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Countess of Huntingdon. The collection of correspondence comes from archives, books, newspapers, and a number of other international sources at over 50 institutions on both sides of the Atlantic. Given the wide-ranging interests of Whitefield and his friends, the assembled strength of the collection will contribute much to our growing understanding of the Evangelical Revival.

Tom Schwanda's work on Whitefield and spiritual formation seizes on Whitefield's significant "Walking with God" sermon and gives a deep examination to his teaching on communion with God. The paper notes that while he employed the term spirituality, Whitefield utilized a broad spectrum of language to describe the believer's relationship with God that have become familiar in the evangelical revival including, true religion, piety, sweet communion, and experimental knowledge. This translatable and dynamic vocabulary provides greater awareness into Whitefield's perception of the spiritual life of the revival and offers a more careful agenda for reading of Whitefield's sermons, letters, and journals.

Brett McInelly's "A New World, a New Approach to Answering His Critics: George Whitefield in the American Colonies, 1740-45," recounts the onslaught of criticism encountered by Whitefield during his earliest preaching tours in America at the time of the First Great Awakening. Stating that he found America in a "defunct spiritual state," a sensational comment akin to those he often used to generate publicity, led to what McInelly argues was the most prolific output of anti-Whitefield publications produced in eighteenth-century America. The paper explores how Whitefield put that crisis to rest and created an environment where public criticism against the revival in America largely ceased after 1745.

The meeting concluded with a robust afternoon discussion following the lead of the Whitefield project, exploring the current state of Wesley and Methodist studies on both sides of the Atlantic that included Randy Maddox (Lead Presenter), Russ Richey (Lead Presenter), Geordan Hammond, Ryan Danker, Steve O'Malley, Jennifer Woodruff-Tait, David Bundy, and Bill Kostlevy. Future meetings of the Wesleyan Historical Society will feature World Methodism (2019) under the direction of David Bundy and Current Wesley Studies (2020) with Randy Maddox as the presenter.

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF GEORGE WHITEFIELD PROJECT: A REPORT AND REFLECTION ON THE EARLY STAGES

by

Geordan Hammond

Introduction to the Project and its Aims

The correspondence of George Whitefield project, formally called the "George Whitefield and Transatlantic Protestantism Project," commenced in February 2015.¹ For two years and three months to April 2017, I was a full-time Research Assistant on this project aimed at producing the first critical edition of Whitefield's correspondence. During that time, I was on research leave from my long-term roles as Senior Lecturer in Church History and Wesley Studies at Nazarene Theological College and Director of the Manchester Wesley Research Centre. In this period the project was funded by the Leverhulme Trust (a major United Kingdom funding body for research in the humanities), with Dr. David Ceri Jones of Aberystwyth University in Wales as project Director. To some extent, the project builds upon the resurgence of Whitefield scholarship surrounding the tercentenary of his birth in 2014, including the international "George Whitefield at 300" conference at his alma mater, Pembroke College, Oxford, and the publication of *George Whitefield: Life, Context, and Legacy* (Oxford University Press, 2016) resulting from it. David and I edited the book and were among the organizers of the conference.²

¹For a biographical introduction to Whitefield, see Boyd Stanley Schlenker, "George Whitefield (1714-1770)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition).

²Six other revised conference papers have been published in William Gibson and Thomas W. Smith, eds. *George Whitefield Tercentenary Essays*, in *The Journal of Religious History, Literature and Culture* 1/2 (2015). Details about the conference, including information on papers that have been published, can be found at <http://www.mwrc.ac.uk/whitefield-conference/>. Other recent academic studies of Whitefield include: Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Jessica M. Parr, *Inventing George Whitefield: Race, Revivalism, and the Making of a Religious Icon* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015); and Peter Y. Choi, *George Whitefield: Evangelist for God and Empire* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

