the revivals, O’Brien explored the new techniques that Whitefield and his contemporaries used to fulfill their mission, including publishing and corresponding via letters. Looking to the international dimension of evangelicalism in the transatlantic world of Whitefield’s time, O’Brien concluded that historians err when they focus solely on local events to explain the revivals.

A concise history of Christianity was completed in two volumes by Justo González. The second volume entitled *The Story of Christianity*, contains information useful for understanding the philosophical and theological milieu of Whitefield’s England.

As a leader in the great revivals of the eighteenth century, libraries should be replete with works and articles about Whitefield but they are not. Fortunately, there seems to be an increasing interest in the Grand Itinerant which may lead to more popular curiosity about his mission, his life and his God.
CHAPTER 3
SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

Spiritual discernment is one of the necessary gifts which God gives to his servants to enable them to make God-honoring and God-pleasing decisions. This perceptive insight can be observed in persons who have a single-minded, unselfish aim to bring glory to God. This desire to possess proper godly beliefs and actions overshadows all other relationships and self-concern. Spiritual discernment involves knowing what God desires an individual to accomplish for His kingdom. Ben Campbell Johnson of Columbia Theological Seminary defines discernment as “the process of determining what is God’s call to us and what is not….Hearing God’s call bestows an honor unequaled upon human beings. This incomparable beckoning raises us to our true dignity as creatures made in the image and likeness of God.”

Pierre Wolff defines discernment as “the process of making choices that correspond as closely as possible to objective reality, that are as free as possible from our inner compulsions, and that are closely attuned to the convictions of our faith.” He goes on to say that discernment is “a concrete way of dealing with daily reality that leads to making choices that affect our lives and the lives of others.”

Exercising Christian spiritual discernment has been a vital ingredient in advancing, defending, and maintaining the ministry of the church throughout history. Possessing godly wisdom and discernment led St. Augustine to contend against Pelagianism, Athanasius to struggle against the Arian heresy, and Martin Luther to be convinced that justification by faith alone was the “article by which the church stands or falls.”

The Old Testament book of Proverbs teaches that wisdom and discernment are gifts bestowed by God. The author of Proverbs asserts that the goal of gaining wisdom is to allow the man of God to be enabled to make responsible decisions:

*The Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the path of justice and watching over the way of his saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you.* (Proverbs: 2: 6-11).

The same godly-inspired teacher notes that the one who finds wisdom and understanding understands that it is more precious than silver, gold, and jewels (Proverbs 3: 14-15).

The author of Ecclesiastes relates obedience to discernment, wisely declaring that “whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way.” (Ecc. 8:5) The translators of the King James Version use the word “discerneth” rather than “know” as translated in modern versions.

There are many characters in the Old Testament who exhibited the possession of the gift of spiritual discernment, most notably Joseph, Samuel and Daniel. Joseph showed godly decision-making when he refused to commit adultery with Potiphar’s wife, knowing that had he done so, he would have been committing “great wickedness and sin against God” (Genesis 39: 9). Joseph’s wisdom and understanding were seen by Pharaoh who gave him an
exalted decision-making position in the Egyptian government after interpreting the leader’s dream. Joseph did not fail to give God the glory for the interpretation, amazingly leaving Pharaoh to declare “since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are” (Genesis 41: 39). The late Dr. James Montgomery Boice noted the relationship between Joseph’s discernment and the presence of God’s Holy Spirit in him.

Joseph also exercised spiritual discernment in his understanding of God’s sovereignty in his own, and the life of others affected by the famine in the region. He told his guilt-ridden brothers who had sold him into slavery, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.” (Genesis 50: 20)

The judge and prophet Samuel exhibited the gift of spiritual discernment in leading the nation of Israel in the days when Yahweh was their only king. He had the insight to realize the consequences that would result if the nation had a king like the other nations around them. Samuel told the people in 1 Samuel 8: 10 - 18 that the kings would take their sons and daughters to fight wars and work in their palaces. They would take the best of the land, vineyards, flocks, livestock, and servants. During his farewell address Samuel told the people of Israel to follow the LORD and to “serve the LORD with all your heart. And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. For the LORD

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will not forsake his people, for his great name’s sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself. Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and right way” (1 Samuel 12: 20b-23). These words show Samuel’s recognition of the indispensable nature of prayer, the significance of the covenant, and the priority of serving God. Samuel also boldly and willing spoke the truth to King Saul when Saul foolishly made the unlawful sacrifice at Gilgal as recorded in 1 Samuel 13: 13 – 14.

The prophet Daniel showed divinely-inspired acumen in diplomatically refusing to compromise God’s dietary laws in Daniel 1. Commentator Gleason Archer, Jr., in noting the young Hebrew’s God-pleasing discernment, observed that it was Daniel who “was the first to make up his mind… to refuse the food from the king’s table and then to communicate his settled resolve to the other three.” Daniel likewise continued to pray to Yahweh when conniving officials passed legislation forbidding prayer to anyone except King Darius, as recorded in Daniel 6. He resolved to follow the worship of God with little regard to his own safety - a decision that led him into the lions’ den but brought about the ultimate glorification of God. Daniel was also perceptive enough to interpret hidden meanings within Scripture revealing that the appointed time of exile (70 years) was close to completion. This knowledge led him to pray beautiful words of supplication on behalf of the fellow members of God’s covenant as recorded in Daniel 9.

Likewise, in the New Testament the apostle Paul clearly illustrated a possession of the gift of spiritual discernment in speech and action. He made God-honoring decisions in his refusal to compromise, in his delivering of sermons to the Gentiles, and in his use of worldly

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means to accomplish heavenly goals. He cared little for his own personal safety but much for the exaltation of Christ Jesus. Paul refused to compromise the truth of the Gospel and disappointedly related to the Galatians his astonishment that they were turning to another gospel. He sternly exhorted them that “even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). He was not afraid to take Peter to task for Peter’s hypocritical practice of eating with Gentiles until the Jews arrived from Jerusalem, thereby showing his fear of the circumcision party (Gal. 2:12). Paul spoke the truth to the Jews who were assembled in the Temple in Jerusalem just prior to his arrest, and later to Governor Felix, King Agrippa, Bernice, and countless others of various ranks and backgrounds. He instructed the Ephesian believers to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

Carrying the Gospel to and embracing the Gentiles when the Jews would not listen to his message, Paul wrote beautifully of the “mystery” that the “Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things” (Eph. 3: 6-9). He showed discernment in his humility in recognizing the honor of God using him to be the apostle to the Gentiles. John Calvin explained that “while Paul held the office of apostleship in common with others, it was an honour peculiar to himself to be appointed
apostle to the Gentiles.”⁵ He was willing to be beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned, hated – all for the sake of carrying the message of the love of Christ to all.

Paul employed worldly means for evangelical endeavors when he wisely used his advantage as a Roman citizen to accomplish his goal of spreading the Gospel. He made his special status known to the Roman official when he was attacked by an angry mob in Jerusalem. A Roman tribune ordered Paul to be flogged “but when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, ‘Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?’” (Acts 22:25). Likewise, the great apostle appealed his case to Caesar when he was held in prison, which providentially allowed him to preach the Gospel to kings, governors, and even to those in Caesar’s household.

Paul employed a variety of methods to attract different types of persons to Christ. He spoke of doing whatever he had to do to win people to Christ as told the Corinthians:

*I have made myself a servant to all, that I may win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win the Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though myself not being under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings (1 Cor. 9:19b – 22).*

While trying to persuade the philosophers on Mars Hill, Paul referred to their own objects of worship that included an altar with an inscription reading “to an unknown god.” He used the opportunity to inform them that the “unknown god” is truly known and is “the God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, [who] does not live in temples made by man,” (Acts 17:24). The exercise of Paul’s gift of spiritual discernment

continued to bless the church as those persons responding to the message of his Gospel continued to share it with new generations.

All the Biblical characters considered in this chapter answered God’s call, thus resulting in His glorification. The God-pleasing choices that they made affected the lives of countless individuals – from the famine-ridden Egyptians and Hebrews of Joseph’s day who were spared from death, to the Gentiles who were included in the family of faith as a result of Paul’s God-honoring actions and beliefs. The wise decisions of many saints described in God’s Word have inspired others throughout history to follow their example and earnestly contend for the faith. As a result, countless God-fearing Christians have exercised the gift of spiritual discernment in their own generations, including Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, and George Whitefield – men used by God to bring about great changes in the evangelical church of the eighteenth century.
CHAPTER 4

THE THEOLOGICAL CLIMATE IN ENGLAND IN THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

George Whitefield entered the stage of British Christianity at a time when his spiritual gifts were sorely needed. The Church of England was failing in its evangelical mandate because of several factors, including the influence of the philosophy of Deism, its latitudinarianism, its fear of emotionalism, and its unwillingness to reach the unchurched masses. The problems of the Anglican Church of Whitefield’s day dated to the 1660’s when the monarchy was restored after the Puritan Revolution under Oliver Cromwell. In the 1660’s the nation violently rejected Puritanism and as a result, licentiousness became rampant. The nation faced serious spiritual declension and a virtual war against Biblical Christianity. It was a time of massive alcohol abuse with the “gin craze,” indigence, slave trading, dueling, and criminal behavior, as well as violence, inhumanity and heartlessness.

Introduced into England during this time, Deism taught that God is merely a first cause, something akin to a master clockmaker who started the clock and then left it alone. “This Deity, they said, had revealed himself only in creation and man’s sole responsibility toward Him was that of recognizing His being. This vague contemplation they termed Natural Religion, and strangely enough, they claimed that it, and it alone, was true Christianity.”

Lord Herbert of Cherbury was the first great figure of Deism. He believed that any true religion must be common to all mankind and not based upon particular revelations, nor on

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historical events, but only natural instinct.\(^7\) John Toland published a work entitled, *Christianity not Mysterious, or a Treatise Showing that there Is Nothing in the Gospel Contrary nor above It, and that no Christian Doctrine Can Be Properly Called a Mystery.* In 1730 Matthew Tindal published *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, which made Deism popular.

According to González, “Deism fought on two fronts. On the one hand, it opposed the narrow dogmatism that had taken hold of most branches of Christianity. On the other, it tried to refute the easy skepticism of those who, tired of the quibbling of the theologians, simply abandoned all religion. But many Christians, while not narrowly dogmatic, were uneasy with the manner in which Deism tended to discount the significance of particular historical events and revelation, for this discounted the significance of Jesus Christ.”\(^8\)

Dallimore argued that since Englishmen had already rejected the idea of moral restraint Deism proved especially welcome. “It removed from their thoughts the God of the Bible, the God of holiness and justice whom the Puritans had preached, and substituted this vague Deity found, as they believed, in nature. In its assertion that man was not held responsible for his actions and that there was no judgment day, it rationalized the *sin with impunity* concept, and, as a result, was widely received.”\(^9\)

Some of the apologists of the Church of England, including Bishops Berkeley and Warburton, replied to the Deists but only in a defensive, intellectual and cold manner. Dallimore criticized the apologists for their “unwillingness to mount a mighty offensive against sin and unbelief, Deism alone took the initiative and the Church politely replied. English Christianity proved itself to be little more than a religious ethic, sedate and timid – a

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8 Ibid., 190.
9 Dallimore, I:21.
disposition admirably exemplified in Dr. John Tillotson, Archbishop from 1691 to 1694—and this remained the vogue until challenged by the militant evangelism of the revival.”

Because many in the Anglican Church had a broad toleration of different ideas, or followed a policy of latitudinarianism, philosophical ideas such as Deism became accepted. Noll observed that “the Church of England seemed to be fertile ground for latitudinarian ideas that troubled serious believers of whatever sort, including the early evangelicals.”

Many of the rank and file of the Anglican clergy in the early eighteenth century accepted Deism and debated about the deity of Christ. It was “not uncommon for them to drone its [Deism] tenets from their pulpits. And even among better men, doctrines that had once been considered essential to Christianity were regarded as open to dispute, and for more than half a century a great debate over the Deity of Christ – the Trinitarian Controversy – was waged within the Church.”

The church was fearful of any emotionalism, or enthusiasm as it was called in that day. There seemed to be a cold orthodoxy and emphasis upon morality, rather than a changed life because of a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. Historian Mark Noll recorded that:

> In reaction to what they regarded as overzealous enthusiasm of Puritanism and the coercive tyranny of Roman Catholicism, a considerable number of Anglican intellectuals were proposing a calmer, more self-controlled, more reasonable religion. The sermons of Archbishop Tillotson, which were read widely in Britain and the colonies for more than a generation after his death in 1694, stressed duty, human effort and common morality much more than original sin, a substitutionary atonement and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The truths of the Gospel were not being widely preached in the Church of England pulpits. Luke Tyerman recorded that prior to Whitefield, “speaking generally, these truths [the need

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10 Ibid., 22.
12 Dallimore, I:22-23.
for regeneration, repentance, original sin, etc.] had been forgotten, and were not preached in the churches and chapels of England. Whitefield preached them with a fervour which shewed that he believed them.”\textsuperscript{14}

The parishioners in Whitefield’s day were not accustomed to hearing the Gospel preached with feeling and power. J. C. Ryle, discussing the uniqueness of Whitefield’s message to the churches of his day and the reason for his popularity in London, wrote that, “the plain truth is that a really eloquent, extempore preacher, preaching the pure gospel with most uncommon gifts of voice and manner, were at that time an entire novelty in London. The congregations were taken by surprise and carried by storm.”\textsuperscript{15} Roderic Pierce noted that “at once Evangelicalism emphasized and spread across Great Britain an experimental type of Christianity involving the heart at a time when religion had directed its appeal to the intellect.”\textsuperscript{16}

There were great numbers of people in Britain who were largely forgotten by the Church of England, including the poor of the nation. People were broken because of excessive gin drinking and the inability or unwillingness of people to work. Lawlessness became rampant and hangings made for public entertainment. In offering his evaluation of the spiritual climate of Whitefield’s times, Dallimore argued that the churches of England had failed in their lack of spiritual authority, lack of earnestness and lack of power. He wrote, “Furthermore, they had failed at a time when they were most sorely needed. Subjected to the effects of Restoration licentiousness, and robbed of a sense of the reality of God by Deism, the people of England stood more in need of the Gospel of Jesus Christ than at any time since

the Reformation. But they were denied the message of its transforming power and, as a result, found themselves in the bondage of sinful habit.”17

Conditions in the American Colonies at the initiation of Whitefield’s ministry were no better than in England. Billy V. Bartlett recorded that “by 1725 the American Colonies were a morass of political ferment, economic bondage, spiritual decline, and ecclesiastical decadence. Historians point to the frontier dynamic, replete with brutalizing wars, lewd entertainments, a mobile population, and a dearth of churches in newly settled areas, as the cause of the extreme immorality evidenced in that era.”18

It was in this troubled spiritual environment that George Whitefield initiated his ministry and became known as the “father of modern evangelism.” He looked to God for strength and wrote in 1735 at the youthful age of twenty, “…I should be thankful ‘That God would finish the good work he has begun in me, that I may never seek nor be fond of worldly preferment; but employ every mite of those talents it shall please God to entrust me with, to his glory and the church’s good, and likewise, that the endeavours of my friends to revive true-religion in the world, may meet with proper success.”19

CHAPTER 5
WHITEFIELD’S REFUSAL TO COMPROMISE IN AREAS THAT HE DEEMED ESSENTIAL THEOLOGICAL TRUTHS AND PRACTICES

George Whitefield’s possession of the gift of spiritual discernment is most clearly seen in his refusal to compromise in theological ideas and practices that he deemed to be essential truths of the Christian faith. This gift of spiritual discernment allowed him to know when to negotiate and when to stand firm in beliefs and actions. He understood that the purpose of his life was to exalt Christ and he did so with the energy, stubbornness, and zeal of the apostle Paul who proclaimed that his only purpose was to “know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). Dr. Geoffrey F. Nuttall, noting Whitefield’s single-mindedness, observed that “Whitefield’s life is extraordinarily narrow in its consistency, persistence, and devotion; and it was not a long life.”

Nuttall went on to surmise that the cause of Whitefield’s remarkable preaching was his singleness of purpose, noting that “Whitefield found Jesus everywhere; he found him everywhere in the Bible, in the Old Testament no less than the New, through an allegorical mode of interpretation which gave scope for the vivid use of imagination; he found him everywhere, no less, in his own everyday experience; and his one consuming desire was to bring others to Jesus.”

Whitefield’s co-laborer, and someone with whom he refused to concede on several biblical issues, John Wesley, preached Whitefield’s funeral sermon. Customarily one’s greatest attributes and accomplishments are lauded during a eulogy, and Wesley did not

21 Ibid., 322.
depart from this custom. His respect and high regard for Whitefield were evident when he said in the funeral remarks that Whitefield was “immoveable in the things of God, or wherever his conscience was concerned. None could persuade, any more than affright him, to vary in the least point from that integrity, which was inseparable from his whole character, and regulated all his words and actions.”

At the time of his death, Whitefield had served in the ministry for over thirty-five years. Not wanting to take office prior to receiving godly confirmation, Whitefield initially had doubts about entering the ministry. When he did receive the needed confirmation he took his vows very seriously. His angst in making the life-changing decision ultimately became so clear to him that he recalled it in detail years later in the final sermon that he preached in London. He related that:

> I never prayed against any corruption I had in my life, so much as I did against going into holy orders so soon as my friends were for having me go; and Bishop Benson was pleased to honour me with peculiar friendship, so as to offer me preferment, or do any thing for me. My friends wanted me to mount the church betimes, they wanted me to knock my head against the pulpit too young; but how some young men stand up here and there and preach, I do not know how it may be to them; but God knows how deep a concern entering into the ministry and preaching was to me; I have prayed a thousand times, till sweat has dropped from my face like rain, that God, of his infinite mercy, would not let me enter the church before he called me to, and thrust me forth into his work… I remember praying, wrestling and striving with God; I said I am undone, I am unfit to preach thy great name, send me not, pray, Lord, send me not yet. I wrote to all my friends in town and country, to pray against the bishop’s solicitations, but they insisted I should go into orders before I was twenty-two. After all their solicitations these words came into my mind, ‘My sheep hear my voice, and none shall pluck them out of my hand.’ O may the words be blessed to you, my dear friends, that I am parting with, as they were to me when they came warm upon my heart, then, and not till then, I said, ‘Lord, I will go, send me where thou wilt.’

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Even though due to his youthfulness Whitefield was reluctant to enter the ministry of the Church of England, he found that his conscience was clear to do so. He illustrated “Berean-like” insight at the young age of twenty-one, writing “in the meanwhile, having before made some observations upon the thirty-nine Articles, and proved them by Scripture, I strictly examined myself by the qualifications required for a minister, in St. Paul’s epistle to Timothy, and also by every question that I know was to be publicly put to me at the time of my ordination.”

Whitefield was ordained as a deacon of the Church of England on June 20, 1736 and as a priest on January 20, 1739. Upon entering the ministry, his call became Whitefield’s first priority until his final days in 1770. The Methodist historian of the eighteenth century, Luke Tyerman, expressed the wish that others entering the ministry of his day had possessed the same sense of commitment as George Whitefield and noted the uncompromising nature of Whitefield in his sense of call. He recorded his hope:

> that preachers now had more of the uncompromising bold, conscientious fidelity that marked the young evangelist among his townsmen in the Church of St. Mary Crypt, Gloucester! Prophets prophesy, smooth things; and the people love to have it so. It was otherwise with Whitefield. ‘I must tell them the truth,’ said he to his friends only a few hours before he preached his first sermon, ‘I must tell them he truth, or I shall not be a faithful minister of Christ.’ From this he never swerved. To the end of his life it was one of his guiding principles. It often brought upon him the ridicule of wicked wits, and the displeasure of many who imagined themselves Christians; but to all this Whitefield was indifferent.

While carrying on his first year of ministry, Whitefield received a letter from his mentors, the Wesley brothers, requesting that he travel to Georgia to join them in their missionary efforts. Whitefield strongly desired to go but, wisely, would not go without a sense of divine confirmation. He wrote, “I returned once more to Oxford to bid adieu to my friends, who

24 Tyerman, I:43.
25 Ibid., 52.
were as dear to me as my own soul. My resolution at first a little shocked them; but having reason to think from my relation of circumstances, that I had a call from Providence, most of them said, ‘The will of the Lord be done!’” Tyerman observed that “the Rubicon was passed. Young Whitefield at the age of twenty-two, resolved to be a missionary. In the quietude of a small country village, he had time to think and pray about such a calling.”

Whitefield was delayed in going to Georgia because he was waiting to sail with the founder of the colony, James Oglethorpe. He used the time to preach in England where he enjoyed great popularity. He showed spiritual discernment in dealing with his popularity in a spirit of humility and understanding of the pitfalls that could accompany acclaim. He refused to compromise or give in to the human proclivity of man rather than God, maturely writing at the age of twenty-four that:

> The innumerable temptations that attend a popular life, sometimes make me think it would be best for me to withdraw. But then, I consider that He who delivered Daniel out of the den of lions, and the other three children out of the fiery furnace, is able and willing to deliver me out of the fiery furnace of popularity and applause, and from the fury of those, who, for preaching Christ and Him crucified, are my enemies. In His strength, therefore, and at His command, when His providence shall call, I will venture out again. As yet, my trials have been nothing. Hereafter, a winnowing time may come; and then we shall see who is on the Lord’s side, and who dare to confess Christ before men.

Indeed, Whitefield could have used his popularity to make a comfortable life of ministry for himself in London. At the young age of twenty-one he had the offer of a profitable curacy in London. Tyerman theorized that “had he accepted this, he probably, instead of becoming one of the illustrious evangelists of the eighteenth century, would have settled down into an earnest and useful, but unknown, pastor of a parochial church and congregation. The offer,

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26 Ibid, 60-61, quoting from _A Further Account of God’s Dealings with George Whitefield, 1747_, 12.
27 Ibid., 312.
to a penniless young parson, was a tempting one; and the wonder is that it was not eagerly embraced.”28

Arnold Dallimore also noted Whitefield’s unyielding spirit in the area of dealing with his popularity, when he wrote that Whitefield’s “popularity however, could have brought him the widest of esteem had that been his aim. With a little compromise, here and a little accommodation of his message there, with care not to stand too strongly for anything and not to offend anyone, he could have enjoyed almost unbroken good will and could have avoided entirely the life of conflict.”29

Whitefield understood that his first priority was to preach the Gospel. When the Bishop of Gloucester admonished him about participating in other congregations he wrote, “As for declining the work in which I am engaged, my blood runs chill at the very thought of it. I am as much convinced it is my duty to act as I do, as I am that the sun shines at noonday.”30

Likewise, when unable to preach in a church building he took to the fields. After Whitefield’s first trip to America in 1738, he was shut out of the churches for preaching the necessity of the new birth. This was a serious trial to a man who lived to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “While it pained, it failed to paralyze the man; to gag him was impossible. If not allowed to preach in churches, he was determined to preach elsewhere.”31

Many church leaders failed to understand that, according to the biblical accounts, Jesus himself preached in various locations, most of which were outdoors, including his most famous “Sermon on the Mount.” Whitefield saw nothing wrong with preaching outdoors even when it upset ecclesiastical and civil authorities. Mark Noll explained that

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28 Ibid., 59.
29 Dallimore, I:134.
31 Tyerman, I:153.
“although the Wesleys and Whitefield considered themselves faithful sons of the Church, their insistence on gospel preaching – wherever, whenever, however – was proving stronger than their respect for traditional order.”

Whitefield considered himself a “Gospel rover” because of his many venues for preaching. His journal entry for November 6, 1740 shows a sense of duty to “Gospel roving.” He received a letter while he was in Connecticut informing him that a minister was going to Savannah to take his place at the church. He wrote, “This last much rejoiced me having resolved to give up the Savannah living as soon as I arrived at Georgia. A parish and the Orphan House together are too much for me, besides, God seems to shew me it is my duty to evangelize, and not to fix in any particular place.”

He saw that there was no place that he was not called: he wrote with dogged determination that “the whole world is now my parish. Wheresoever my Master calls me I am ready to go and preach His everlasting Gospel. My only grief is that I cannot do more for Christ.”

Dr. Joseph Trapp, an influential Anglican leader in London, preached and published several scathing sermons against Whitefield’s habits of “Gospel roving.” He failed to see the relationship between contemporary Gospel preaching and that of the early apostles who were itinerate preachers. Trapp criticized Whitefield, saying that it was beneath an Anglican clergyman to preach in places other than the church building: “For a clergyman of the Church of England to pray and preach in the fields in the country, or in the streets in the city, is perfectly new, never heard of before;…To pray and preach and sing psalms in the streets.

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33 *Whitefield’s Journals*, 488.
and fields is worse, if possible, than intruding into pulpits by downright violence and breach of the peace.”

Whitefield did not care if his preaching in the field upset mere mortals; he concerned himself with pleasing God as evidenced by his statement “my preaching in the fields may displease some timorous bigoted men, but I am thoroughly persuaded it pleases God and why should I fear anything else!”

Whitefield no doubt understood the significance in Acts 4: 19-20 when Peter and John refused to be silent upon being ordered by the authorities to cease their preaching. He thus revealed the wisdom and fearlessness of the early apostles regarding all who would threaten his ministry. In a conversation with the town bailiff in Tewkesbury, he recorded that:

[he] told me, ‘a certain judge said, he would take me up as a vagrant, were I to preach near him.’ I answered, ‘he was very welcome to do as he pleased; but I apprehended no magistrate had power to stop my preaching, even in the street, if I thought proper.’ ‘No, sir,’ said he, ‘and if you preach here tomorrow, you shall have the constables to attend you.’ After this I took my leave, telling him, ‘I thought it my duty as a minister to inform him, that magistrates were intended to be a terror to evildoers, and not to those who do well.’ And I desired he would be as careful to appoint constables to attend at the next horse-races, balls and assemblies.

Whitefield demonstrated such similar zeal for preaching until the day of his death. He made his seventh and last tour of America in the summer of 1770 while in extremely declining health. His schedule was as hectic as it had always been and even seemed suicidal to some. When asked about his pace, Whitefield insisted that “I would rather wear out than rust out.”

In commenting on Whitefield’s refusal to stop his preaching, Harry Stout noted that “in fact it was entirely consistent with Whitefield’s life and message. He had at all times

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35 Dallimore, I:334.
36 Whitefield’s Journals, 227.
37 Whitefield’s Journals, 297.
demonstrated a callous disregard for his private self, both body and spirit. The preaching
moment engulfed all, and it would continue to do so, for in fact there was nothing else he
lived for.”  

The necessity and power of prayer was another area where Whitefield refused to
compromise. He discerned that he could do nothing apart from communication with God.
He exhorted ministers who were gathered for the Second Conference of the Calvinistic
Methodists in April of 1743, to pray claiming:

O prayer, prayer! It brings and keeps God and man together, it raises man up to
God, and brings God down to man. If you would keep up your walk with God,
pray, pray, without ceasing. Be much in secret, set prayer. When you are about
the common business of life, be much in ejaculatory prayer. Send, from time
to time, short letters post to heaven, upon the wings of faith. They will reach
the very heart of God, and will return to you loaded with blessing.

In his sermon entitled, “Walking with God,” Whitefield told believers how to maintain their
relationship with God through private prayer. He warned his hearers that “a neglect of secret
prayer has been frequently an inlet to many spiritual diseases, and has been attended with
fatal consequences. It is one of the most noble parts of the believers’ spiritual armour.”

One of the most fundamental areas where Whitefield absolutely refused to compromise
was in his insistence on the “new birth.” He believed the words that Jesus spoke to
Nicodemus in John 3:7, “You must be born again.” It is surprising that he faced such
opposition in his own church to preaching this fundamental and biblical doctrine. It was the
doctrine that defined the whole evangelical movement, a movement that started with
revivalists such as Whitefield and Wesley, eventually touching almost every continent. The

39 Ibid., 276.
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key foundation of the movement was the necessity of godliness – but even more, the insistence upon the new birth.\(^{42}\)

In calling for the *experience* of “new birth” Whitefield was using the philosophy of his day--Empiricism--which held that knowledge can only be gained through experience as opposed to innate ideas. Whitefield called for a personal experience of conversion. Harry Stout noticed this relationship with philosophy and the evangelical movement:

In the evangelical parachurch, individual experience became the ultimate arbiter of authentic religious faith. Experience – or, in the term of John Locke, “sensation” came to be the legitimating mark of religion over and against family, communal covenants, traditional membership, baptism, or sacraments. A sensation represented the only avenue for natural knowledge in Lockean epistemology, so the supernatural experience of the New Birth became the sole authentic means to spiritual knowledge in the evangelical revivals.\(^{43}\)

Stout does fail to understand that for Whitefield the *experience* included repentance as well as holy living after the new birth. In his early sermon entitled “On the Nature and Necessity of Our Regeneration or New Birth in Christ Jesus,” Whitefield stated his strong assertion that “to be in Christ was not a ‘bare outward Profession, or being called after his Name. It was rather ‘an Inward Change and Purity of Heart, and Cohabitation of his Holy Spirit.’ It was ‘to be mystically united to him by a true and lively Faith, and thereby to receive spiritual virtue from him, as members of the natural Body do from the Head, or the Branches from the Vine.’”\(^{44}\)

Whitefield defined what he meant by the new birth, as well as the problem of false ideas of the nature of Christianity, in his sermon entitled “The Almost Christian:”

One reason why so many are only almost Christians is, because they set out with notions of religion. Though they live in a Christian country, they

\(^{43}\) Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, 205.
know not what Christianity is. Some place religion in being of this or that communion; more in morality; most in a round of duties; and few, very few, acknowledge it to be, what it really is, a thorough inward change of nature, a divine life, a vital participation of Jesus Christ, an union of the soul with God. Hence, it happens that so many, even of the most knowing professors you converse with them concerning the essence, the life, the soul of religion, and our new birth in Jesus Christ, confess themselves quite ignorant of the matter, and cry out with Nicodemus, ‘How can this thing be?’

Whitefield recorded in his *Journal* his uncompromising spirit in this area as he wrote on May 28, 1739, “[I] Preached, after earnest and frequent invitation, at Hackney, in a field, to about ten thousand people. I insisted much upon the reasonableness of the doctrine of the new birth, and the necessity of our receiving the Holy Ghost in His sanctifying gifts and graces, as well now as formerly.”

The need for regeneration was certainly nothing new in the Church but morality had replaced its teaching in the Church of England. “Whitefield’s doctrine, if not new, was startling. It was seldom preached, was hardly understood, and rarely felt. As Whitefield himself observes, ‘though one of the most fundamental doctrines of our holy religion,’” it was so seldom considered, so little *experimentally* understood by the generality of professors.”

While Whitefield and Wesley battled over several doctrines, especially election and perfection, they agreed on the necessity of the new birth. It was their mutual adherence to this non-negotiable truth that kept the men friends in ministry until Whitefield’s death. As Dr. James L. Schwenk explained, “Whitefield never fully accepted Wesley’s Arminianism, nor did Wesley fully accept Whitefield’s Calvinism. Yet both realized that the message that

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45 Tyerman, I:36, quoting Whitefield’s sermon “The Almost Christian.”
46 *Whitefield’s Journals*, 276.
47 Tyerman, I:79-80.
they preached, the *necessity of experiential faith* in an individual’s life, was more than enough basis for a cordial working and personal relationship.\(^{48}\)

Whitefield’s steadfastness on the necessity of the new birth can be seen in his refusal to read the burial office for a professed unbeliever with whom he had conversed several months, and just two days prior to his death. The last conversation convinced Whitefield that the man was the most professed unbeliever that he had ever met. He even used the man’s death as an opportunity to warn surviving unbelievers.\(^{49}\)

Whitefield preached the doctrine of regeneration with a sense of urgency. Noll, noting the effects of the Grand Itinerant’s call for the necessity of the new birth, explained that “Whitefield’s great effect arose from what he proclaimed about the need for the new birth, but even more from how he proclaimed it – urgently, immediately and as the great question for every hearer *right now.* To Whitefield, formal doctrine was most irrelevant, but not the lived experience of God’s grace in Christ. He preached about the matters like no Londoners had ever heard before.”\(^{50}\)

Fearlessness and boldness in confronting all types of persons about their need for regeneration marked Whitefield’s ministry. He refused to compromise in his call for the new birth to *all* persons he encountered. His *Journals* reveal his practice of speaking to many persons about this vital need. While traveling through Virginia he described a conversation he had with a woman who owned an establishment he visited. He told her

> that we must be born again. She said that was true, but it was to be done *after* death; also she thought God was very merciful and that it would be no harm to swear by her faith. I could not help remarking how the devil loves to represent God as *all mercy,* or *all justice,* when persons are awakened he would if


\(^{49}\) Whitefield’s *Journals*, 163-164.

possible tempt them to despair, when dead in trespasses and sin he tempts them to presume. Lord, preserve us from making shipwreck against either of these rocks. Give us such a sense of Thy justice as to convince us that we cannot be saved if we continue in sin, and such a sense of Thy mercy as may keep us from despair, through a living faith in Thy dear Son Who is the Saviour of sinners!  

Whitefield not only felt the need to preach the new birth but he also enjoyed doing so. While on board the Whitaker during his first passage to America, Whitefield recorded that on Sunday, January 15, he “was much enlarged in preaching to the soldiers on this Article, *I believe in the Holy Ghost*, - in treating of which, I took occasion to show the nature and necessity of the new birth, a subject on which I delight to dwell.”

The belief that the Church was not just one group or denomination but was constituted by the power of the Holy Spirit moving in believers’ hearts was another non-negotiable in Whitefield’s mind. When the teachings of a revered church leader, John Tillotson, conflicted with his interpretation of teachings of Jesus, Whitefield was uncompromising in his criticism. Tillotson (1630-1694), a latitudinarian Anglican divine who became the archbishop of Canterbury in 1691, demonstrated in his writings a respect for salvation by works. He “stressed duty, human effort and common morality much more than original sin, a substitutionary atonement and the work of the Holy Spirit.” Whitefield understood that the clergyman was highly respected in the Church of England, but he believed that Tillotson’s writing contradicted the Biblical teaching of the new birth, and regarded them as a snare to the souls of men. But having recently heard the testimony of a wealthy South Carolina planter, Hugh Bryan, who stated that he had been kept in ignorance of the Gospel for years by reading Tillotson, he deemed it his responsibility to expose such a danger. Whitefield’s Letter is calm, reasoned, Scriptural, but it contains one exceptional phrase.

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51 *Whitefield’s Journals*, 370.
52 Ibid., 109.
‘Any spiritual man who reads them (his works) may easily see that the
Archbishop knew of no other than a bare historical faith, and as to the
method of our acceptance before God and our justification by faith
alone (which is the doctrine of the Church of England), he certainly
was as ignorant thereof as Mahomet himself.’

When Whitefield returned to England from his first trip to Georgia in 1738 he found that he
was unpopular among many clergy members because of his preaching the necessity of
regeneration. J.C. Ryle concluded that as a result of Whitefield’s insistence on the new birth,
the bulk of the clergy were no longer favourable to him, and regarded him with
suspicion as an enthusiast and a fanatic. They were especially scandalized by his
preaching the doctrine of regeneration or the new birth, as a thing which many
baptized persons greatly needed! The number of pulpits to which he had access
rapidly diminished. Churchwardens, who had no eyes for drunkenness and
impurity, were filled with indignation about what they called ‘breaches of order’.
Bishops who could tolerate Arianism, Socinianism, and Deism, were filled with
indignation at the man who declared fully the atonement of Christ and the work
of the Holy Ghost, and began to denounce him openly. In short, from this period
of his life, Whitefield’s usefulness within the Church of England narrowed rapidly
on every side.