There have been two primary aims of the project thus far: (1) to locate, obtain copies of the letters, and catalogue them; (2) to transcribe the letters. The first goal was the primary focus for about the first six months, with a particular focus on manuscript letters. This involved extending a preliminary calendar of Whitefield's correspondence that Dr. Jones had created prior to the start of the project. My approach was to: (1) start with searching large union catalogues like the National Archives in the United Kingdom and WorldCat; (2) search catalogues of all libraries and archives that might possibly have Whitefield materials; (3) email all libraries and archives that might possibly have Whitefield materials. I quickly learned that in numerous cases there is no information online about manuscript letters of Whitefield that some libraries and archives hold. Sometimes this is because the institution is small with limited resources; sometimes it is because institutions have not placed online material from old card catalogues. Three valuable lessons that came out of this exercise were, first, not to assume that because I did not find Whitefield manuscript materials in online catalogues that my research was complete. Second, utilizing the expertise of librarians and archivists was essential in locating letters for which there is not information online. Third, card catalogues can still be useful. At the John Rylands Library in Manchester, for example, I was able to locate some Whitefield letters only via the card catalogue.

Something else I soon learned is that prior to the electronic age this project, apart from being completed by a substantial international team of scholars, if it would have been possible for an individual or a small group of two or three scholars, it would have taken a lifetime and required vast amounts of money for research visits. In our case, the libraries and archives have almost universally been helpful and supportive in sending photos or scans of the letters they have. The initial assumption was that this project would require at least one lengthy research trip to the United States to examine and obtain copies of letters, but, in fact, thus far only a few short research visits to US libraries and archives have been needed.

To the present, we have spent the bulk of our time on transcribing the letters. Transcription of the manuscripts and letters in eighteenth-century periodicals has largely been completed. Work has begun, but more work remains to be done on locating and transcribing letters in later periodicals, newspapers, and books from the eighteenth century and to the present. About six months into the project, we made a successful proposal to Oxford University Press for a projected seven-volume collection of Whitefield's correspondence.

The project incorporates both letters by and to Whitefield. Including letters to Whitefield substantially extends the project's scope and amount of time required. Not only do we need to be intimately acquainted with Whitefield's handwriting, we need to become familiar with the hand of many individuals who wrote to him. Our basic definition of a letter for the project is a manuscript or printed letter that was or was likely to have been in its original form a letter that was sent via post. An ongoing challenge for us is that it is sometimes difficult to determine this, and many of Whitefield's publications and those of his contemporaries directed to him were written in letter form—probably over one hundred publications would fall into this category.

Through the progression of the project thus far, our "Calendar of the Correspondence of George Whitefield" (now well over one hundred pages long) has been a constant companion and essential resource. The calendar includes cross-referencing of letters found in more than one source. Where letters appear in more than one source we will use the oldest or most reliable version of the letter. The basic categories into which we have divided the letters in the calendar are as follows (omitting the subcategories):

- (1) Manuscript Letters
- (2) Periodicals
- (3) Newspapers (British and colonial American)
- (4) Confirmed Letters in Eighteenth-Century Books and Pamphlets
- (5) Possible Letters in Eighteenth-Century Books and Pamphlets
- (6) Edited Primary Source Collections
- (7) Biographies/Memoirs/Studies of Whitefield

The calendar has enabled us to begin to get a sense of the number of letters, the types of sources they appear in, and their distribution over Whitefield's lifetime. The table below titled "Number of Unique Letters in Whitefield's Correspondence"³ contains this data. It is important to state that this is a work in progress—the figures in the table and elsewhere below represent the "state of play" at the end of 2018 and will change as the project continues to develop.³

³For example, although we know that there are a number of unique letters in eighteenth-century newspapers, they have not been included in the table since this part of our research is in its early stages. The "N.D." (no date) category is excluded from some of the figures below that refer to specific timeframes.