Whitefield’s conviction that ministers needed to be converted drew much harsh criticism,
even though Scripture obviously demanded conversion. Paul clearly taught in many of his
epistles that an unregenerate man could not understand the things of God. He wrote in his
first letter to the Corinthians that “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of
God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually
discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Whitefield recorded in his Journals that “unconverted
ministers are the bane of the Christian Church. I honour the memory of that great and good
man, Mr. Stoddard; but I think he is much to be blamed for endeavouring to prove that

55 Dallimore, I:483-484.
unconverted men may be admitted into the ministry.”

Whitefield also recorded a specific preaching experience that he had at Dr. Sewell’s church in New England,

When I got into the pulpit I saw a great number of ministers sitting around and before me. Coming to these words, ‘Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?’ the Lord enabled me to open my mouth boldly against unconverted ministers…The reason why congregations have been so dead is, because they have dead men preaching to them…How can dead men beget living children? It is true, indeed, that God may convert people by the devil, if he chooses; and so He may by unconverted ministers; but I believe He seldom makes use of either of them for this purpose. No, He chooses vessels made meet by the operations of His blessed Spirit. For my own part, I would NOT lay hands on an unconverted man for ten thousand worlds.

The following journal entry regarding his preaching a meeting-house in Elizabeth Town, Pennsylvania in April, 1740, illustrates Whitefield’s uncompromising spirit regarding the problems of allowing unconverted men to serve as ministers:

Ten Dissenting ministers were present, and two Church ministers; but they did not tarry very long. God gave me much freedom of speech. I dealt very plainly with the Presbyterian clergy, many of whom, I am persuaded, preach the doctrines of grace to others, without being converted themselves. No doubt, some were offended; but I care not for any sect or party of men. As I love all who love the Lord Jesus, of what communion soever; so I reprove All, whether Dissenters, or no Dissenters, who take His Word into their mouths, but never felt Him dwelling in their hearts.

Whitefield’s insistence upon clergy being converted proved to be instrumental in changing the course of the revivals. Dallimore’s contention is that while Whitefield seemed to be a “voice crying in the Wilderness,” his words bore fruit. He wrote that “the idea of the necessity of a converted ministry became one of the great underlying principles of the revival among all denominations it reached, and the entrance of this concept effected changes which continued in force for a century.”

57 Whitefield’s Journals, 478.
58 Ibid., 470.
59 Ibid., 414.
60 Dallimore, I:339.
converted by his ministry and “it was the strong stand against the unconverted in the ministry which God used to that end.”

Whitefield was discerning enough not to believe that everyone who was moved by his sermons would actually experience the new birth at that time or ever. He did not make altar calls nor did he count converts as modern revivalists do to gauge success. Using the methods of the Puritans, he left the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of his listeners. Dallimore noted that Whitefield made application of the Gospel he preached and “looked for the Spirit’s work in arousing the sinner to a deep and even overwhelming sense of his need, but this work he called not conversion, but awakening…He [Whitefield] chose to wait until conversion had been manifested by months of a transformed life, and his attitude is well expressed in his words, ‘Only the judgment morning will reveal who the converts really are.’”

While many persons became emotional as Whitefield preached the need for the new birth, he did not encourage emotional frenzy as did his co-worker John Wesley. Wesley believed that the emotional experiences were confirmation from God that his ministry was effective, but Whitefield discouraged Wesley by writing the following discerning warning:

I cannot think it right in you to give so much encouragement to those convulsions which people have been thrown into under your ministry. Were I to do so, how many would cry out every night! I think it is tempting God to require such signs. That there is something of God in it I doubt not; but the devil I believe, does interpose. I think it will encourage the French Prophets, take people from the written word, and make them depend on visions, convulsions, and c[?], more than on the promises and precepts of the Gospel.

Whitefield was often charged with enthusiasm but he actually believed that the extreme emotional outbursts were satanic in nature. He recorded in his Journals on May 10, 1740,

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61 Ibid, 340.
62 Ibid., 137.
63 Ibid., 328.
64 Ibid., 328, quoting Methodist Magazine, 1849, 165.
about a woman with whom he prayed after she experienced strong spiritual and bodily agonies. He recorded that “such-like bodily agonies, I believe, are from the devil; and now the work of God is going on, he will, no doubt, endeavour by these to bring an evil report upon it. O Lord, for Thy mercy’s sake, rebuke him; and, though he may be permitted to bite Thy people’s heel, fulfill Thy promise, and let the Seed of the Woman bruise his head!”

Despite his skepticism of emotional frenzy as evidence of God’s presence, Whitefield was prophetic in saying that an evil report would be made against him, and indeed he was often blamed for outpourings of emotionalism and enthusiasm. Historian Timothy L. Smith contends that the substance of Whitefield’s famous sermon entitled “The Nature and Necessity of Our Regeneration or New Birth in Christ Jesus,” “belie the charge of enthusiasm so often placed against George Whitefield. Though he always agreed that facing the truth about life and death and eternal salvation deeply stirred the emotions of thinking men and women, he anchored the doctrine of the new birth in the New Testament, as had the great Anglican, William Law.”

With the same God-given fortitude of John Hus and Martin Luther, Whitefield was unmoving in the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Very early in his Christian life, he stood firmly on the foundation of Paul’s teachings in Ephesians 2: 8-9, where the apostle describes that “for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Whitefield was convinced that the doctrine was an Anglican teaching from which the Church of England had strayed. His Journal speaks of his willingness to die for the defense of the doctrine that had claimed the lives of many martyrs in past times.

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65 Whitefield’s Journals, 421.
About this time [age 20] God was pleased to enlighten my soul, and bring me into the knowledge of His free grace, and the necessity of being justified in His sight by faith only. This was more extraordinary because my friends at Oxford had rather inclined to the mystic divinity; and one of them, a dear servant of the Lord, later confessed he did not like me so well at Oxford, as the rest of his brethren, because I held justification by faith only. And yet, he observed, I had most success. But, blessed be God! most of us have been taught this doctrine of Christ, and, I hope, shall be willing to die in the defence of it. It is good old doctrine of the Church of England. It is what the holy martyrs in Queen Mary’s time sealed with their blood, and which I pray God, if need be, that I and my brethren may seal with ours.67

Whitefield preached his final sermon, which continued two hours, in Exeter, Massachusetts on September 29, 1770. He died within hours of speaking of the inefficiency of works to merit salvation. He was visibly in a weakened condition; a listener in the field recorded that Whitefield “rose up sluggishly… [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 get to heaven by works! I would as soon think of climbing to the moon on a rope of sand.’”68

Along with the doctrine of justification by faith only, Whitefield understood that salvation by Christ came through the imputation of His righteousness as a free gift of God’s grace. In one of Whitefield’s most popular sermons entitled “The Lord Our Righteousness,” he discusses the aftermath of the Fall described in Genesis 3:

Here then opens the amazing scene of divine philanthropy, I mean, God’s love to man for behold, what man could not do, Jesus Christ, the Son of his Father’s love, undertakes to do for him… As God, he satisfied, at the same that he obeyed and suffered as man; and being God and man in one person, he wrought out a full, perfect, and sufficient righteousness for all to whom it was to be imputed.69

In this same sermon Whitefield understood that the coverings that God made for Adam and Eve foreshadowed Christ’s covering the sinner through his sacrifice and imputation.

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67 Whitefield’s Journals, 62.
68 Stout, The Divine Dramatist, 279.
to believers. Whitefield contended that:

The righteousness of Jesus Christ is one of the great mysteries which the angels desire to look into, and seems to be one of the first lessons that God taught men after the Fall. For, what were the coats that God made to put on our first parents, but types of the application of the merits or righteousness of Jesus Christ to believers’ hearts? We are told that those coats were made of skins of beasts; and, as beasts were not then food for men, we may fairly infer, that those beasts were slain in sacrifice, in commemoration of the great sacrifice, Jesus Christ, thereafter to be offered. And the skins of the beasts thus slain, being put on Adam and Eve, they were hereby taught how their nakedness was to be covered with the righteousness of the Lamb of God.\(^{70}\)

Whitefield noted the consequences of denying the doctrine of imputation pointing out that doing so contradicts many passages of Scripture, such as Ephesians 2: 8-9, and argued that “it would be endless to enumerate how many texts of Scripture must be false, if this doctrine be not true.”\(^{71}\)

Whitefield maintained that the Christian’s inward communication with the Holy Spirit could only come through the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. After having a conversation with a Quaker preacher while on board the Elizabeth, on September 29, 1739, he recorded that he disagreed with the Quaker about making the light of conscience and the Holy Spirit the same thing and “represented Christ within and not Christ without, as the foundation of our faith; whereas, the outward righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to us, I believe, is the sole fountain and cause of all the inward communications which we receive from the Spirit of God. Oh, that all of that persuasion were convinced of this; till they are, they cannot preach the truth as it is in Jesus.”\(^{72}\)

While Whitefield was firmly convinced of the correctness of the doctrine of imputation, he was equally convinced of the necessity of works as proof of having received Christ’s

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 117.
\(^{71}\) Ibid., 129.
\(^{72}\) Whitefield’s Journals, 335.
righteousness. He insisted that the New Testament teachings only “excluded good works from being any cause of our justification in the sight of God. Doing them, Whitefield declared, was ‘a proof of our having this righteousness imputed to us’ and he warned that ‘an unapplied Christ is no Christ at all.’”

Once again, the best selection to illustrate Whitefield’s belief in good works as proof of salvation appears in his sermon, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” where he boldly maintains that:

The only question should be, whether or not this doctrine of an imputed righteousness does in itself cut off the occasion of good works, or lead to licentiousness? To this we may boldly answer, In no wise. It excludes works, indeed, from being any cause of our justification in the sight of God; but it requires good works as a proof of our having this righteousness imputed to us, and as a declarative evidence of our justification in the sight of men.

Whitefield’s personal sense of morality came from his gratitude to God for the grace of justification. His own life proved that he believed in the words of James when he wrote that “faith without works is dead.” He believed that one who loved Jesus would strive for holiness, for its own sake, and would work for Christ because of love, gratitude, and heavenly rewards.

Whitefield not only preached the necessity of good works but he also practiced what he preached throughout his entire life. His greatest work and love was that of preaching the Gospel to thousands of individuals on two continents, but he also created and sustained the Bethesda Orphanage in Georgia. Frank Lambert noted the importance of the orphanage to Whitefield’s ministry by explaining that “Bethesda took on important symbolic meaning for Whitefield, becoming a visible sign of his view of Evangelicalism: faith in action, a

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75 Pierce, George Whitefield and His Critics, 214.
voluntary outpouring of charity for distant strangers by a community of believers that transcended denominational and national borders.”  

Bethesda was Whitefield’s symbol of practical Christianity and a “visible cause” through which Christians of various denominations could help poor children and Whitefield saw the orphanage as a test of his faith.  

Helping orphans was only one of many charities that the Grand Itinerant chose to support. He also visited prisoners, the poor, the sick - and he helped establish and maintain educational institutions. Eleazar Wheelock received support from Whitefield for his school for boys in Lebanon, Connecticut, a school which included Mohegan Indians students. Whitefield used his influence to persuade the Marquis of Lothian, the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, and Lord Dartmouth to support the Connecticut school, which eventually became Dartmouth College.  

When the library at Harvard College was destroyed by fire, Whitefield acquired donations for the school and obtained replacements for the lost books. Harry Stout noted that Whitefield used his popularity not to accumulate wealth for himself but to raise money for “charitable and educational projects in England and America. Among the beneficiary of his fund-raising were persecuted Protestants in France and in Germany, charity schools all over Britain as well as the colonies, ecumenical church buildings such as the one Franklin proposed for Philadelphia, and a long list of colleges and schools including Harvard…..”  

Whitefield planned to start a college on the grounds of the Orphan House in Savannah, but he encountered problems with the Church of England that further illustrates his

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77 Ibid., 210.  
78 Dallimore, II:430.  
79 Lambert, Pedlar for Divinity, 208.
uncompromising spirit. The Archbishop of Canterbury would not grant him a charter unless the school was Anglican. Prior to his final trip to America in 1769, Whitefield told his Tottenham Court Road Chapel congregation that:

I intended to give up the Orphan House into other hands, God has so ordered it that his Grace the late Archbishop of Canterbury refused me a charter, unless I would confine it to the episcopacy. I could not, in honour, comply with this as Dissenters, and other serious people of different denominations, had contributed towards its support. I would sooner cut off my head than betray my trust. I always meant the Orphan House to keep a broad bottom, for people of all denominations.\(^\text{80}\)

Whitefield firmly held to the doctrine of the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. He could pronounce along with Paul that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16). He made use of the Scripture in all of the ways described by Paul. In his sermon entitled “Walking with God,” Whitefield expounded the danger of compromising the Word of God, preaching that “if we once get above our Bibles, and cease making the written word of God our sole rule both as to faith and practice, we shall soon lie open to all manner of delusion, and be in great danger of making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. Our blessed Lord, though he had the Spirit of God without measure yet always was governed by, and fought the devil with, ‘It is written.’”\(^\text{81}\)

The Grand Itinerant traveled though Ireland and, on one occasion, noted that the Roman Catholic Church kept her members from understanding the truth of God’s Word. In 1738 a conversation with a local Irish woman led him to record in his Journals “the whole commonality almost are of the Romish Profession, and seem to be so very ignorant, that they

\(^{80}\) Tyerman, II:563.
may well be termed the wild Irish. No wonder, when the key of knowledge is taken away from them. Woe unto their blind guides. I can think of no likelier means to convert them from their erroneous principles, than to get the Bible translated into their own native language, ….”

While making his fifth voyage to America, Whitefield had a stopover in the city of Lisbon, Portugal. He happened to be in the city to experience the rituals of Holy Week. He wrote that “Everyday I have seen or heard something that has a tendency to make me thankful for the glorious Reformation.”

He wrote a letter back to his Tabernacle in London describing the events in Lisbon and urging them to be thankful for having the word of God. In a letter dated April 13, 1754 he passionately wrote:

O my dear Tabernacle friends, what a goodly heritage has the Lord vouchsafed you! Bless Him, O bless Him, from your inmost souls, that you have been taught the way to Him, without the help of fictitious saints! Thank Him, night and day, that you are committed to the lovely oracles of God! Adore Him continually for giving you to hear the word preached with power; and pity and pray for those who are led blindfolded by crafty and designing men!

When faced with the charge of “enthusiasm” Whitefield urged his audiences to be Berean-like in searching the Scriptures to confirm his words. His called upon his listeners to “try the suggestions or impressions that [they] may at any time feel, by the unerring rule of God’s most holy word: and if they are not found to be agreeable to that, reject them as diabolical and delusive.”

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82 Whitefield’s Journals, 181.
83 Ibid., 326.
83 Tyerman, II: 331.
84 Ibid., 326.
85 Lambert, Pedlar in Divinity, 190.
One of Whitefield’s supporters wrote, “In opposition to Enthusiasm, he preaches a close adherence to the Scripture, the Necessity of trying all Impressions by them, and of rejecting whatever is not agreeable to them, as Delusions. He applies himself to the Understandings of His Hearers, and then to the Affections.”

George Whitefield spent his entire life as a member of the Church of England. He was ordained as a priest on January 14, 1739 and remained one until his death. He resolutely refused to start a new denomination because he saw himself as correctly adhering to the tenants of the Church. He recorded in his Journals that:

I have never been charged by his Lordship [of London] with teaching or living otherwise than as a true minister of the Church of England. I am close to her Articles and Homilies, which, if my opposers did, we should not have so many dissenters from her. But, it is most notorious, that for the iniquity of the priests the land mourns. We have preached and lived, many sincere persons out of our communion. I have now conversed with several of the best of all denominations; many of them solemnly protest that they went from the Church, because they could not find food for their souls. They stayed among us till they were starved out.

Dallimore argued that Whitefield had no intentions of leaving the Church of England and wrote that “he had, of course, not the slightest thought of forming a new denomination…But Whitefield thought of this movement as particularly within the Church of England. He believed that the doctrines he taught were simply those of her Articles and, having convinced himself (whether rightly or wrongly) that his open-air and itinerant proceedings were not contrary to her laws, he sought to induce other members of the clergy to believe the same things and perform the same work.”

Soon after his conversion Whitefield was convinced of the truth of the doctrines of grace, or Calvinism, though he did not openly preach all of these doctrines until his first trip to

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86 Ibid., 190, quoting the South Carolina Gazette, February 11, 1745.
87 Whitefield’s Journals, 250.
88 Dallimore, I:383.
America where he encountered Jonathan Edwards and other Reformed ministers. Whitefield remarked in a letter in 1739 to his associate Howell Harris, ‘Since I saw you, God has been pleased to enlighten me more in that comfortable doctrine of election, etc. At my return, I hope to be more explicit than I have been. God forbid, my dear brother, that we should shun to declare the whole counsel of God!’”

Throughout his life Whitefield’s gift of spiritual discernment allowed him to know when he had to take a stand, even against those whom he truly loved, and when to fight for the truth of God’s Word. Whitefield developed an uncompromising embrace of the ‘doctrines of grace’ that led to his well-publicized rift with John and Charles Wesley. Whitefield greatly respected and admired the men who had once been his mentors. He mourned greatly their public dispute, but his commitment to God’s truth was higher than his desire for peace at its expense. He was convinced that his own Church of England held to the doctrine of election as evidenced by the seventeenth (of thirty-nine) Articles which states that “Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundation of the world were laid) hath constantly decreed by his counsel, his secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour.”

In reply to a letter from Wesley, Whitefield wrote his beliefs from Savannah on March 26, 1740, whilst attempting to avoid conflict but not wishing to compromise on the doctrines that he held to be true, Whitefield cautioned that

the doctrines of election, and the final perseverance of those that are truly in Christ, I am ten thousand times more convinced of, if possible, than when I saw you last. Honoured Sir, let us offer salvation freely to all by the blood of Jesus; and whatever light God has communicated to us, let us freely communicate to

89 Tyerman, I:314.
90 Dallimore, II:24.
others. I have lately read the life of Luther, and think it is in no wise to his honour, that the last part of his life was so much taken up in disputing with Zuinglius and others; who in all probability equally loved the Lord Jesus, notwithstanding they might differ from him in other points. Let this, dear Sir, be a caution to us. I hope it will to me; for by the blessing of God, provoke me to it as much as you please, I do not think ever to enter the lists of controversy with you on the points wherein we differ.”\(^\text{91}\)

In 1740, Wesley published a sermon titled “Free Grace,” in which he attempted to put a stop to the ideas of Calvinism. He charged that the doctrines were “unbiblical, blasphemous, demonic, and detrimental to holiness and evangelism.”\(^\text{92}\) Dallimore in noting the angst that the rift caused for Whitefield, wrote that “Wesley’s actions placed Whitefield in a very difficult situation. It was not a matter of feeling a personal affront, but rather of standing against the denial of what he believed with all his heart to be the truth of God. ‘I hope nothing will cause a division between me and the Messrs Wesley; he said again, ‘but I must speak what I know and confute error wheresoever I find it.’”\(^\text{93}\)

Whitefield reluctantly responded in print with “A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley in Answer to His Sermon Entitled ‘Free Grace’. Wesley had asserted that people who rejected the doctrine of election had more grounds for assurance of salvation than those who held to it. Whitefield wrote that ‘but without the belief of the doctrine of election, and the immutability of the free love of God, I cannot see how it is possible that any should have a comfortable assurance of eternal salvation.’”\(^\text{94}\)

Whitefield recorded in his Journals his simple and concise explanation of the doctrine of election and illustrated an understanding of the full consequences if the Arminian model be true. He noted that if men examine their own experiences they must come to the conclusion

\(^{91}\) Whitefield’s Works, I:156.
\(^{93}\) Dallimore, I:580, quoting Whitefield’s Works, I: 213.
\(^{94}\) Dallimore, II:60, quoting Whitefield’s Reply to Wesley’s Sermon on Free Grace.
that God chose them and not the other way around. He argued that “if He chose them at all, it must be from all eternity, and that too without anything foreseen in them. Unless they acknowledge this, man’s salvation must be in part owing to the free-will of man; and if so, unless men descend from other parents than I did, Christ Jesus might have died, and never have seen the travail of His soul in the salvation of one of His creatures.”

In the mind of George Whitefield the doctrines of grace stood together as a group and were not separate ideas. He wrote that, “I bless God His Spirit has convinced me of our eternal election by the Father through the Son, of our free justification through faith in His blood, of our sanctification as the consequence of that, and of our final perseverance and glorification as the result of all. These I am persuaded God has joined together; these, neither men nor devils shall ever be able to put asunder.”

Curt Daniel applauded Whitefield for his stance against Wesley and wrote that “Whitefield was right to remind Wesley that both of them were honor-bound to uphold the Calvinism of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. Whitefield was right to try to correct Wesley. In this he was imitating Paul and Peter (Gal. 2), and Aquila and Priscilla with Apollos (Acts 10). Iron sharpens iron, and faithful are the wounds of a friend.”

Another area where Whitefield and Wesley failed to find common ground was in the doctrine of eternal security. Whitefield stood firm in his belief in biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, as did Paul who, in writing to the Philippians, confidently asserted with assuredness that “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). In a letter to his friend James Hervey regarding Wesley’s denial of the subject, Whitefield wrote,

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95 Whitefield’s Journals, 491.
96 Whitefield, Works, I:129.
Poor Mr. Wesley is striving against the stream. Strong assertions will not go for proofs, with those who are sealed by the Holy Spirit, even to the day of redemption. They know that the covenant of grace is not built upon the faithfulness of a poor fallible, changeable creature, but upon the never-failing faithfulness of an unchangeable God. This is the foundation whereon I build; ‘Lord Jesus, I believe, help my unbelief!’ Having once loved me, Thou wilt love me to the end. Thou will keep that safe, which I have committed unto Thee. Establish Thy people more and more in this glorious truth.98

He also recorded in his Journals that “it is a dreadful mistake to deny the doctrine of assurances…Not only righteousness and peace, but joy in the Holy Ghost, which is the consequence of assurance, is a necessary part of the Kingdom of God within us; and though all are not to be condemned who have not an immediate assurance, yet all ought to labour after it.”99

In a sermon based on 1 Corinthians 1:30, Whitefield noted that “[though] there is no other text in the book of God, this single one sufficiently proves the final perseverance of true believers: for never did God yet justify a man, who he did not sanctify; nor sanctify one, whom he did not completely redeem and glorify: no! as for God, his way, his work is perfect…”100

Whitefield’s confidence in the truth of the doctrines of grace came from his reading of Scripture. “Of primary importance to Whitefield was the biblical basis of all essential doctrines. Whitefield argued that his beloved Calvinism was not a product of his reading Calvin, but of his reading Scripture.”101

Along with contending with Wesley about theological matters, Whitefield also made it his practice to imitate Paul by “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15), to friends, peers,
acquaintances, audiences, and those in authority over him. He wrote to his Fetter Lane Society the dangers of their being too much influenced by the French Prophets who had mystical ideas, emotional practices, and a lack of Biblical understanding.\footnote{Dallimore, I:348.}

He wrote a pamphlet addressed to Nicholas Lewis, the Count of Zinzendorf, about the problems that he observed in Moravianism. He sincerely wrote,

> For many years past, I have been a silent and impartial observer of the progress and effects of Moravianism, both in England and America; but such shocking things have lately been brought to our ears, and offences have swollen to such an enormous bulk, that a real regard for my king and country, and a distinctive love for the ever-blessed Jesus, will not suffer me to be silent any longer. Pardon me, therefore, my lord, if I am constrained to inform your lordship that you, together with some of your leading brethren, have been unhappily instrumental in misguiding many simple, honest-hearted Christians; of distressing, if not totally ruining, numerous families, and of introducing a whole \textit{farrago} of superstitions, not to say idolatrous fopperies into the English nation.\footnote{Tyerman, II:301, quoting Whitefield’s pamphlet, “An Expostulatory Letter, addressed to Nicholas Lewis, Count Zinzendorf, the Lord Advocate of the Unitas Fratrum,” London-April 24, 1753.}

While Whitefield later owned slaves, he was not afraid to write a critical letter to slave owners in the southern colonies confronting them about the physical abuse of their slaves and their neglect of the religious education of the blacks. “Early in 1740, therefore, the Grand Itinerant went on record publicly condemning those who were responsible for the mistreatment of slaves, although he stopped short of rendering a moral judgment on slavery itself as an institution.”\footnote{Stephen Stein, “Whitefield on Slavery: Some New Evidence,” \textit{Church History} 42 (1973): 244.}

Whitefield wrote a loving rebuke to Dr. James Stonehouse, a Christian who was afraid of being branded as a “Methodist.” Whitefield remonstrated that he did not believe that God would bless Stonehouse until he was “more delivered from the fear of man. Alas! How were you bowed down with it, when I saw you last! And your letter bespeaks you yet a slave to it.
O my brother, deal faithfully with yourself, and you will find a love of the world, a fear of not providing for your children, have gotten too much hold of your heart.”

In a mark of true spiritual discernment, Whitefield not only gave advice but he sought the advice and counsel of other respected Christians such as William Law and Jonathan Edwards. He wrote to the Congregationalist minister, Benjamin Coleman, noting that he loved ‘to be acquainted with old servants of Jesus Christ. I delight to sit at their feet and receive instruction from them.’

When his respected mentor John Wesley taught an attainable condition of perfection in this life, Whitefield informed him of his error, writing, “I am sorry, honoured Sir, to hear by many letters, that you seem to own a sinless perfection in this life attainable.” Whitefield refused to compromise with Wesley on this topic and wrote to him asserting that “I cannot entertain prejudices against your conduct and principles any longer, without informing you. The more I examine the writings of the most experienced men, and the most established Christians, the more I differ from your notion about not committing sin, and your denying the doctrines of election, final perseverance of the saints.”

Whitefield’s refusal to compromise in the areas that he deemed essential theological truths and practices illustrate that he did possess the gift of spiritual discernment. He had godly direction in carefully choosing the battles that he fought with church leaders, other ministers, friends, co-workers, as well as unbelievers. He fought for fundamental Scriptural truths because he believed in the truth of Scripture. The overriding concern for his ministry was the

105 Tyerman, II:213.
107 Whitefield, Works, I:211.
108 Dallimore, I:492, quoting Letter from Whitefield to John Wesley, May 24, 1740.
glorification of God and the exaltation of Christ, no matter the consequences to himself.

Bishop J.C. Ryle commented that once taught to

understand the glorious liberty of Christ’s Gospel, Whitefield never turned again to asceticism, legalism, mysticism or strange views of Christian perfection…The doctrines of free grace… took deep root in his heart and became, as it were, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Of all the little band of Oxford Methodists, none seems to have got hold so soon of clear views of Christ’s Gospel as he did, and none kept them so unwaveringly to the end.\footnote{Dallimore, I:394, quoting \textit{Christian Leaders}, 1868.}
CHAPTER 6
WHITEFIELD’S SENSE OF EVANGELICAL ECUMENICITY

Whitefield was consistently uncompromising in several of his theological ideas and practices but was also quite willing to embrace other Christians who loved Christ as he did, regardless of their denominational preferences. This sense of evangelical ecumenicity is illustrative of his gift of spiritual discernment and complements his refusal to compromise. He refused to let externals keep him from communing with other true believers in Jesus Christ. He had close relationships with members of various denominations and made it a practice to associate with men and women of all stations in life, preaching to groups as diverse as the Kingswood colliers (miners) and the very poor, as well as to the highest members of British aristocracy. He cared about the spiritual condition of members of different races – an uncommon sentiment in his day. He would have agreed with the apostle Paul’s statement that there is “no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised; barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:11).

According to Luke Tyerman, Whitefield “made himself one with all who loved his Master – Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Moravians, Baptists, Independents, and even Quakers.”\footnote{\textsuperscript{110} Luke Tyerman, \textit{The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield}, vol. 1 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876), 438.} Whitefield wrote the following words to John Edwards of Dublin: “For I am a debtor to all,
of all denominations, and have no design but to promote the common salvation of mankind. The love of Christ constrains me to this.”

Whitefield’s catholic spirit was a distinctive mark of his spiritual maturity. He understood that the mark of a “true Christian” was the new birth – not merely being a member of any denomination. Denominational labels were of little significance to him and consequently, when others expressed their desire that he start a new denomination, he declined. In his farewell sermon in London he used Jesus’ own illustration of believers and unbelievers being as sheep and goats to downplay the importance of denominational titles. He said, “‘My sheep hear my voice; and they follow me.’ It is very remarkable, there are but two sorts of people mentioned in scripture: it does not say that the Baptists and Independents, nor the Methodists and Presbyterians; no, Jesus Christ divides the whole world into but two classes, sheep and goats: the Lord give us to see this morning to which of these classes we belong.”

Whitefield realized that the words of authors from different denominations could be beneficial to one’s spiritual edification. Frank Lambert asserted that:

consistent with his emphasis on experience as the keystone of true religion, Whitefield recommended to his readers devotional works that had influenced his own faith….Some were works written by seventeenth-century Dissenters who stressed the necessity of a spiritual new birth, including Scogal’s *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* and Baxter’s *Call to the Unconverted*. Whitefield also recommended volumes by Catholic writers who emphasized spiritual transformation over doctrinal obedience – titles such as Juan de Castaniza’s *Spiritual Combat* and Thomas á Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ*. Whitefield recommended works by both German and English Pietists, including Francke’s *Against the Fear of Man* and Law’s *Serious Call to a Devout Life, On Christian Perfection*, and *The Absolute Unlawfulness of the Stage Entertainment.*

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111 Tyerman, II:287.
The benefit of conversing with believers of different denominations was frequently mentioned in Whitefield’s *Journals*. On Monday, May 14, 1739, he recorded that he “spent the evening very agreeably with several Quakers. How much comfort do those lose who converse with none but such as are of their own communion!”\(^{114}\)

Whitefield made it his goal in preaching to bring together those of different denominations, as he recorded in his *Journal* for Wednesday, April 18, 1739 that he

> preached this morning with power to a much larger congregation than we had last night. Several servants of God said they never saw the likes before. We shall see greater things than these; for almost every day persons of all denominations come unto me, telling how they intercede in my behalf. And it shall now be my particular business, wherever I go, to bring all the children of God, notwithstanding their differences, to rejoice together. How dare we not converse with those who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?\(^{115}\)

Dr. James Schwenk reported that Whitefield was not as optimistic as John Wesley about Roman Catholic participation in the revival but did include “Lutherans, Scottish Presbyterians, Anglicans, Quakers, Moravians, and others of vastly different opinions….Of primary importance to Whitefield was the biblical basis of all essential doctrines.”\(^{116}\)

On Whitefield’s second trip to the American Colonies he arrived in Philadelphia and, according to Harry Stout, chose the city as his first stop because it “fit Whitefield’s ecumenical appeal… Its [Philadelphia] policy of religious toleration together attracted a heterogeneous population of Catholics, Jews, and Protestants, all of whom were tolerated and none of whom were powerful enough to stifle the others. By the same token most of these

\(^{114}\) Tyerman, I:215.
\(^{115}\) *Whitefield’s Journals*, 253.
\(^{116}\) Schwenk, “‘And the Holy Catholic Church:’ A Paradigm for Evangelical Catholicity,” *Evangelical Journal* 18 (Fall 2000): 74-75.
groups had established separate islands of identity. Whitefield would strive to bring them together under the banner of revival."\(^{117}\)

Whitefield was properly concerned about the effects of strife within and among different Christian groups. He understood that divisions would cause a stifling of reformation. He recorded the following plea for God’s action in his *Journal* on March 8, 1739:

Blessed by God, there seems to be a noble spirit gone out into Wales, and I believe, ere long there will be more visible fruits of it. What inclines me strongly to think so is, that the partition wall of bigotry and party-zeal is broken down, and ministers and teachers of different communications, join with one heart and one mind to carry on the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. The Lord make all the Christian world thus minded! For till this is done, I fear, we must despair of any great reformation in the Church of God.\(^{118}\)

While he was concerned about division he was also the cause of some splintering because of his strong stance on the necessity of the new birth. He understood that not every person who was a member of the visible church was truly regenerated. His desire was for a communion of *believers* within the different denominations. Mark Noll discovered that Whitefield’s ministry both brought some groups together and divided others. He found that Whitefield hastened splintering of New England Congregationalism between the traditional and liberal wings because of his strong evangelical note. “He inspired many who would later become leaders of Baptist and Methodist churches. He was also a personal bridge that connected many previously isolated groups, including some Quakers and German immigrant congregations, with the Dissenting denominations that were his main supporters.”\(^{119}\)

While Whitefield was willing to commune with believers in many different churches, the Church of England was his lifelong denomination and he always considered himself a loyal son of the Anglican communion. He often angered members of his own clergy, but he made


a positive impact upon countless others in the Established church as he worked to encourage evangelical preachers within that body. Dallimore discovered that “wherever he had gone he had found some of them [Anglicans] who were favorable to his message and who welcomed him to their pulpits and he strove to lead such men forth from what he considered the indolence of preaching merely in the churches and on Sundays, into a ministry which would see them declaring the Gospel in the fields and on every day of the week.”

Whitefield was successful in his endeavor to influence other Anglicans. Dallimore concluded that “hand in hand with his denunciations of an unconverted ministry there went his constant encouragement of those who were sound in the evangelical faith, and as the narrative of his career progresses, we shall see these efforts gradually resulting in the formation of a strong evangelical party within the Church of England.”

Whitefield’s ministry influenced Anglicans such as John Newton, Augustus Toplady, Rowland Hill, and later Charles Simeon and William Wilberforce.

Whitefield is best known for his part in the development of early Methodism. He continued to work closely with Methodists throughout his entire ministry. His friendship, as well as his differences, with the Wesleys has been addressed. Even after his well-publicized falling out with Wesley, Whitefield continued to support Methodist causes and charities. In a letter to Mr. Gillies of Glasgow, Whitefield recorded that “as they [Wesley’s Chapel in St. Peter’s Street] were in debt, at Leeds, for their building, last Lord’s-day I collected for them

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121 Ibid., 384.
122 Ibid., 318.
nearly £50. Lord Jesus, help me to know no party but Thine! This, I am persuaded is your catholic spirit. O for an increase of it among all denominations!”

Because of his commitment to Calvinism, Whitefield most logically allied himself with adherents of the Reformed faith, including Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Dutch Reformed. Mark Noll suggested that “the critical importance of George Whitefield for the early history of evangelicalism is suggested by the fact that he was the only major figure as completely at home in this Calvinistic internationale [Wales, Scotland, America] as among the Church of England revivalists.”

Whitefield wrote of his theological affinity with his Reformed brothers in his preface to A Communion Morning’s Companion. He confessed that “though I profess myself a minister of the Established church and never yet renounced her Articles, homilies, or liturgy, I can and, if God’s providence direct my course thither again, shall join in occasional communion with the churches of New England and Scotland being persuaded there are as many faithful ministers among them as in any part of the known world.”

Because Whitefield was a Calvinist he was able to initiate relationships with many Reformed pastors in Scotland, as well as the American colonies. The Methodist pastor and writer Luke Tyerman, who was not inclined to the beliefs of Calvinism, chronicled the many ecumenical benefits gained because Whitefield held to the Reformed faith. He wrote:

It is an unquestionable fact that this [being Calvinist] opened to Whitefield a wide field of usefulness, which, without it, neither he nor Wesley could have occupied. Without this, Whitefield could not have had the sympathy and cooperation of the Presbyterian and Independents of America. It was this that prepared the way for his popularity in Scotland. But for this, he would have lacked the important patronage of the Countess of Huntingdon. This was one of the prime sources of the immense influence he exercised over Hervey, Berridge,

123 Tyerman, II:412.
125 Tyerman, II:345.
Romaine, Venn and many other contemporaneous clergymen of the Church of England; and it also, to an untold extent, enabled him to move and quicken the Dissenting ministers and congregations of the land.  

Whitefield made fifteen preaching tours of Scotland throughout his ministry. He was used by God to bring revival to that Presbyterian nation - especially in the Cambuslang Revival of 1742. He was invited to Scotland by the Erskine brothers and, when criticized for his relationship with Ralph Erskine, wrote, “Some may be offended at my corresponding with him, but I dare not but confess my Lord’s disciples.”  