Number of Unique Letters in Whitefield's Correspondence

Year	MS by GW	MS to GW	Periodical by GW	Periodical to GW	Publication by GW	Publication to GW	Gillies by GW	Total
1734							4	4
1735	4	1	1	1			5	12
1736	8	1	1		1	2	10	23
1737	13	6				2	10	31
1738	48	11			5	1	9	74
1739	67	31	2	2	11	17	103	233
1740	26	6	3	2	5	7	87	136
1741	11	26	9	43		7	139	235
1742	19	26	18	46	1	6	102	218
1743	12	22	33	59	1	3	22	152
1744	6	13	7	24		7	14	71
1745	9	7	1				8	25
1746	88	7	7		3		1	106
1747	10	8	12				45	75
1748	11	5	3				85	104
1749	3	14		1		4	78	100
1750	13	9	9				71	102
1751	4	5	4				34	47
1752	5	9	2				41	57
1753	6	28					62	96
1754	5	3	2		4		47	61
1755	8	1	2				42	53
1756	11	14	5				40	70
1757	3	9	6				33	51
1758	2	5	3	1	1		32	44
1759	6	4					12	22
1760	2	13					7	22
1761	4	11	1				14	30
1762	6	14					18	38
1763	3	8					26	37
1764	12	15	2				19	48
1765	6	11	1	1		1	17	37
1766	10	22	3		1	2	12	50
1767	15	13			2	3	33	66
1768	8	9	1			1	19	38
1769	7	14	1			2	42	66
1770	3	1				2	21	27
N.D.	6	18		8		1	—	33
Total	480	420	139	188	35	68	1364	2694

General Notes on the Letters

We are now in a position to detail some features of what we have learned thus far from the research, calendar, and the table above. The table provides a list of *unique* letters. When there are multiple copies of letters, it includes only the oldest or most reliable version of the letter. Over one-third (36%) of the letters are from the five years from 1739 to 1743 (974 letters), which is close to the total amount of letters for the twenty-one years from 1750 to 1770 (1062 letters). Looking at the numbers of letters by decades is another way of observing the general downward trend:

1730s: 377 (in six years)

1740s: 1,222

1750s: 603

1760s: 432

John Gillies' Edition of Whitefield's Letters and Number of Letters by Compared to Number of Letters to Whitefield

The table shows a large imbalance of letters by Whitefield (2018 letters, or 75% of the total) versus letters to Whitefield (676 letters, or 25% of the total). The key factor in this disproportion is the letters by Whitefield in *The Works of Reverend George Whitefield, M.A.* edited by Church of Scotland minister John Gillies (1712-96) and published shortly after Whitefield's death. Whitefield bequeathed manuscript material to Gillies who published *Whitefield's Works* in six volumes in 1771 and 1772.⁴ The first three volumes contain 1465 letters by Whitefield, followed by about eighty pages of published material relating to Whitefield's orphan-house in Georgia. Volume 4 contains a selection of twenty-three publications of Whitefield, most of which were written in letter form. Volumes 5 and 6 contain fifty-seven of Whitefield's sermons. The first three volumes were also published separately as *A Select Collection of Letters* (1771-72), the title seemingly indicating that Gillies had more than the 1465 letters that he published. Gillies went on to publish *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield* in 1772. If Gillies is excluded, the numbers of letters by and to Whitefield are fairly even (by Whitefield: 654 letters versus to Whitefield: 676 letters).⁵

⁴It was first published in London by Edward and Charles Dilly.

⁵We know that Whitefield faithfully replied to the manuscript letters to him since in the vast majority of them he wrote the writer's surname with the notation "Answered" on the address page of the letter. In this sentence and in some cases below, "Gillies" is used as shorthand for his edition of Whitefield's letters.

Sadly, we do not know what happened to the manuscripts after Gillies published them. This unfortunately means that Gillies is the only or oldest source for just over 50% of all letters. This problem is made more serious by the fact that from cases where we have an eighteenth-century manuscript or printed version of a letter that appears in Gillies, we know that Gillies approached the letters with a rather heavy editorial hand.⁶ It is understandable that because many persons named in Whitefield's letters were still living, Gillies routinely removed the names of the recipients and people who are mentioned in the text of the letters. Regrettably, alongside this, Gillies frequently removed Whitefield's "enthusiastic" language, taming Whitefield's character and spiritual experience. He also regularly omitted details of personal comments of Whitefield to his recipients and of Whitefield's travels, presumably with a more general audience for Whitefield's letters in mind. Recovering alterations to the texts of the letters, where possible, will be a significant challenge for our project. Further work on Gillies' editorial practices should reveal significant details on this subject. However, we are limited in this endeavor since, thus far, only 101 of the 1465 letters (7%) in Gillies can be found in an older source than Gillies. Some of these letters are manuscripts and others were published in eighteenth-century periodicals. At present, it is not clear whether the manuscripts are the same manuscripts that Gillies used or other manuscripts of the letters that have survived.⁷

Thankfully, for most early years there are a substantial number of manuscript letters and letters from eighteenth-century periodicals to place alongside letters from Gillies. In the thirteen years from 1734 to 1746, we have 806 non-Gillies letters and 514 in Gillies. However, letters from Gillies dominate the total number of letters for the twelve years from 1747 to 1758: 250 non-Gillies; 610 Gillies. For the final twelve years of Whitefield's life from 1759, the numbers of non-Gillies and Gillies letters evens out: 241 non-Gillies; 240 Gillies.

Manuscript Letters

What do we know at this point about Whitefield's manuscript letters? We have 900 manuscript letters, which make up 33% of all letters and 66% of

⁶Schlechter noted that Gillies "made alternations of substance and style" to the letters. "George Whitefield (1714-1770)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁷Except when referencing manuscript letter books, in this article, I have generally not distinguished between holographs and manuscript copies of letters.

all letters outside of Gillies. His manuscript letters are widely dispersed in the North Atlantic; they have been located in sixty-six libraries and archives: twenty-five of these are in the United Kingdom, thirty-seven in the United States, one in Canada, and three in Germany. These collections range widely in size. The fact that no single repository has anything near a majority of the letters complicates the project. The most common collection is the very small collection with only one letter: twenty-two institutions. These include large libraries like the British Library and National Library of Scotland, to perhaps unexpected sources like the Royal College of Surgeons, New England Historic Genealogical Society, and Morristown Historical National Park in Morristown, New Jersey. However, there are seven manuscript collections with over fifty letters:

Library of Congress (131)
 Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia (93)
 National Library of Wales, Trevecka Collection (72)
 Moravian Archives, London (71)
 John Rylands Library (70)
 Dartmouth College (63)
 Cardiff Central Library (60)

In these seven collections we have 560 of the 900 (62%) manuscript letters. The Library of Congress letters are all to Whitefield; the Presbyterian Historical Society letters are all by Whitefield. Two other substantial collections have almost exclusively letters to Whitefield: the Evangelical Library (40 letters) and Dr. Williams's Library (26 letters), both in London. Nearly half of the manuscript letters to Whitefield are in these two collections and the Library of Congress: 197 of 420 letters (47%).

There are a large number of manuscript letters in certain periods: for example, in 1738 and 1739 as the revival gained steam, and a small upsurge in the mid-1760s. Particular collections of manuscript letters make up a large portion of all manuscript letters during certain periods. In 1738, 44 of the 59 letters (75%) are from the Moravian Archives, London (18 letters), and the Cardiff Central Library manuscript letter book copies of Whitefield letters (26 letters). In 1739, 55 of the 98 letters (56%) are from the Moravian Archives, London (25 letters), and the Cardiff Central Library manuscript letter book (30 letters). The Presbyterian Historical Society manuscript letter book copies of Whitefield letters dominate the year 1746 with 87 letters (92%). The Dartmouth College collection (63 total letters) makes up a significant number of the letters from

the mid-1760s. Most of these are from Eleazar Wheelock to Whitefield regarding the establishment of the Indian school in New Hampshire, which later became Dartmouth College.

Letters in Periodicals

For the years 1741 to 1744 there are substantial numbers of letters from evangelical periodicals (239 letters). This makes up 35% of the letters for those years and 60% of the letters outside of Gillies. Almost all of these letters come from the series of five periodicals published under four different titles by John Lewis between 1740 and 1748 to support Calvinistic Methodism.⁸ From 1741 to 1744 these periodicals give us 67 letters by Whitefield and 172 to Whitefield.