Dallimore commented on Whitefield’s evangelical ecumenicity in regard to his association with the ministers in Scotland, and found Whitefield wishing “that all who are truly spiritual knew one another!” In this and similar utterances, he manifested his vision of a fellowship which would link together the several evangelical workers in various lands.  

Whitefield developed a friendship with the Presbyterian pastor Gilbert Tennant (1703-64) and referred to his being a kindred spirit. As they first traveled to New York together, Whitefield recalled that “we spent our time more agreeably telling what God had done for our soul.” Tennant’s father, the Reverend William Tennant (1673-1745), also became an acquaintance of Whitefield when the two met at the site of the “Log Cabin College” that the older Mr. Tennant founded to train pastors. Whitefield remembers that they had “sweet communion with each other, and spent the evening in concerting measures for promoting our Lord’s kingdom.”

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126 Tyerman, I:275.  
127 Whitefield’s Journals, 312.  
128 Dallimore, I:384.  
129 Whitefield’s Journals, 347.  
130 Dallimore, I:437.
Theodorus Frelinghuysen (1691-1747) was an influential Dutch Reformed pastor whom Whitefield met and declared to be “a worthy old soldier of Jesus Christ, the beginner of the great work that I trust the Lord is carrying on in these parts.”  

In 1740 Whitefield visited the church and home of the great pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards. While many of Edwards’ contemporaries failed to see his genius, Whitefield was not among them. Whitefield described Edwards as “a solid, excellent Christian. I think I have not seen his fellow in all New England. When I came into his pulpit, I found my heart drawn out to talk of scarce anything besides the consolations and privileges of saints, and the plentiful effusion of the Spirit upon believers. When I came to remind them of their former experiences, and how zealous and lively they were at that time, both minister and people wept much.”

Edwards recorded his impressions about the impact of Whitefield’s visit:

‘Mr. Whitefield came to Northampton about the middle of October, 1740, and preached four sermons in the meeting-house. The congregation was extraordinarily melted by every sermon; almost the whole assembly being in tears. His sermons were suitable to the circumstances of our town; containing just reproofs of our backslidings; and, in a most moving and affectionate manner, making use of our great mercies as arguments with us to return to God, from whom we had departed. Immediately after this, the minds of the people in general appeared more engaged in religion. The revival at first was principally among professors, to whom Mr. Whitefield had chiefly addressed himself; but, in a short time, there was a deep concern among young persons. By the middle of December, a very considerable work of God appeared, and the revival continued to increase.’

Whitefield was in close association with many members of the Moravian Brethren, including Peter Bohler, James Hutton and John Cennick. The Moravians had a strong desire to pursue personal godliness and participation in charitable activities. Whitefield and Wesley were

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131 Whitefield’s Journals, 352.
132 Ibid., 476.
133 Tyerman, I:429.
associated with the Fetter Lane Society - one of London’s many religious societies of the eighteenth century - which increasingly became controlled by Moravians. When some of his Moravian acquaintances were in America, Whitefield showed kindness to them by giving them employment at one of his new prospective ministries—“Nazareth”—which was to house and educate African-Americans. He recorded in his Journal on April 22, 1740 the purchase of five thousand acres “on the fork of the Delaware, and ordered a large house to be built thereon, for the instruction of these poor creatures [persons of African descent]…I have called it Nazareth; and, I trust in a few years, the Lord will let us see much good come out of it.”

Whitefield found that Peter Bohler and his entourage were in need of employment so he offered them jobs constructing the edifice. Dallimore called this an act of mercy, rather than business, because “though some of the men were carpenters by trade, Bohler, who was to oversee the construction, was without experience in this field.”

The Nazareth project ended in failure in large part because of the complications of the difficult terrain. Later Whitefield and Bohler agreed to part ministry because of doctrinal differences, but even this parting was done in a loving spirit. The Moravians began to hold to a “stillness” doctrine, believing that they should wait until God planted faith in them before taking any action. They did not hold the Bible to be their supreme authority and cast lots to determine what action to take. It was an axiom of Whitefield’s ministry that when theological truths and the desire for catholicity clashed that his desire for truth won the day, and so it did in his disagreements with the Moravians. Whitefield wrote of this division, “I have lately conversed closely with Peter Bohler. Alas! We differ widely in many respects; therefore, to avoid disputations and jealousies on both sides, it is best to carry on the work of

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134 *Whitefield’s Journals*, 411.
135 Dallimore, I:503.
God apart. The divisions among the brethren sometimes grieve, but do not surprise me. How can things be otherwise, when teachers do not speak and think the same things? God grant we may keep up a cordial undissembled love towards each other, notwithstanding our different opinions.”

Even in his parting with Bohler, Whitefield illustrated an abiding love for the Moravian elder as well as a wisdom and understanding regarding the existence of their differences. Whitefield’s Presbyterian friend, Gilbert Tennant, had a special dislike for the Moravians and wrote charging Whitefield with being too kind to them. Whitefield replied that “I think the Moravian Brethren shew a better and milder spirit in general but many of their principles deviate as far as the east is from the west from the truths of Jesus Christ.”

According to Dallimore, Whitefield slowly moved to an acceptance of the Baptists in England but more rapidly while he was in America. While in Philadelphia Whitefield recorded that on May 7, 1740 he “went and heard Mr. Jones, the Baptist minister, who preaches the truth as it is in Jesus. He is the only preacher that I know of in Philadelphia, who speaks feelingly and with authority. The poor people are much refreshed by him, and I trust the Lord will bless him more and more.”

In August 1740 Whitefield attended a Baptist church in Charleston, South Carolina because, rather than preaching Christianity, the Church of England’s clergyman, Commissary Alexander Garden, preached only tirades against Whitefield in the Anglican services. Whitefield’s journal entry for August 25, 1740, is indicative of his ecumenical spirit. He recounted that “finding when I was here last, that Jesus Christ was not preached in the

137 Whitefield, Works, I:400.
138 Dallimore, I:522.
139 Whitefield’s Journals, 419.
church, my conscience would not suffer me to attend on those that preached there anymore. I therefore went to the Baptist and Independent meeting-houses, where Jesus Christ was preached. I have administered the Sacrament thrice in a private house. Never did I see anything more solemn.”

Whitefield realized the benefits that he could gain by associating with some Dissenters, or Non-conformists. Dissenters were those persons and groups who had originally left the Church of England after their refusal to submit to the Acts of Uniformity of 1662 when the Anglican forms of worship were established. The Dissenters were from a variety of Protestant communions. The most famous of the Non-conformists with whom Whitefield developed relationships were Philip Doddridge and the great hymn writer, Isaac Watts.

Whitefield found that the consequence of communing with Dissenters was to provoke some of his enemies but he found his association with them to be biblical. His spiritual discernment in this situation can be seen in his journal entry where he found that “what, I believe, irritated some of my enemies the more, was my free conversation with many of the serious Dissenters. My practice in visiting and associating with them, I thought was quite agreeable to the Word of God. Their conversation was savoury, and I imagined the best way to bring them over was not by bigotry and railing, but by moderation and love and by undissembled holiness of life.”

Wesley’s sympathetic biographer, Luke Tyerman found Whitefield to be far ahead of his friend John Wesley in his association with Dissenters. Referring to the year 1737, Tyerman wrote that “in Georgia, Wesley was treating Dissenters with the supercilious tyranny of a High Church bigot...at the very time when Whitefield in London was having ‘free

140 Ibid., 450.
141 Dallimore, I:384.
142 Whitefield’s Journals, 90.
conversation with many of the serious Dissenters who invited him to their houses.’ Who can doubt which of the two Oxford Methodists was right? Wesley had more learning than Whitefield, but, for the present, Whitefield had more charity.”

Whitefield also encouraged other Dissenters to develop a spirit of catholicity and a focus upon being or developing able ministers of the Gospel. In a letter addressed to students at a Dissenting college Whitefield penned the following words: “Though you are not of the Church of England, yet, - if you are persuaded in your own minds of the truth of the way wherein you walk, I leave it. Whether Conformist or Nonconformist, our main goal should be, to be assured that we are called and taught of God; for none but such are fit to minister in holy things.”

Being open to an exchange of ideas with the Quakers was another sign of Whitefield’s maturity and discernment. He understood that there were points upon which he and the Quakers could agree and points where they could not. He was discerning enough to find the positive aspects in the Quaker faith without agreeing with their entire theology, or refusing fellowship with them because of their differences.

Whitefield not only possessed an ecumenical spirit himself but he also encouraged members of various denominations to enjoy the same spirit. Timothy Hall found that Whitefield’s preaching in America continued to unite colonists “otherwise divided by ecclesiastical disputes, doctrinal differences, and barriers of race and ethnicity. The regular reappearance of the Grand Itinerant in America over the next three decades reinforced this

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143 Tyerman, I:93.
144 Ibid., 313.
unity as colonists of divergent beliefs and backgrounds mingled in churches and open fields in a common quest for the New Birth.\textsuperscript{145}

Hall also understood that Whitefield set an example of evangelical ecumenicity that others followed in that the revivals emphasized the new birth rather than denominational differences. Whitefield’s itinerancy dramatized this emphasis as the “Anglican cleric rejected captivity to any single denomination, preached from dissenting pulpits across the empire, held ‘sweet conversations’ with Quakers and shared the Lord’s Supper with Baptist, Presbyterian, and Congregational alike. American revivals followed Whitefield’s example with their own evangelical ecumenism.”\textsuperscript{146}

Whitefield’s uncompromising insistence upon the new birth led him to desire spiritual communion with any persons who were regenerate. Dallimore found that this sentiment came soon after Whitefield’s conversion, noting that:

\begin{quote}
while at Oxford, like the rest of the Holy Club he [Whitefield] had admitted of no fellowship except with men of the Church of England. But…following his conversion the logical conclusions of the doctrine of the new birth had caused him to embrace the friendship of regenerate men among the Dissenters and at the same time to feel a separation from non-regenerate persons within the church. And in this direction he had moved still further, until now, in America, the same reasoning had caused him to take his stand against the unconverted among the clergy; this in turn had largely alienated him from his own communion and yet had brought him into this close fellowship with Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed and Baptists. Thus he had come to a position in which not denominational adherence but evangelical soundness was the criterion, and his work had become non-denominational in character.\textsuperscript{147}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 78.

\textsuperscript{147} Dallimore, I:438.
Schwenk discovered that “for Whitefield, he would ‘bear and converse with all others, who do not err in fundamentals, and who give evidence that they are true lovers of the Lord Jesus.’”

Whitefield wrote in a letter to a Presbyterian minister of this desire for fellowship with all who are truly evangelical. He praised God with the following words, “Blessed be God that His love is so far shed abroad in our hearts as to cause us to love one another, though we little differ as to externals. For my part, I hate to mention them. My one sole question is ‘Are you a Christian?’”

In a letter to his New York friend, Thomas Noble, Whitefield recorded his words of wisdom in this area of the ecumenicity as he wrote,

‘The Lord has given me an enlarged heart, and unfeigned love and freedom to converse with all his dear children, of whatever denomination. I talk freely with the Messrs. Wesley, though we widely differ in a certain point. Most talk of a catholic spirit, but it is only till they have brought people into the pale of their own church. This is downright sectarianism, not Catholicism. How can I act consistently, unless I receive and love all the children of God, whom I esteem to be such, of whatever denomination they may be? Why should we dispute when there is no probability of convincing? I think this is not giving up the faith, but fulfilling our Lord’s new command, ‘Love one another,’ and our love is but feigned, unless it produces proper effects. I am persuaded the more the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, the more all narrowness of spirit will subside and give way: besides, so far as we are narrow spirited, we are uneasy. Prejudices, jealousies, and suspicions make the soul miserable, so far as they are entertained.”

The fact that denominational titles and outward professions of faith were inconsequential to Whitefield led him to desire to preach the gospel to mass audiences. For Whitefield, “the new birth occurred with the hearts of individuals and had nothing to do with formal religious affiliation. Proclaiming that salvation transcended traditional church boundaries, he believed

148 Schwenk, “‘And the Holy Catholic Church’,“ 81.
149 Whitefield, Works, I:126.
150 Schwenk, 78, quoting Whitefield, Letters, 372.
evangelicals should convey the gospel to a mass audience. But he also offered the hope of spiritual new birth to men and women who professed no church affiliation, to ‘those who [were] dead in trespasses and sins.’”

Note: Whitefield’s innovations in outdoor preaching will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Whitefield refused to negotiate on Christian practices that he deemed essential but he also refused to dispute over those practices that he believed to be non-essential. When he first arrived in Georgia he allowed the German, Swiss and French colonists to incorporate their national traditions into the Anglican liturgy, including the rite of Baptism. Stout found that “here we see the first signs of the ecumenicity and inclusiveness that would come to be such a notable feature of his ministry throughout the transatlantic world.”

Whitefield believed that the mode of distribution of the Sacrament was one of the non-essentials and unworthy of dispute. He recorded in his journal an ecumenical service where Holy Communion was celebrated, noting, “What was best, Baptists, Church folks, and Presbyterians, all joined together, and received according to the Church of England, except two, who desired to have it sitting: I willingly complied, knowing that it was a thing quite indifferent.”

Party spirit was something that Whitefield wanted to see decrease through the revivals. He wrote, “Oh, how do I long to see bigotry and party zeal taken away and all the Lord’s servants more knit together.”

Because of his fame some ministers sought his aid in taking sides in local theological disputes, but Whitefield wisely refused to do so on many occasions. Harry Stout concluded

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153 Whitefield’s Journals*, 450.
154 Dallimore, I:397.
that “neither Whitefield’s ecumenical theology nor his actor’s instinct for center stage would allow him to be preempted by local concerns and interests, whether Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist or New World Separatist.”

While Whitefield was in Scotland in July 1741, a group called the Associate Presbytery desired that he refrain from visiting or preaching to a rival group. He met with the Associate Presbytery and reported in a letter to Thomas Noble:

I then asked them seriously what they would have me to do; the answer was that I was not desired to subscribe immediately to the solemn league and covenant, but to preach only for them till I had further light. I asked why only for them? Mr. Ralph E[rskine] said, ‘they were the Lord’s people.’ I asked whether there were no other Lord’s people but themselves; and supposing all others were the devil’s people, they certainly had more need to be preached to, and therefore I was more and more determined to go out into the highways and hedges; and that if the Pope himself would lend me his pulpit, I would gladly proclaim the righteousness of Christ therein.

Whitefield’s letter to Noble illustrates his desire to preach the Gospel to all and not become involved in disputes. During his first trip to America Whitefield stopped in Gibraltar and recorded in his journal that he “went to the church, and did as yesterday, and was visited afterwards by two of the Non-conforming Society, who seemed to be Israelites indeed. I exhorted them to love and unity, and not to let a little difference about a few externals occasion any narrow-spiritedness to arise in their hearts.”

Whitefield reconciled with Charles and John Wesley after their dispute and, while he did not compromise on his theology, he did desire a relationship with his friends and allies in the revivals. Schwenk argued that “the continuation of the evangelical ecumenicity was much more important than doctrinal differences, personality issues, and matters of self-promotion.

155 Stout, The Divine Dramatist, 139.
156 Whitefield, Works, I:307-08.
157 Whitefield’s Journals, 133.
Once Whitefield and Wesley realized this, not only the revival, but their friendship could move forward. They have left a paradigm to the contemporary Evangelical Church.”

Some persons criticized him for his reunion with Wesley, so Whitefield wrote in his defense that “I dare not look on them as willful deceivers, but as persons who hazard their lives for the sake of the Gospel – Mr. W[esley] I think is wrong in some things, and Mr. L[aw] wrong also, yet I believe that both Mr. L and Mr. W and others with whom I do not agree in all things, will shine bright in glory.”

In his farewell sermon in London he spoke about Christian non-essentials and looked forward to the time when Christians would be completely sanctified and free from disputes. He said that “I believe when we, like him [Christ], are filled with the Holy Ghost, we shall not entertain our audiences with disputes about rites and ceremonies, but the gospel, and then rites and ceremonies will appear with more indifference.”

Dallimore noted that Whitefield had the reputation of being a peacemaker, a role that Whitefield worked diligently to fill. “The Revival work was divided over the two forms of doctrine, and there were disputes over personalities and several minor matters. Whitefield endeavoured to influence both sides to concentrate on the great truths of the Gospel that they held in common and to exercise forbearance in the areas of disagreement, and his own life was an example of the conduct he sought to promote in others.”

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158 Schwenk, ‘‘And the Holy Catholic Church’’, 88-89.
159 Dallimore, II:144, quoting Whitefield’s Works, I:438.
161 Dallimore, II:352-53.
Finally, Whitefield lamented about disagreements over non-essentials when he recorded in his journal, "What a pity it is, Christ’s seamless coat should be rent in pieces on account of things in themselves purely indifferent!"\(^{162}\)

Whitefield’s desire and promotion of evangelical ecumenicity was unique among Anglican clergyman of his day. Mark Noll recounted a meeting that Whitefield had with some Boston Anglican clergymen on September 19, 1740 where one of the Boston Anglicans insisted that the Church of England was the only true church, because it followed exactly the ecclesiastical pattern provided by Jesus himself[.\] Whitefield could not agree. To him there was much greater flexibility in the gospel: ‘I saw regenerate souls among the Baptists, among the Presbyterians, among the Independents, and among the Church [i.e. Anglican] folks – all children of God, and yet all born again in a different way of worship: and who can tell which is the most evangelical?’\(^{163}\)

One of Whitefield’s non-negotiable actions was to preach the Gospel to everyone, regardless of their race, class, occupation, and denomination. He had a special love for the Kingswood colliers, the poor miners of England. He was one of the first missionaries to reach this rough group. Stout described that Whitefield’s “experimental preaching began with a trial by fire in the rough Kingswood coal-mining district near Bristol in southwest England…The men, women and children of Kingswood labored long hours in the 150 coal pits that pocketed the countryside. They were a violent, short-lived people who were regarded as some of eighteenth-century England’s most desperate inhabitants.”\(^{164}\)

Dallimore recorded that Whitefield “was moved by a love for these pitiable people: ‘My bowels have long since yearned’, he wrote at this time, ‘toward the poor colliers, who are very numerous and as sheep having no shepherd.’ ”\(^{165}\)

\(^{162}\) Whitefield’s Journals, 138.