Possible Division of Letters into Volumes

Based on what we presently know, here is a rough possible division of letters into seven volumes:

- Vol. 1: 1734-39 [6 years] = 377 letters
- Vol. 2: 1740-41 [2 years] = 371 letters
- Vol. 3: 1742-43 [2 years] = 370 letters
- Vol. 4: 1744-48 [5 years] = 381 letters
- Vol. 5: 1749-53 [5 years] = 402 letters
- Vol. 6: 1754-62 [9 years] = 391 letters
- Vol. 7: 1763-70 [8 years] = 369 letters

Some Individuals that Whitefield Corresponded with Often

The research thus far can give us a general indication of some individuals that Whitefield corresponded with often (keeping in mind that this will change, especially as more work is done on identifying recipients of letters in Gillies).

- (1) Howel Harris (1714-73), a leader of the Welsh Calvinist Methodist revival: 105 letters (mostly Harris to Whitefield)

⁸The short titles are: *The Christian's Amusement* [1740-41]; *The Weekly History* (1741-42); *An Account of the Most Remarkable Particulars Relating to the Present Progress of the Gospel* (1743); *The Christian History* (1743-45 and [1746-48]). The seminal studies of these periodicals are Susan Durden, "A Study of the First Evangelical Magazines, 1740-1748," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27/3 (1976): 255-75 and Susan O'Brien [née Durden], "A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735-1755," *American Historical Review* 91/4 (1986): 811-32.

- (2) John Wesley (1703-91), a founder of Wesleyan Methodism: 55 letters (Whitefield to Wesley = 44)
- (3) James Habersham (c. 1712-75), sometime leader in Whitefield's Bethesda Orphanage in Georgia: 32 letters
- (4) Anne Dutton (1692-1765), Baptist spiritual writer: 25 letters (Dutton to Whitefield = 18)
- (5) Charles Wesley (1707-88), a founder of Wesleyan Methodism: 24 letters (Whitefield to Wesley = 18)
- (6) Thomas Adams (d. 1770), preacher in Whitefield's connection: 21 letters (all but one Adams to Whitefield)
- (7) Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon (1707-91), a leader of the Methodist revival: 15 letters (Whitefield to Countess of Huntingdon = 13)

Preliminary Reflections on the Content of Select Letters

Turning from a focus on the "data" of the letters, what can we learn from their content? Given that the editing of the first volume of the letters and the accompanying annotating process have not yet begun, I can only give a few examples here as a preliminary reflection to scratch the surface of the potential of the letters to shed light on Whitefield and the wider Evangelical Revival. The examples given below all come from manuscript letters.

Whitefield's Education and Intellect

Biographers and popular accounts of Whitefield have often stated or assumed that Whitefield was neither particularly well educated nor intellectual sophisticated.⁹ The publication of his letters may have the effect of somewhat modifying these assumptions. Examples from two 1736 letters to Sir John Philipps, a patron of the Oxford Methodists, are intriguing in this regard. In one letter Whitefield comments, "Here are likewise Good Sir John of devout Women not a few. And some of them press on so earnestly towards the mark of the prize of their High Calling,¹⁰ that they really make me ashamed of my own lukewarmness & nonproficiency. I

⁹For example, Stuart C. Henry claimed that Whitefield was neither a theologian nor an intellectual. *George Whitefield: Wayfaring Witness* (New York: Abingdon, 1957), 96. Tom Schwanda recently noted that "it's commonly held that Whitefield was unsophisticated and intellectually weak," in "How George Whitefield Expanded the British Empire," *The Gospel Coalition* (21 September 2018): <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/george-whitefield-evangelist-god-empire/>.

¹⁰See Phil. 3:14.

find I must rowze myself or I shall be outstriped by Women.”¹¹ Was this an echo of early church father John Chrysostom, who, commenting on the zeal of ascetic women to challenge his hearers to be more zealous in good works, stated, “However, I demand nothing like this of you, seeing ye have a mind to be outstriped by women?”¹² In another letter to Philipps, Whitefield expressed these pious desires toward his patron: “I only wish Honoured Sir that my prayers (worthless as they are) may through the merits of Our Blessed Redeemer pierce the Clouds in your Honour’s & Good Family’s behalf.”¹³ Might this be an illusion to Shakespeare: “Can curses pierce the clouds and enter heaven?”¹⁴

While these are possible attributions, what is certain is that Whitefield was proficient at writing in Latin.¹⁵ We have several letters that were written by Whitefield entirely in Latin, most commonly to the Pietist leader in Halle, Germany, Gotthilf August Francke—Latin being the language they shared in common. Of the three such letters in Whitefield’s hand, one each is from the 1730s, 40s, and 50s.¹⁶ Correspondents also occasionally wrote to Whitefield in Latin.¹⁷ Whitefield often used Latin phrases in his writings throughout his life—we have well over one hundred examples of this.

Letters with Interesting and Challenging Features

There are a number of letters than have interesting and/or challenging features. In a fascinating set of letters found in the Moravian Archives in

¹¹Whitefield to Sir John Philipps (27 September 1736), Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. Images of this Whitefield letter and others in the Bridwell Library collection can be viewed here: <https://www.smu.edu/libraries/digitalcollection/white>.

¹²John Chrysostom, “Homily XIII” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, First Series, vol. 13 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 116.

¹³Whitefield to Sir John Philipps (13 November 1736), Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University.

¹⁴*The Life and Death of Richard the Third*, Act 1, Scene 3.

¹⁵After transcribing Whitefield’s Latin letter of 10 January 1753, Professor Ted Campbell of Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University commented: “Well this is changing my estimation of George Whitefield—his Latin is quite readable” (email to the author dated 17 June 2015). This manuscript letter is at the Huntington Library and is probably to Gotthilf August Francke.

¹⁶The letters are all at the Franckeschen Stiftungen in Halle, Germany and are dated 9 November 1739, 19 February 1746, and 19 May 1752.

¹⁷In addition to three Latin letters from Francke to Whitefield, see Thomas Goster to Whitefield (7 July 1760), Library of Congress and Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf to Whitefield [no date], Moravian Archives (Herrnhut, Germany).

London, Whitefield appears as a secondary author in letters written by his financial supporter, publicist, and traveling companion William Seward. In thirteen 1739 letters written to James Hutton and the Fetter Lane Society, Whitefield added brief notes in his hand to Hutton at the end of Seward’s letters.¹⁸ In the same collection, there is even an example of a triple letter that Whitefield contributed to written to Hutton.¹⁹

Another interesting but challenging group of letters is found in the Evangelical Library in London. These letters show how many ordinary and often otherwise unknown people Whitefield’s ministry touched. They also present challenges to the editorial process. Given the low quality of the paper they were written on, it is remarkable that some of these letters have survived. Not surprisingly then some of them are heavily damaged making them difficult to transcribe and often impossible to recover portions of the letters that have become detached and are now missing.

Whitefield’s Deep and Inspirational Spiritual Experience

The letters reveal Whitefield’s deep and inspirational communion with God. As the excitement of the revival was increasing in early 1738, Whitefield’s sense of God’s presence with him and the dramatic advance of the revival convinced him that “Wherever I go, he makes his divine power to be known.” His letters at this time are filled with expressions such as “God is with me and in me,” “God greatly visits my soul,” “He fills my soul every day with himself,” underscoring his almost overwhelming experience of God’s presence. Whitefield was convinced of the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit in nearly everything he did; writing, for example, God’s “holy spirit makes me do things.”²⁰

¹⁸John Wesley also wrote a series of letters to Hutton and the Fetter Lane Society in 1739 that have been published in volume 25 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*.

¹⁹Thomas Coombs, Whitefield, and Wesley Hall to James Hutton (9 February 1739).

²⁰Cardiff Central Library Letter Book, published in Graham C. G. Thomas, ed., “George Whitefield and Friends: The Correspondence of Some Early Methodists,” *National Library of Wales Journal* 26/3–27/4 (1990–92), Volume 26/4: Whitefield to Mr. Debart (23 January 1738), 380; Whitefield to John Edmunds (10 January and 13 January 1738), 372, 374; Whitefield to John Bray (22 January 1738 and 5 January 1738), 377, 369. Extracts and further discussion can be found in Geordan Hammond, “Whitefield, John Wesley, and Revival Leadership,” in *George Whitefield: Life, Context, and Legacy*, Geordan Hammond and David Ceri Jones, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 101–02.