\(^{164}\) Stout, The Divine Dramatist, 72.

\(^{165}\) Dallimore, I:266, quoting Whitefield’s Journals, 216.
These colliers were not persons who normally attended church services so Whitefield had the spiritual discernment to preach to them outdoors. J.C. Ryle profoundly commented about effects of Whitefield’s practice of outdoor preaching:

The gospel so proclaimed was listened to and greedily received by hundreds who never dreamed of going to a place of worship. The cause of pure religion was advanced and souls were plucked from the hand of Satan, like brands from the burning. But it was going much too fast for the Church those days. The clergy, with a few honourable exceptions, refused entirely to countenance this strange preacher. In the true spirit of the dog in the manger, they neither liked to go after the semi-heathen masses of population themselves, nor liked any one else to do the work for them. The consequence was, that the ministrations of Whitefield in the pulpits of the Church of England from this time [1739] almost entirely ceased. He loved the Church in which he had been ordained; he gloried in her Articles; he used her Prayer-book with pleasure. But the Church did not love him, and so lost his services. The plain truth is, that the Church of England of that day was not ready for a man like Whitefield. The Church was too much asleep to understand him, and was vexed at a man who would not keep still and let the devil alone.166

Whitefield also preached to the poor at Moorfields and Kennington Common. These poor residents were the “lowest of London’s citizens congregated in teeming numbers. Here were vicious sports and drunken brawlings. Here the harlot and pick-pocket sought the victims of their trades, and here the mob assembled, ready for any act of violence. Here humanity gathered – men, women and children – unwashed and ignorant, wicked and diseased, a vast host of whom it might be said, ‘No man cared for their souls.’”167

Whitefield recorded the response of his Kennington Common congregation where no less than thirty thousand people were supposed to be present. The wind being for me, carried the voice to the extremest part of the audience. All stood attentive, and joined in the Psalm and Lord’s Prayer most regularly. I scarce ever preached more quietly in a church. The Word came with power. The people were much affected, and expressed their love to me in many ways. All agreed it was never seen on this wise before. Oh what need have all God’s people to

166 J.C. Ryle, “George Whitefield and His Ministry,” in Select Sermons, 21
167 Dallimore, I:288.
rejoice and give thanks! I hope a good inroad has been made into the Devil’s kingdom this day.\textsuperscript{168}

Whitefield had the early experience of filling the pulpit for a minister in the village of Dummer. The congregation included many who were poor and illiterate, and Whitefield hesitated going there but “the experience among the Dummer villagers proved effective, for never again was there the least suggestion that he was not equally happy in ministering to the poor and illiterate as to the wealthy and learned.”\textsuperscript{169}

Whitefield recorded in his journal a day that was not uncommon when he “went to the almshouse, and preached on these words, ‘The poor received the Gospel’ …then I went to the work-house, where I prayed and exhorted a great number of people.”\textsuperscript{170}

Likewise, the Grand Itinerant was involved in prison ministry throughout his career. He recorded on one occasion about ministering to a condemned horse thief just prior to his execution. Whitefield recalled how “the sheriff allowed him to come, and hear a sermon under an adjacent tree. Solemn, solemn! I walked half a mile with him to the gallows. His heart had been softened before my first visit. He seemed full of solid, divine consolations. [We had] an instructive walk. I went up with him into the cart. He gave a short exhortation. I then stood upon the coffin, added, I trust, a word in season, prayed, gave the blessing and took my leave. Effective good, I hope, was done.”\textsuperscript{171}

Sadly, there were many persons in eighteenth-century England and America who refused to believe that African slaves were worthy of receiving the Gospel or even possessed souls. While Whitefield did own slaves to support his Georgia orphanage, he also successfully

\textsuperscript{168} Whitefield’s Journals, 260-61.
\textsuperscript{169} Dallimore, I:106.
\textsuperscript{170} Whitefield’s Journals, 469-71.
\textsuperscript{171} Whitefield, Works, III:425.
ministered to the African community. Whitefield reported that it was not uncommon for Africans to ask him if they had a soul.¹⁷²

Harry Stout recorded Whitefield’s practice of seeking out audiences of slaves and that he often wrote on their behalf:

Gary B. Nash, in his study of the Philadelphia slave community, dates ‘the advent of black Christianity’ in Philadelphia to Whitefield. Nash estimates that perhaps a thousand slaves heard Whitefield’s sermons in Philadelphia both at Christian church and out of doors. They heard from him that they had as surely souls as the white folks who had enslaved them and that their masters owed them the freedom of religious conscience.¹⁷³

Dallimore attributed Whitefield’s success in preaching to the slaves to his ability to “simplify Divine truth and to present the narratives of the Scriptures – the message of the Gospel with vivid clarity – [which] rendered him particularly suited to such a ministry. In turn, the negroes found an unusual interest in his preaching, and many of them testified that God used it in bringing grace to their hearts.”¹⁷⁴

Stout maintained that while the question of the correlation between conversions and changed lives in Whitefield’s revivals can be debated, in the case of the slaves the changes were indisputable. “More than any other eighteenth-century figure, Whitefield established Christian faith in the slave community… In 1770, while many Americans continued to doubt that slaves had souls, Whitefield stood as the slaves’ greatest champion, and at the time (of death) he was mourned as such.”¹⁷⁵

Whitefield was also concerned that the American Indians hear the Gospel message. He recorded in his journal for Monday, May 19, 1740, that he was

¹⁷² Dallimore, I:499.
¹⁷⁴ Dallimore, I:500
¹⁷⁵ Stout, The Divine Dramatist, 284-85.
much refreshed to-day, by reading the Journal of an Indian trader, mentioned a little before, and could not help thinking that God would open a door for preaching the Gospel among the Alleghanian Indians. Being much pressed thereto in spirit, I wrote them a letter, wherein I laid down the principles of our Holy Religion, told them the promises of the Gospel, that had especial reference to them, and cautioned them against such things as I thought might be a hindrance to their embracing Christianity. The Head or Chief of them is well inclined, and the white people thereabouts have heard of me, and have got my sermons. Who knows but God may now begin to give His Son the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession.\(^{176}\)

Whitefield had a heart for ministry among the soldiers and sailors whom he encountered, especially those who were on board ships with him. Harry Stout explained the cause of Whitefield’s success among the military personnel on board the Whitaker on his first trip to America:

In fact, he succeeded. And the path to that success was less his words than his actions. He knew how to make friends by following a lifelong credo to ‘be servant-like, but not servile.’ The shipboard crew soon learned that this included them. In Whitefield they discovered a friend and comforter as well as a rebuker. Alongside his admonitions he filled his time with acts of mercy and compassion that expressed the sentiments of divine love and mercy he proclaimed in his preaching. Morning and evening he visited the sick sailors and shared food from his considerable stores of supplies collected for Georgia. Through sheer will power and determined charity, he broke down the walls of hostility and gradually won a grudging respect.\(^{177}\)

Whitefield’s ministry brought repentance to some of the soldiers and sailors whom he met. One sailor “who had been one of the most evil men aboard, came to Whitefield, confessing how grievous a sinner he had been and crying to God for repentance.”\(^{178}\) On the same trip Whitefield reported that he went on board the Amy “to pay my respects to Col. C., and to visit the soldiers, whom I looked upon as part of my charge. I was received very civilly by the officers and went among the soldiers and enquired into the state of their souls. Gave them a word or two of exhortation, promised to bring them some books (I saw their wants),

\(^{176}\) *Whitefield’s Journals*, 428.  
\(^{177}\) Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, 55  
\(^{178}\) Dallimore, I:160.
and at the officers’ request, to come and preach to them, if opportunity should offer, before
we left the Downs.”

One of the most influential groups who were affected by Whitefield’s ministry was the
nobility of Great Britain, especially Selina, the Countess of Huntingdon, who became one of
Whitefield’s most loyal supporters. In 1748 she even appointed Whitefield to be one of her
personal chaplains. The Countess devised a special plan to bring Whitefield in contact with
her aristocratic friends. In her biography of the Countess, Faith Cook described how:

as a peeress she had the legal right to appoint two private chaplains whose
responsibility it was to minister to the spiritual needs of her household wherever
she might be living. If she appointed Whitefield to the position she could then
invite members of the nobility, politicians and even royalty to her house to listen
to her chaplain preach. In this way she could gain a hearing for the gospel of
Christ among those of her own rank. Pride, coupled with an apartheid born of
social privilege, might otherwise preclude forever such people from the reach of
the evangelical preachers.

The members of the nobility who assembled to hear Whitefield included Lady Fanny
Shirley; Lady, Charles and Lord Townshend; William Pitt; the Earl of Aberdeen; the Earl of
Lauderdale; the Earl of Burlington; the Earl of Hyndford; Lord Lytton; Lord Chesterfield;
and the Marquis of Tweedsdale. Harry Stout found that “with Huntingdon’s patronage,
Whitefield added another ‘field’ to his ministry outside of the established church, this time in
the posh drawing rooms and parlors of the English aristocracy.”

“David Hume, the agnostic philosopher, was also one of Mr. Whitefield’s hearers during this
period. Hume declared, ‘Mr. Whitefield is the most ingenious preacher I ever heard; it is

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179 Whitefield’s Journals, 113.
180 Faith Cook, Selina – Countess of Huntingdon: Her Pivotal Role in the 18th Century Evangelical
181 Stout, The Divine Dramatist, 214.
worth going twenty miles to hear him!’” 182 Unfortunately Hume’s negative philosophy was not positively affected by Whitefield’s messages.

Whitefield understood the necessity of preaching to children as well as adults. He recorded the following touching moment of ministry:

I think I never was so drawn out to preach for little children, and invite little children to Jesus Christ, as I was this morning. I had just heard of a child who after hearing me preach, was immediately taken sick, and said, ‘I will go to Mr. Whitefield’s God.’ In a short time he died. This encouraged me to speak to little ones, but, oh, how were the old people affected, when I said, ‘Little children, if your parents will not come to Christ, you come, and go to Heaven without them.’ There seemed to be but few dry eyes. 183

One major reason Whitefield was so appealing to so many diverse groups was his style of preaching – both understandable and interesting. Roderic Pierce concluded that “Whitefield preached a simple gospel, using the Bible extensively. He began with the Fall, convicting his hearers of their sin. Next, he spelled out the Calvinistic doctrine of Predestination. He then freely offered to all a justification wrought by Christ and appropriated by faith…. Finally, Whitefield bid his hearers to the all-important experience of regeneration, by which they might be assured of salvation.” 184 Pierce described Whitefield’s preaching style as being:

almost conversational in his frequent use of short sentences. He was also bold and direct. He used the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’ constantly. He addressed his discourses to all classes and ages, applying his message to their separate interests and needs. When he said, ‘I have come here to speak to you about your soul,’ each hearer felt that Whitefield referred to him individually. He [Whitefield] preached with a thundering earnestness, revealing by his voice and action that he believed all he was saying. His sermons were delivered with intense pathos and feeling.” 185

Whitefield had the ability to make his messages relevant and interesting. Stout found that Whitefield contextualized his messages and consequently “he preached the necessity of a

182 Dallimore, II:274.
183 Whitefield’s Journals, 469.
185 Ibid., 15.
spiritual conversion in the language of ordinary people’s daily experience, often casting his theology in mercantile terms.” He did not use complicated theological terminology and difficult concepts. In his sermon “The Almost Christian” Whitefield “paints a word picture of the almost Christian in language unadorned by Latin and Greek quotations and references to works other than the Bible…. Whitefield confronted his readers with straightforward poignant language that called for immediate self-examination rather than theological discourses designed for reflection and debate.”

Tyerman noted that Whitefield’s preaching was adapted to human nature. He wrote that “whatever his faults might be, Whitefield was a natural orator of the highest order. The truths which distinguished his preaching were truths exactly adapted to the wants and yearnings of human nature, such as meet the necessities of human beings of all classes, in all lands, and belonging to all ages.”

It is rare for one preacher to have the ability to relay the truth of God to so many different types of people as did George Whitefield. He possessed a desire to share the Gospel with everyone, regardless of their station in life, and he had the spiritual discernment to know how to relate to different individuals. This call to preach was a non-negotiable in his ministry as was his desire to embrace all believers who confessed Jesus Christ as Lord. He called his listeners to the new birth and increased the number of church membership in various denominations. “Some of the people converted under his preaching became Independents, and some Baptists; many joined Wesley’s Societies, but the large majority remained members of the Church of England and took their places within its evangelical party.”

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186 Stout, The Divine Dramatist, 154.
187 Lambert, Pedlar in Divinity, 116.
188 Tyerman, I:221.
189 Dallimore, II:321.
preaching made an impact in the world of his day because he was not concerned about denominational titles, debates about non-essentials, moving on in certain circles, and impressing auditors with his theological knowledge. He was also willing to use innovative techniques to reach any group that he could with Christ’s Gospel.
CHAPTER 7

WHITEFIELD’S USE OF WORLDLY MEANS TO ACCOMPLISH HEAVENLY GOALS

George Whitefield’s uncompromising desire to evangelize as many persons and groups as he could, regardless of their composition, drove him to be willing to use innovative means to accomplish heavenly goals. His gift of spiritual discernment led him to make the proper choices regarding his use of the secular realm to advance the kingdom of Christ. Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 10:16 that he was sending them out “as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16). William Hendriksen wrote that the “keenness here recommended involves insight into the nature of one’s surroundings,…circumspection, sanctified common sense, wisdom to do the right thing at the right time and place and in the right manner, [and] a serious attempt always to discover the best means to achieve the highest goal.” Whitfield was as “wise as a serpent” in adapting his ministry to the changing environment of his day. His ministry success in the transatlantic revivals was due in large measure to his divinely-inspired innovations. He showed a genius for novelty in adapting his ministry to the changing marketplace of his day, in the use of his natural theatrical abilities to advance the kingdom, in his use of the print medium to publicize his ministry and in his innovative techniques such as outdoor preaching. He ministered during a time of great changes that took place with the advent of the industrial revolution and the transformation of the marketplace. Possessing a discerning spirit and a

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concern about the times in which he lived, Whitefield boldly declared, “Something out of the common must be done to awaken a thoughtless world.”\textsuperscript{191}

The changes that had taken place in the marketplace occurred because “the old patron-client economy gave way to the buyer-seller economy of the marketplace. Books, magazines, and newspapers proliferated and were eagerly purchased by private subscriptions…The marketing of the theater was no less impressive…Objects and pursuits that had once been the exclusive domain of the aristocracy now came within the reach of new numbers of people.”\textsuperscript{192}

The marketplace also became a transatlantic one as the colonists clamored for the newest British information and goods. Timothy Hall described that the “colonists in the rush to procure the latest English goods, began to acquire a common set of tastes and experiences that bound them to their fellows throughout the empire…Improvements in transportation and other forms of transatlantic communication likewise worked to shrink the distance between the Old World and the New, drawing colonial inhabitants inexorably nearer their fellows in the British Isles.”\textsuperscript{193}

The marketplace changes allowed Whitefield to take advantage of every opportunity to follow the teachings of Scripture in Luke 16 when Jesus told the parable of the shrewd manager urging believers to act as cleverly as the “children of this age.” Leon Morris reminded readers that “when even dishonest worldly people know how and when to take decisive action, much more should those who follow him [Christ]. It is the astuteness of the


\textsuperscript{192} Harry Stout, \textit{The Divine Dramatist} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 35.

steward which is commended, not his commercial practices.” Whitefield used the world to spread the Gospel and even advocated that believers should do the same. Frank Lambert, who labeled Whitefield a “pedlar in divinity” wrote that, “while advancing an otherworldly message, Whitefield confessed that evangelicals should use the world to propagate the Gospel. He contended that ‘the devotion and business of a Methodist go hand in hand,’ adding that the rationalization of the counting-house should extend to the meeting-house.”

Lambert also observed that “although subscribing to the Calvinist doctrine of election, Whitefield believed that God used the ‘meanest instruments’ to awaken sinners to his grace. Hence, the evangelist felt compelled to employ every means – even those ‘the world’ used to merchandise its baubles – to deliver the gospel to all people.”

In urging Christians to “use the world” to advance the kingdom of God, Whitefield was in no way suggesting that believers should behave deceptively or dishonestly. He was always concerned to maintain a godly character. On the occasion of his death, Selina, the Countess of Huntingdon, wrote to Charles Wesley about her dear friend and chaplain. She declared that the quality that she most admired in Whitefield was his sincerity and lack of guile. She suggested that “there is not one soul living either in temporals or spirituals who [he] ever meant to deceive for any purpose, and that it was his greatest point ever in godly sincerity and simplicity to have his whole life approved in this world. No prospect of pretended good could make him do evil.”

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196 Ibid., 93.
J.J. Ellis quoted a conversation that Whitefield had with his friend Gilbert Tennant who warned Whitefield that his enemies in America advocated that he must be resisted. Whitefield understood the need for innovation and wrote that ‘Ah! Brother, they do not see that the old truth requires new methods and new modes of presentation. It is the old light in new lanterns, but the light was kindled at the brazen altar. There is no light but that which comes from the Atonement of Christ.’

Harry Stout recognized Whitefield’s innovative techniques and concluded that his “forte was making use of the profane time, not sacred time. He selected moments outside of traditional religious meeting time, and spaces that drew crowds, exploiting both to the full.” “Exploiting” time and space for God’s glory illustrates Whitefield’s possession of spiritual discernment to which Jesus alluded in his parable of the shrewd manager. The word “capitalize” seems to be a better one for the way in which Whitefield used the secular realm for the benefit of the divine realm. While Whitefield had a gift for making use of the “profane” time that Stout mentions above, he did have the greatest impact in making what seemed to be “profane” times “sacred” by delivering the Gospel of Christ to as many persons as he physically could.