Whitefield as Pioneer in the Revival

Whitefield's letters can help us to recalibrate previous understandings of him and appreciate his radical pioneering ministry in the revival. John Wesley's phrase "I look upon *all the world as my parish*" is justly renowned. While there is some uncertainty on date of the letter in which Wesley made this proclamation, he was very likely rephrasing Whitefield's bold claim first recorded in a letter of 3 March 1739: "The whole World is now my Parish."²¹ If one reads Whitefield's and Wesley's journals side-by-side tracing their ministry and travel as the revival gathered momentum in Bristol and London in 1739, it can be observed just how groundbreaking Whitefield's ministry was. It was frequently the case that Wesley followed Whitefield several weeks later in preaching in the exact locations that Whitefield had earlier preached and kindled the revival.²²

Whitefield's Friendships and Use of Affectionate Language

Some letters contain intensely affectionate language toward certain male colleagues in the revival. Such ardently warmhearted language seems to be lacking in letters to female correspondents. Most striking in this regard are eight letters in January 1738 to John Edmonds, a founding member of the Fetter Lane Society, in which he frequently expressed his love for his friend and imagined himself to be again in Edmonds' presence.²³ To give just a few short extracts, in one letter Whitefield exclaimed, "Surely, my dear friend, there is a divine attraction between your soul and mine, for I think of you constantly, and the very mention of your name fills me with a sympathy I never felt for anyone before. . . . May we continue lovers of God and one another for ever . . . oh dearest, dearest Mr Edmonds, ever, ever, ever your own, G.W.?" Similar affectionate language was a regular feature of these letters: "I want nothing but dear Mr Edmonds' company to make me happy, but then I should be too happy. Oh, my dear friend,

²¹Wesley to [?], [28 March 1739?], *Letters I*, ed. Frank Baker, vol. 25 in *The Works of John Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 616. Whitefield to Daniel Abbot (3 March 1739), "Whitefield and Friends," 27:1, 91. Whitefield's letter was written two weeks after he commenced open-air preaching to the Kingwood colliers and nearly a month before Wesley arrived in Bristol to join him in the ministry there.

²²This is briefly outlined in Hammond, "Whitefield, John Wesley, and Revival Leadership," esp. 109 and 109 n. 37.

²³Whitefield was at this time on board the *Whitaker* taking him to America for the first time.

you are always in my thoughts. I can never clap dear Mr Habersham in my arms (as often I do) but those happy hours come to mind when I used to embrace my dearest Mr Edmonds." He then went on to write to Edmonds' wife, Mary, noting that she possessed what he "would be glad to have . . . your husband for a companion."²⁴

In a recent article on same-sex affection in eighteenth-century Methodism, Glen O'Brien has used these letters as part of his evidence to cautiously, though provocatively, conclude that "Whitefield was likely to have been same-sex attracted."²⁵ The evidence, as O'Brien acknowledges, does not seem to allow a definitive conclusion on Whitefield's possible same-sex attraction, but his letters do clearly show his capacity to develop deep friendships with male colleagues in the gospel and converts for whom he became a spiritual director.

Tensions in the Revival

The letters bring to light not only the heights of Whitefield's spiritual experiences and amazing success as a revival leader, but also, perhaps inevitably, tensions in the revival. Friendships and cooperation in ministry were strained soon after Whitefield began to see the fruits of his open-air evangelism in Bristol. Responding to the reluctance of his friends in London to send him helpers from among themselves to support the work of God in Bristol, Whitefield confidently rebuked them drawing on the language of I Peter 5:8-10: "I can therefore (without judging rashly) say that you were permitted by God to oppose for a little while." Whitefield continued the letter by seeking to direct the movements of the Wesley brothers, James Hutton, and Charles Kinchin according to his conviction of how God was leading him. Later in the same letter, Whitefield even challenged the loyalty to the Crown of his brethren: "Are not some of you disaffected to his Present Majesty, & do not own him to be Your king? If I mistake not, when there was an objection made

²⁴Whitefield to John Edmonds (10 and 22 January 1738), "Whitefield and Friends," 26/4, 372-3, 379. Whitefield to Mary Edmonds (31 January 1738), *ibid.*, 384. This correspondence is cited as part of a larger discussion in Boyd Stanley Schlenker, "Whitefield's Personal Life and Character," *George Whitefield: Life, Context, and Legacy*, Hammond and Jones, eds. 12-28, at 15.