Whitefield’s desire to downplay denominational labels also led to his innovative spirit and popularity. Mark Noll wrote that “in all his activities, Whitefield combined an extraordinary disregard for inherited church traditions with a breathtaking entrepreneurial spirit. The willingness to innovate made him immensely popular in the colonies and also promoted among later American evangelicals a similar disregard for Christian traditions.”

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199 Stout, The Divine Dramatist, 85.
Lambert recognized Whitefield’s intuition and self-consciousness in his use of the marketplace. This intuition can be understood to have been part of Whitefield’s gift of discernment that allowed him to be one of the major instruments used for the transatlantic revival. Lambert found that:

what was new about Whitefield was not just his appropriation of the language of the market but his adaptation of marketing strategies. Yet Whitefield’s commercialization of religion need not suggest a secular orientation. Rather it indicates the assimilative powers of Christianity to re-present itself through transformations, including that of the marketplace. Whitefield intuitively and self-consciously, albeit at first tentatively, appropriated merchandising techniques for igniting the transatlantic revivals.²⁰¹

It cannot be forgotten that while Whitefield possessed a prowess in marketing his message, he understood that his only success came through the Holy Spirit that led him in his ministry. He prayed in his journal: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who alone bringeth mighty things to pass.”²⁰² Describing the merging of divine and human ability, Whitefield “became a defining figure for early evangelicalism because he was a heartfelt preacher of the new birth communicated by the work of the Holy Spirit. But he was also an expert marketer of the gospel in the new, open spaces of British imperial commerce.”²⁰³

The new consumer market greatly increased worldliness and materialism, which was a reality that Whitefield clearly recognized. He turned consumerism against itself by using the consumer marketplace to condemn its excesses and borrow from its vocabulary. Whitefield found that the new marketplace caused problems because people had more time for ungodly diversions, but it also allowed him a platform on which to speak to the crowds. Lambert argued that:

²⁰¹ Lambert, Pedlar for Divinity, 51.
Although Whitefield condemned the consumer market and worldliness it promoted, he discovered within it a fresh language for delivering his message of the new birth and a vocabulary for explaining his evangelical mission to himself and the world. While commercial discourse was only one of several languages Whitefield employed, in a rapidly expanding consumer society it increasingly communicated images drawn from daily experiences of men and women. He always preached in biblical terms and frequently used tropes from such arenas as agriculture and the military, but his sermons reflect a particular familiarity with commercial discourse.²⁰⁴

Whitefield’s career was also advanced because of the strategic location of his initial ministry – in the center of British commerce. Stout surmised that “equally important for Whitefield’s career, London was the center of commerce and the exporter of culture throughout the British empire. As never before, culture had become a product. London was awash in its goods and services, as were the provinces as far away as Scotland and America. The middle class was expanding rapidly, and with its growth came the rise of a market economy.”²⁰⁵

Stout also argued that Whitefield became the central figure or “the entrepreneur” of the religious marketplace. He theorized that “before religion could become a marketplace phenomenon, however, it required an entrepreneur…who could offer it in public settings during the week for the general public. Someone needed to conceive of religion, in effect, as another leisure-time activity that could attract customers in the marketplace and promote itself through a full spectrum of advertising and media coverage. Whitefield soon became that entrepreneur.”²⁰⁶

Whitefield had a natural ability that he could have used on the theater stage but he used his gift on the world stage of revival to advance God’s kingdom with his innovative style of preaching. He later condemned the theatre because he believed it to be an immoral diversion from godliness. As a young student he recalled participating in many plays. He recorded in

²⁰⁴ Lambert, Pedlar for Divinity, 46.
²⁰⁵ Stout, The Divine Dramatist, 34.
²⁰⁶ Ibid., 36.
his journal that “during the time of my being at school, I was very fond of reading plays and have kept from school for days together to prepare myself for acting them.”²⁰⁷ He also learned about characters by working at his family business, the Bell’s Inn in Gloucester, where countless interesting patrons passed through the doors. J.I. Packer wrote that “you could call him a sanctified barnstormer. God gave him actor’s gifts as his resource for communicating Christ. Communication was his life.”²⁰⁸

Whitefield innovatively “applied the methods and ethos of acting to preaching with revolutionary results. While damning contemporary theater as the ‘devil’s workshop’ on the one hand, he co-opted its secrets and techniques on the other.”²⁰⁹

Stout also observed that Whitefield’s special style was sincere and natural and that “from the start of his preaching, apparently without premeditation or guile, he evidenced a dramatic manner than remained a hallmark of his preaching style throughout his career.”²¹⁰

In delivering a sermon Whitefield had the gift of making the characters in the Bible come to life. He preached with a true passion for the Word as well as for his auditors. David Garrick, considered to be the greatest actor of Whitefield’s day, once claimed that he would give a hundred guineas if he could say one “Oh” like Whitefield. “He went on to state that Whitefield could move an audience either to weeping or rejoicing merely by the manner in which he pronounced ‘Mesopotamia.’”²¹¹

“Besides pathos and tears, Whitefield frequently appealed to his listeners’ imaginations as he enacted the agonies of damnation and the ecstasy of salvation.”²¹² Stout found that

²⁰⁷ Whitefield’s Journals, 39.
²⁰⁹ Stout, The Divine Dramatist, xix.
²¹⁰ Ibid., 39.
²¹¹ Dallimore, II:530.
²¹² Stout, The Divine Dramatist, 42.
“more than any of his peers or predecessors, he turned his back on the academy and traditional homiletical manuals and adopted the assumptions of the actor. Passion would be the key to his preaching, and his body would be enlisted in raising passions in his audience to embrace traditional Protestant truths…Like no preacher before, and perhaps since, he demonstrated that the passions could be as effective an anchor of evangelical preaching as the intellect.”

Whitefield did not use this passion to scare his listeners into heaven but “tears, passions, and consolation fused in Whitefield’s sermons to produce a new and powerful form of preaching. Although endowed with a voice that was often likened to the ‘roar of a lion,’ Whitefield offered a message not primarily of fear and hell-fire but of compassion, suffering and comfort.”

In addition, Whitefield was one of the revivalists who participated in “Letter Days,” where believers would gather to listen to the correspondence of itinerant missionaries. Susan O’Brien noted the reason why this practice was needed.

Because private correspondence intensified their emotional identification with one another and reinforced a set of beliefs and practices, revival leaders soon realized that its usefulness could be multiplied if the news and information related in the letters was shared more widely. One simple and obvious method was to pass a letter around among friends. Another was to make a copy and pass the letter on or to read it aloud to a congregation or prayer group. But the most sophisticated technique evolved by evangelicals was to found newspapers and magazines whose main content was revival letters.

213 Ibid., xix-xx.
214 Ibid., 42.
In September 1740, a printer named John Lewis supplied the answer to publicizing these evangelical letters when he started printing and editing a weekly, revival newspaper.\textsuperscript{216}

Whitefield used the newspapers and magazines of his day to publicize his revivals and events. At first Whitefield was opposed to advertising and reported that it “chagrined me.” He later overcame his opposition when he observed the positive effects of such publicity in bringing crowds to his sermons.\textsuperscript{217}

Stout found that just as “he had mastered the London pulpit, Whitefield eventually mastered the London press. In advance of virtually all his clerical peers, he sensed the potential of the press and exploited it fully. ‘Whitefield stories’ began to circulate in print, quickly assuming the status of legend. Many of these stories were contributed by Whitefield himself and reported in his journal.”\textsuperscript{218} In these stories Whitefield did not brag about his exploits but glorified God in His work of revival. He followed the teachings of the prophet Jeremiah who uttered the Lord’s desire that men only boast “that they understand and know me, that I am the LORD; I act with steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the LORD” (Jeremiah: 9:24).

Many readers who learned of Whitefield’s activities and ideas, traveled to hear him in person and some actually experienced the new birth. Others, who never saw Whitefield in person, read his works and were spiritually affected. For example, in Hanover County, Virginia, Whitefield’s sermons were instrumental in bringing the new birth to a group of literate laymen.\textsuperscript{219} Many other persons reported being affected by reading Whitefield’s autobiographical journals. He recorded that on January 25, 1739 he “received a letter from

\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., 826-27.
\textsuperscript{217} Lambert, Pedlar in Divinity, 54-55.
\textsuperscript{218} Stout, The Divine Dramatist, 44.
\textsuperscript{219} Hall, Contested Boundaries, 82.
Edinburgh, from a truly pious gentleman, who tells me his heart was knit to me most strongly, upon the reading of my Journal. How many are there, whom I know not, praying for me in secret! Surely God intends to bring mighty things to pass. Is not His strength made perfect in weakness?"  

Hall recorded that in some communities where no itinerants visited, “revival narratives themselves had played the role of itinerant by invading the parish through newspapers, pamphlets, or correspondence to spark local awakenings.”

Presbyterian pastor William McCullough described the conversion of a parishioner who read Whitefield’s Journals prior to hearing him in person. “McCullough wrote in 1747, ‘when she read [Whitefield’s] Journals, she longed more to hear him. But when she read the account of God’s dealings with him, she prayed she might hear him.’ When the woman finally heard Whitefield preach, well prepared in advance by his writings, she experienced the spiritual New Birth he proclaimed.”

Timothy Hall noted that Whitefield’s “enormous popularity, his unsurpassed eloquence, his skillful manipulation of the press, and his whirlwind tours throughout the empire, made him an embodiment of the changes overtaking it.”

Lambert argued that “through his vigorous use of the press, Whitefield participated in creating a new religious public sphere that extended throughout the American colonies. Indeed, by exploiting the expanding print market of the mid-eighteenth century, Whitefield had redefined popular religion, fashioning something public and national out of what had

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221 Hall, Contested Boundaries, 76.
222 Lambert, Pedlar in Divinity, 11.
223 Hall, Contested Boundaries, 32.
been private and local.”\textsuperscript{224} Lambert also found that “most scholars of the Great Awakening, the American phase of the revivals, have noted almost in passing Whitefield’s appropriation of commercial means for advance publicity.”\textsuperscript{225}

Whitefield also employed worldly means for the distribution of his printed works, thereby allowing more persons to hear his messages and learn about his ministry. He used creative pricing schemes and subscriptions to his publications. “Through flexible pricing Whitefield expanded the market for his publications and simultaneously extended the scope of his publicity.”\textsuperscript{226} “By serializing his Journals, Whitefield not only made purchasing easier but created a heightened sense of anticipation as readers followed the evangelist’s progress toward their own communities.”\textsuperscript{227}

Whitefield understood the power of the printed word to reach wider audiences than his preaching. Print allowed him to greatly extend the reach of his voice. “While he preached in one location, men and women throughout the colonies participated in the revivals by reading newspaper accounts of his progress, scanning advertisements of his printed works, following pamphlet wars between supporters and opponents, or reading one of his sermons. Whitefield’s exploitation of the press was central to his making the Great Awakening a national event.”\textsuperscript{228}

By the time Whitefield made his second trip to America in 1740, he employed a full-time assistant for traveling issues, funding and publicity: William Seward’s job as “advance man” was to “stay one step ahead of Whitefield. Some days he never left his lodgings, ‘sometimes writing a hundred letters a day.’ Other days he traveled by horse, spreading the word by

\textsuperscript{224} Lambert, Pedlar in Divinity, 197.
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{226} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., 80-81.
\textsuperscript{228} Ibid., 107-08.
mouth that Whitefield was coming. Before Whitefield began in William Penn’s model city of brotherly love, his way had been carefully prepared by Seward’s announcements and his own meetings with local clergy of all denominations.”

Having Seward to do the advance work meant that Whitefield was free to spend his time preparing sermons and ministering to those who needed him. In allowing others to help him in the ministry Whitefield was following the practices of Moses, who chose able men to assist him in leading the people of Israel in Exodus 18:25, as well as the early apostles who agreed that “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables” (Acts 6:2) and therefore appointed deacons to do the work of serving while they devoted themselves to prayer and the word.

Whitefield even came to appreciate the benefits of negative publicity in generating crowds to attend his revivals. Whitefield’s controversies with church leaders created an interest in his ministry. His dispute with the Bishop of London created much fodder for the press.

In New England the “conservative and thoroughly anglicized publisher, Thomas Fleet, heaped abuse on the ‘field preacher,’ identifying him with Methodism and mayhem…But, like other opposition, he simply fueled public curiosity.”

Whitefield described in his Journal on Wednesday, December 19, 1739 the impact of negative publicity and his understanding of the sovereign purposes behind it. He recorded that “… I have found the advantage of the things my adversaries have inserted in the public papers. They do but excite people’s curiosity, and serve to raise their attention, while men of seriousness and candour naturally infer that some good must be doing where such stories and

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230 Ibid., 116.
falsities are invented. It often gives me unspeakable comfort, to see how wisely God
overrules everything for the good of His Church.”

While it was good for Whitefield’s purposes to have his name publicized in newspapers
and magazines, it was even better for him to control the print medium, which he did when he
became a publisher, bookseller and distributor of his own works. Lambert noted
Whitefield’s advantage because “rather than place himself at the mercy of printers whose
objectives differed from his, Whitefield sought a vehicle that would give him control over his
portrayal in print. His opportunity came in 1741 when he injected new life into a moribund
evangelical magazine established by London printer John Lewis” entitled, *The Weekly
History; or An Account of the Most Remarkable Particulars Relating to the Present Progress
of the Gospel.*

Whitefield developed a business relationship and friendship with Philadelphia’s own
printer and greatest citizen, Benjamin Franklin who:

> though not interested in Whitefield’s message, was attracted to him as a
personality and an orator. Franklin also recognized that the publication of his
sermons could be a profitable avenue of business. Whitefield merely says, ‘[A] printer
told me he might have sold a thousand sermons, if he had them; I therefore gave
him two extempore discourses to be published’. This was the beginning of a long
association between the two men. Franklin became Whitefield’s principal publisher in
America, his personal friend and, at times, his host.

Whitefield recognized the importance of publicity for his ministry and skillfully used it for
the propagation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but he also used different venues to preach his
messages. The fact that he mastered open air preaching meant that thousands of persons at a
time could hear his sermons and be part of a national event. This innovation meant that

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231 Whitefield’s *Journals*, 373.
without walls to hinder, the audience would certainly grow, “possibly limited only by how far his voice could carry. Individuals uninterested in the church could be sought in the profane spaces of the marketplace and, mixing together with Methodist believers, could create ‘religious’ assemblies that represented something entirely new: neither church nor sect, neither Sabbath nor festival, neither sacred nor profane – but all wrapped up in one hybrid event.”  

Whitefield took advantage of the changing marketplace and moved the preaching of the word from its exclusive position inside church walls to outside where all could hear God’s message. Lambert described Whitefield as a “pioneer in the commercialization of religion, discovering with the market the very strategies and language to attack its excesses. He faced a problem similar to that of the new merchants: how to reach an ever-expanding audience of anonymous strangers, most of whom he could not reach face to face.”

It was while ministering to the Kingswood colliers that Whitefield first employed his innovation of outdoor preaching. One of the non-negotiable practices of his ministry was to preach the gospel to all types of persons. He did so on February 17, 1739 when he went to Kingswood and described how he was concerned about the poor colliers and “therefore, I went upon a mount and spake to as many people as came unto me. They were upwards of two hundred. Blessed be God that I have now broken the ice! I believe I was never more acceptable to my Master than when I was standing to teach those hearers in the open fields. Some may censure me; but if I thus pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”

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236 Whitefield’s Journals, 216.
This innovative technique of preaching to those who would never consider entering a church was one way that Whitefield used his spiritual discernment to advance the kingdom of God. Going to needy people to share the Gospel was a model that was initiated by Christ during his ministry. When Jesus was ministering in Galilee he went to the home of Levi (aka Matthew) the tax collector. He did not wait for these persons to enter the synagogue, and he was criticized by the Pharisees for eating with sinners and tax collectors. Jesus said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (Mark 2:17).

Mark Noll argued that when Whitefield first preached to the Kingswood colliers that “it marked a striking willingness to innovate and a fresh break with the Protestant past. Whitefield had become a bona-fide sensation, harshly censured by some but eagerly sought by many more.”

Whitefield showed discernment when he initially preached outdoors because he arrived at the decision carefully and with specific goals in mind. Dallimore argued that Whitefield’s action in initiating an open-air ministry was not reckless as some have suggested. “It is true that he was driven by a sense of spiritual urgency, but true also that he held himself in check by wise caution. Yet there can be no doubt that he had more in mind than merely preaching to the colliers, for he had a vision of a ministry that would take him to fields and market places far and wide across England.”

Whitefield understood the logistical impact of preaching outdoors where he could reach many more souls for Christ than inside a church. On March 14, 1739 he recorded his feelings about God’s providence in the matter:

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238 Dallimore, I:229.
Being forbidden to preach in the prison, and, being resolved not to give place to my adversaries, I preached at Baptist Mills, a place very near the city, to three or four thousand people, from these words, ‘what think ye of Christ?’ Blessed be God, all things happen for the furtherance of the Gospel. I now preach to ten times more people than I should, if I had been confined to the churches. Surely the Devil is blind, and so are his emissaries, or otherwise they would not thus confound themselves.\textsuperscript{239}

Whitefield was most comfortable in his extemporaneous, open-air preaching to mass audiences, where he “transformed the traditional sermon into something different: a dramatic event capable of competition for public attention outside the arena of the churches – in fact, in the marketplace. Whitefield showed that preaching could be both edifying and entertaining.”\textsuperscript{240} By preaching outdoors Whitefield was not competing with the churches so much as with the “merchants, hawkers, and stage players of the world. The market centers and fairs would attract thousands whom Whitefield could divert through his powerful ministry. In economic terms, religion would compete in the marketplace for its own market share. In religious terms, it would be going out to the hedges and highways to convict sinners.”\textsuperscript{241}

Whitefield’s itinerancy and many contacts with other evangelists led to the development of a transatlantic system of contacts on two continents. It was vital to the success of the revivals that believers be connected by letters, news and especially in prayer. Timothy Hall discussed his innovation in communication with other believers. He found:

Whitefield’s role in shaping a translocal consciousness extended well beyond his exploitation of the press. Through itinerancy he also provided personal, representative contact with what was soon to become a vast ‘imagined community’ of saints that transcended geographical and denominational lines through a common experience of the New Birth. The tropes Whitefield employed to describe his ministry emphasized openness, expansiveness, boundlessness often alluding to the Pauline understanding of the Church as a translocal

\textsuperscript{239} Whitefield’s Journals, 233.
\textsuperscript{240} Stout, The Divine Dramatist, xvi.
\textsuperscript{241} Ibid., 68.
community composed of ‘all who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place.’ He declared ‘all places equal to me in America as in England,’ viewing them ‘as so many parts of [God’s] great family.’