²⁵"A divine attraction between your soul and mine? George Whitefield and Same-Sex Affection in 18th-Century Methodism," *Pacificca* 30/2 (2017): 177-92, at 192.

that we did not pray for the King in our Societies, there was some equivocation made use of the matter was hushed up too hastily.”²⁶

The same admiration for and attraction to the Moravians coupled with, at times, perplexity and criticism expressed toward them that is found in the writings of other leaders of the revival like the Wesley brothers, is also present in Whitefield’s correspondence. As was the case with John Wesley and Benjamin Ingham in Georgia, Whitefield also flirted with uniting with the Moravians²⁷ telling Peter Böhler, “my Soul was knit with Yours.” However, unspecified conflict had caused division that Whitefield expressed desire to leave behind.

The second half of Whitefield’s letter to Böhler transitions to the news that “Yesterday I was married to a Daughter of Abraham, whom I knew not personally only in Spirit, till about eight Days ago.” Whitefield’s framing of his marriage in scriptural language highlights another prominent feature of his letters—their saturation in the words of scripture. In this short two-page letter there are at least fifteen allusions to scripture. And, once again, Whitefield’s astonishing ecstatic spiritual experience shines forth: “I enjoy Day & night an uninterrupted Communion & Fellowship with the Ever blessed Three-One no Sin has Dominion over me, neither does any Sin lead me captive.”²⁸

²⁶Whitefield to My Dear Brethren in Christ (14 March 1739), Moravian Archives (London).

²⁷Geordan Hammond, *John Wesley in America: Restoring Primitive Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 91. On Whitefield’s inconsistent interest in uniting with the Moravians, see Colin Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England, 1728-1760* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 80-88.

²⁸Whitefield to [Peter] Böhler] (15 November 1741), Moravian Archives (Bethlehem, Pennsylvania).

WALKING WITH GOD: GEORGE WHITEFIELD’S TEACHINGS ON TRUE RELIGION

by

Tom Schwanda

When George Whitefield preached his sermon on *The Benefits of an Early Piety* before a London religious society he clarified his understanding of the nature of religion. He told his listeners that religion was far more than mere words or casually speaking the name of Jesus. He remarked that many who even prophesied in Jesus’ name later rejected him. Rather religion was “a thorough, real, inward Change of Nature, wrought in us by the powerful Operations of the Holy Ghost, conveyed to and nourished in our Hearts, by a constant Use of all the Means of Grace, evidenced by a good Life, and bringing forth the Fruits of the Spirit.” This declared Whitefield was “real, inward Religion.”¹ True religion demanded a personal and internal reception of the living presence of Jesus Christ. Its operation was dependent upon the Holy Spirit who refashioned the inner life to produce an outward expression of holy living. God’s initiative inspired the use of the means of grace to deepen this process of spiritual maturity. In Whitefield’s sermon *The Folly and Danger of Being Not Righteous Enough* he reinforced the centrality of the heart and its need for radical transformation declaring “Religion consists not in external Performance, it must be in the Heart, or else it is only a Name, which cannot profit us.” He emphasized that this was possible only as the Holy Spirit touched a person’s soul.² Early evangelicals of both Calvinist and Wesleyan backgrounds stressed

¹George Whitefield, *The Benefits of an Early Piety* (London, 1737), 6.

²George Whitefield, *The Folly and Danger of Being Not Righteous Enough* (London, 1739), 8. For a helpful treatment of Whitefield’s understanding of heart religion see David Ceri Jones, “George Whitefield and Heart Religion” in John Coffey, ed. *Heart Religion: Evangelical Piety in England & Ireland, 1690-1850*, 93-112 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). More broadly including a treatment of John Wesley see Coffey *Heart Religion*, index; Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Ted A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1991, 2000), esp. 99-129.