Highlighting Whitefield’s use of the worldly means of marketing to accomplish the heavenly mandate to “make disciples of all nations,” Lambert argued that in order to fund and promote his ministry Whitefield established a new transatlantic system of contacts through which “he circulated information about his revival successes, solicited funds for his missionary work, and instructed ministers on the practice of revivalism. Whitefield and his associates developed a pervasive publicity campaign featuring endorsements, testimonials, and controversy in newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets….Hence, the Grand Itinerant proclaimed a message not of the market but in the market.”

This communication with others who were part of the revivals encouraged a consciousness of international revival and a reminder that “the Spirit was at work simultaneously in the colonies and in places as distant as Edinburgh and Rotterdam…Ordinary laypersons could pray for the work of revival across the empire following the example of the monthly ‘Letter-Meetings’ in London. There Whitefield’s followers gathered to hear revival accounts from ‘all parts of the three kingdoms and America’ and to intercede.”

Susan O’Brien, noting the importance of revival news in creating a “transatlantic community of saints,” wrote that “because revival news was of great importance to Calvinist evangelicals, they had a strong motivation to create a relatively durable chain of correspondence. Once in place, the contacts proved useful to ministers in other ways.”

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244 Hall, *Contested Boundaries*, 83-84.
O’Brien also noted that the “successful establishment of coordinated prayer days, organized as the united concerts for prayer, is solid evidence for the effectiveness of the communication networks.”

Whitefield’s ‘Letter Days’ allowed other believers to participate in the “revival’s successes in remote places, joining through print thousands of distant strangers in celebrating the revival of experimental religion.” Whitefield was a consummate letter writer, writing “regularly to all the main revival figures in Britain and American and to hundreds of other ministers and lay people… When Whitefield sent letters from the colonies to London for distribution, he did so by the trunkload.”

Whitefield became known as the “Grand Itinerant” and so it was that his type of itinerancy was an innovation in his day. Such preaching had been accomplished by the early apostles as they spread the Gospel, but centuries had passed since that time. As the merchants traveled selling their new wares to better the lives of citizens, so Whitefield brought the good news to better the eternal lives of those who responded to his message of the New Birth. Hall concluded that “George Whitefield had adapted the consumer revolution’s advertising methods to pioneer the novel practice of supplementing the regular parish ministry with the preaching of traveling evangelists. The same route that brought first settlers, then merchants and peddlers with imports from afar also brought Whitefield and his successors with the message of the New Birth.”

Hall also believed that Whitefield’s three later tours in America “reinforced his status as the living symbol of evangelical zeal. They also

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246 Ibid., 829.
247 Lambert, Pedlar in Divinity, 141.
249 Hall, Contested Boundaries, 131.
strengthened his role as the representative link among a transatlantic community of the regenerate drawn from a widening range of religious persuasions and ethnic background.”

Susan O’Brien recognized that Whitefield’s “willingness to travel was the most obvious expression of his eagerness to see the revival world as a single entity and to encourage others to do the same.”

Whitefield understood the necessity to give people food for their stomachs as well as spiritual bread when ministering to them. On his first trip to America he had “clothing, books, hardware and foodstuffs to distribute and such gifts could not fail to win him a warm reception.” Large collections of funds were taken up at many of Whitefield’s revivals, but there is no indication that he ever personally benefited from offerings. As a matter of fact, he was in debt during most of his ministry because of the Orphan House, since he used most of the funds collected to support the home, as well as other charities. He wisely saw the benefit of publishing his financial records and having his ledgers audited by qualified men from the colony of Georgia. The 1745 report, entitled “A Brief Account of the Rise and Progress and Present Situation of the Orphan House in Georgia,” was printed by none other than Benjamin Franklin.

Further showing his spiritual discernment in financial dealings, Whitefield did not ask for offerings on his first visit to most American locations. While in Philadelphia, he recorded in his journal on Monday, November 26, 1739, this “preach and return” policy: “Some little presents have been sent for the Orphan House, and a large collection, I believe, might be made for it; but I choose to defer till my return hither again. As yet, it seems necessary for

250 Ibid., 101.
252 Dallimore, I:204.
253 Dallimore, II:213.
the good of the Church in general, and my orphans in particular[,] that I should visit every place in America whither I have been before."\textsuperscript{254}

Whitefield understood the holy benefits that could take place because of his developing relationships with wealthy individuals. At the young age of twenty-two he described a visit:

to a worthy Doctor of Divinity, near London, who introduced us to some Honourable ladies, who delighted in doing good. It being my constant practice to improve my acquaintance with the rich for the benefit of the poor, I recommended two poor clergymen, and another pious person, to their charity. They said little, but between then, gave, I think, thirty-six guineas. When we came to the Doctor’s house, and he saw the ladies’ liberality, he said, ‘If you had not spoken for others, you would have had a good deal of that yourself.’ God gave me to rejoice that I had nothing, and the poor all. The next day, upon my return to London, in the first letter that I opened, was a Bank Note of £10, sent from an unexpected hand as a present for myself. This encouraged me to go on doing good to others, with a full assurance, that the Lord would not let me want. Blessed be His Name! I have had many such instances of His tender concern for my temporal, as well as my eternal welfare.\textsuperscript{255}

Dallimore, describing Whitefield’s practices of soliciting the wealthy for the benefit of the poor, wrote that “upon noticing an instance of dire need in the life of some deserving person – children left without parents, a struggling widow, a pastor seeking to maintain a family on £20 a year – he would frequently bring the case to the attention of some wealthy friend and boldly ask for and receive assistance.”\textsuperscript{256}

Whitefield devised a plan to help with his burden of supporting Bethesda, his orphanage in Georgia. He “enlisted the aid of several well-to-do business men or prominent ministers, some in America and some in England, who would subscribe an amount to be given regularly by themselves and would influence others to do the same. By this means Whitefield would

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{254} Whitefield’s Journals, 357.
\item \textsuperscript{255} Ibid., 86.
\item \textsuperscript{256} Dallimore, II:280.
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no long bear Bethesda’s burdens alone and these ‘subscribers’ would count themselves responsible too.”

One other way that Whitefield used the world for the benefit of the kingdom of Christ was in his attempt to protect Methodists from attacks by violent rioters. Whitefield appealed to the court system in the same way that the apostle Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship on many occasions. After a bitter attack in Hampton in 1744 where one woman’s arm was broken and another man was wounded in the leg after being thrown into a pool, Whitefield decided to prosecute. He identified himself with Paul and wrote that “it seems they have compelled us to appeal unto Caesar.” The rioters were put on trial and the judge sided with the Methodists. Whitefield wanted only to show the rioters that they would be held responsible for their actions and he therefore did not pursue the prosecution. “Presumably, his chief goal was to prevent future attacks, and incidentally to impart the gospel to the rioters themselves. At any rate, the Methodists gained a legal victory over the rioters. If Whitefield believed in 1744 that persecution was necessary for Christians, at least the theory did not prevent him from doing everything in his power to prevent persecution against others.”

Dallimore found that “this victory was strategic in the life of the early Methodists. The violence did not cease, but in general it was less than it had been, and undoubtedly was less than it would have been had its perpetrators not known they could be made subject to the law and punished.”

Whitefield used the courts and the press to “uphold the embattled Methodists. No one on either side of the controversy recognized the value of publicity as did Whitefield. Between

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257 Ibid., 211-212.
259 Ibid., 55-56.
260 Dallimore, II:170.
1741 and 1745 he issued a barrage of pamphlets defending the Methodists and his own preaching on both religious and political grounds.\textsuperscript{261}

Whitefield was involved in ministry at a most crucial time in the history of the church. Being willing and able to initiate changes in order to preach the Gospel to as many persons as he could, Whitefield emulated the apostle Paul, who declared, “\textit{I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more}” (1Cor. 9:19). Whitefield became “a servant to all” and he won many souls to Christ. Using innovative means to attract listeners to his sermons on the necessity of the new birth, he moved his pulpit from the confining walls of the church to open spaces where lost sinners could listen. Using the language of the day with relevant and vivid illustrations, he convinced and convicted sinners of their need for salvation through Jesus Christ. Recognizing the need to publicize his ministry so that the maximum number of persons would listen to and read his works, he used the media for the benefit of his ministry which encouraged others to pray and join in the transatlantic revivals. He hired others to work with him so that he could be free to preach and learn. Traveling the globe like no other minister in his day, risking his life in thirteen hazardous Atlantic crossings and hundreds of perilous overland routes, Whitefield became an example to countless evangelists in his day and future generations. He encouraged his wealthy contacts to give to heavenly causes rather than earthly ones where “\textit{rust and moth destroy.”} Refusing to stand by and allow his fellow evangelicals to be terrorized by rioting crowds, he pursued legal action against the dangerous culprits. Timothy Hall found that “Whitefield’s enormous popularity, his unsurpassed eloquence, his skillful manipulation of the press, and his whirlwind tours throughout the empire made him an embodiment of the changes overtaking it.”\textsuperscript{262} George Whitefield used

\textsuperscript{261} Stout, \textit{The Divine Dramatist}, 179.
\textsuperscript{262} Hall, \textit{Contested Boundaries}, 32.
all the means he deemed necessary to obey the risen Christ’s command to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19a).
“I am never better than when I am on the full stretch for God.” These words were recorded by Whitefield on May 5, 1738 during a stopover in Gibraltar while making the first of seven voyages to America where he became a major force in the Great Awakening. Little did he know how much of his life would be spent on a “full stretch for God.” His life was marked by a singleness of purpose in preaching the Gospel to as many persons as he could – and he preached to more individuals than any other person in history up to that time, sometimes to audiences as large as eighty thousand. Whitefield’s gift of spiritual discernment – illustrated by his decisions concerning his refusal to compromise on essential theological truths, his sense of evangelical ecumenicity and his use of worldly means to accomplish heavenly objectives, allowed him to be the single most influential evangelical figure of his day. George Grant described Whitefield as “America’s first celebrity. He would leave his mark on the lives of virtually every English-speaking soul living on this side of the Atlantic… By almost all accounts, he was the ‘father of modern evangelicalism.’ He sparked a revival of portentous proportions – the Great Awakening. He helped to pioneer one of the most enduring church-reform movements – Methodism,” 263 B. V. Bartlett referred to Whitefield as “uncontestably the Awakening’s most prolific spiritual hunter. In a few short

years he and his Bible-carrying cohorts added 150 new churches [in America] and claimed 40,000 converts.”

Whitefield was instrumental in bringing revival to two continents as he preached the necessity of the new birth. When he entered the ministry of the Church of England the idea of the new birth was “much neglected and denied, by the time he died it was widely accepted, and throughout generations to come was a basic belief of most Protestant denominations.”

Whitefield greatly influenced other pastors and teachers who followed him. He had an abiding influence on evangelical preaching as the great Anglican pastor and hymn writer, John Newton wrote in 1770:

‘The Lord gave him [Whitefield] a manner of preaching, which was peculiarly his own. He copied from none, and I never met anyone who could imitate him with success… His familiar address, the power of his action, his marvellous talent in fixing the attention even of the most careless, I need not describe to those who have heard him, and to those who have not, the attempt would be in vain. Other ministers could, perhaps, preach the Gospel as clearly, and in general say the same things, but…no man living could say them in his way…he was in other respects a signal and happy pattern and model for preachers. He introduced a way of close and lively application to the conscience for which I believe many of the most admired and eminent preachers now living would not be ashamed, or unwilling to acknowledge themselves his debtors.’

Whitefield’s ministry impacted the great Baptist preacher of the next century, Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892). He recorded his thoughts about the Whitefield’s legacy, writing: ‘Often I have read his life, I am conscious of distinct quickening whenever I turn to it. He lived. Other men seem to be only half alive; but Whitefield was all life, fire, wing,

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force. My own model, if I may have such a thing in due subordination to my Lord, is George Whitefield; but with unequal footsteps must I follow in his glorious track.’

The great British theologian J.I. Packer, in comparing Whitefield with Spurgeon, profoundly suggested that:

Whitefield was and remains in a class by himself among British evangelists. Only the Baptist, Charles Spurgeon, who took Whitefield as a role model, ever came close to him. Both were pastoral Calvinists of genius, marked by tremendous inner intensity, vividness of imagination, freshness of vision and sublimity of rhetoric…Spurgeon neither roared nor soared in the pulpit as Whitefield did. As a preacher, Whitefield was supreme.

The evangelical church of today could learn much from Whitefield’s ministry. He would be much grieved by the spiritual condition of his native country where former Prime Minister Tony Blair recently confessed that he consciously avoided speaking about his faith during his 1997-2007 term in office admitting: “You talk about it in our system and frankly people do think you’re a nutter.” Whitefield would not have been ashamed to be called a “nutter.”

As a matter of fact, he was often called names such as: enthusiast, fanatic, intolerant, Bible bigot, among many others. The church of Jesus Christ is desperately in need of men who speak the truths of the faith without reservation and without compromise. Whitefield believed that there were essential spiritual truths and he influenced others in his day to accept them. Dallimore argued that,

Whitefield widely strengthened belief in all the fundamentals of the faith. He held to the inerrancy of Scripture, the Deity of Christ, His virgin birth, atoning death, literal resurrection, ascension, and coming again – the position held also by the leaders of the Revival…he not only preached these doctrines but also refused to collaborate with any men who denied them. The fact is that his

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267 Dallimore, II:534.
stand contributed greatly to the firm belief in the whole body of truth which characterized much of English-speaking Christianity throughout the nineteenth century. In Luke 12:8-9 Jesus said “whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.” Whitefield unashamedly, and boldly, confessed his Lord Jesus before countless numbers of men until his dying moments.

Whitefield left a model for evangelical ecumenicity that many, especially among our Reformed camp, would be wise to emulate. Whitefield repeatedly admitted that he “loved all who loved the Lord.” It is easy to discount all that is preached by members of other denominations with whom we are not in complete theological agreement, but Whitefield was open to communication and ministry with many others. He was not willing to “throw out the baby with the bath water,’ so to speak. He found that others who did not commune with members of others denominations missed out on many “comforts” and blessings.

Whitefield discerned that disputes over non-essentials were not beneficial to the revivals of his day. Mark Noll observed that “the concentration on conversion and holy living that marked Whitefield’s activity, as well as his flexibility with respect to church forms and inherited religious traditions, have always been important characteristics of evangelical movements.”

Roderic Pierce found that it was “axiomatic with George Whitefield that the Church was constituted not so much by external organization and denominational names as by the power of the Holy Spirit in believers’ hearts.” Whitefield knew that the invisible church was composed of those of many denominations, not only Anglicans, as he declared in his final

270 Dallimore, II:533.
sermon to his London congregation.\textsuperscript{273} The evangelical church of today should learn the lesson from Whitefield that externals are inconsequential to ministry \textit{but} that it must be discerning enough to know the difference between essential and nonessentials. Evangelicals today make the mistake of embracing without reservation any and all who merely claim to be Christians, regardless of their stance on vital issues, such as the authority of Scripture and justification by faith alone. Some evangelicals today go to extremes and refuse to even offer Holy Communion to anyone outside of their denomination and deny the validity of baptisms done in methods different from what is practiced in their church.

Whitefield’s reconciliation with his friend John Wesley illustrates the importance of working together for the good of the kingdom of Christ. Dr. Schwenk observed that “Whitefield never fully accepted Wesley’s Arminianism, nor did Wesley fully accept Whitefield’s Calvinism. Yet both realized that the message that they preached, the necessity of experiential faith in an individual’s life, was more than enough basis for a cordial working and personal relationship. They preached the same gospel.”\textsuperscript{274} Schwenk preached that the Whitefield and Wesley left a paradigm for modern evangelical catholicity:

The continuation of the evangelical ecumenicity was much more important than doctrinal differences, personality issues, and matters of self-promotion. Once Whitefield and Wesley realized this, not only the revival, but their friendship could move forward. They have left a paradigm to the contemporary Evangelical Church. Much more important than what keeps Evangelicals apart, is what should hold them together: the fundamental teaching of the necessity of experiential, warm-hearted Christianity. Further, Evangelicals can find in Wesley and Whitefield a paradigm for looking beyond evangelical denominations in a concerted effort to find ‘experiential religion’ in traditions historically different from their own. But this is not a call to abandon the integrity of one’s theological system. Neither Wesley nor Whitefield sacrificed the integrity of their respective system. They were


\textsuperscript{274} Schwenk, “‘And the Holy Catholic Church:’ A Paradigm for Evangelical Catholicity,”\textit{Evangelical Journal} 18 (Fall 2000): 87.
willing, however, to recognize ‘the religion of the heart’ wherever they discovered it.\textsuperscript{275}

Evangelicals today could also learn from Whitefield the importance of using innovative means to preach the Gospel to as many persons as possible. Many churches today refuse to change anything about their methods or style merely because “things have always been done that way.” Other churches use secular means merely for the sake of innovation and succeed in only compromising the glory of God. Whitefield discerned the difference and used worldly means in ways that advanced the kingdom of God. He was a pioneer in the modern methods of mass evangelism.

It has already been mentioned that Whitefield once prayed that his name should perish but the Lord’s be exalted. He did exalt the name of the Lord but his name must not perish because his character, beliefs, and methods should be emulated by Christians today to carry out the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ. May the Lord send more George Whitefield’s to do His ministry, or, better yet, may those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ boldly exhibit the same passion, uncompromising character, catholic spirit, and willingness to do all to advance the kingdom, as did the Grand Itinerant, George Whitefield.

\textsuperscript{275} Ibid., 88-89.
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