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Inventing George Whitefield: Celebrity and the making of a religious icon

Jessica M. Parr
University of New Hampshire, Durham

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Inventing George Whitefield: Celebrity and the making of a religious icon

Abstract
This dissertation explores the making of the public image of eighteenth-century Anglican missionary George Whitefield through his use of trans-Atlantic public print networks. Whitefield, who was a consummate self-promoter and publisher of his own work, played a central role in the development of his image. The success of his publishing campaign meant that he reached iconic status, his every move seemingly documented in newspapers and pamphlets around Great Britain and its American dominions.

Owing to Whitefield’s successful use of the trans-Atlantic public print networks and his itinerant preaching, Whitefield’s influence extended well beyond national, denominational, racial and ethnic boundaries. The extent of his influence meant that his public image took on a life of his own. It also meant that his legacy was profoundly malleable. After his death, it also meant that, as a public symbol, his image had numerous possible meanings and could be "read" in different ways. His followers and other contemporaries could readily co-opt this image into multiple possible narratives, interpreting him in ways that Whitefield almost certainly never intended.

Keywords
History, Modern, Religion, History of, Biography

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INVENTING GEORGE WHITEFIELD: CELEBRITY AND THE MAKING OF A RELIGIOUS ICON

BY
JESSICA M. PARR

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M.A., History, Simmons College, 2005
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DISSERTATION
Submitted to the University of New Hampshire in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
History

May, 2012
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It is pleasure to thank all those who have made my completion of this dissertation possible. I would never have been able to finish without their guidance and support. I would like to thank advisor extraordinaire, Lige Gould, for his considerable patience and encouragement over the years. It is rare, indeed, to find a scholar of his caliber who embraces mentoring the way he does. My supportive second reader, Bill Harris, provided me with some incredibly detailed comments that were invaluable as I revised the full draft of my dissertation in preparation for its defense. I would like to thank Funso Afolayan and Jess Lepler not only for serving on my dissertation committee, but also for their collegiality toward a junior scholar and their career advice over the years. Funso also supervised my exam field in West African History. I am grateful to Bill Ross for his service as my fifth reader.

Over the course of my graduate career, I have benefitted from the advice and feedback of other faculty members at the University of New Hampshire. Ellen Fitzpatrick was my first graduate director and supported me during a rough first year of teaching. She also supervised my Modern United States History exam field. Jeff Bolster guided me through an exam field in Caribbean studies and tirelessly answered questions during my dissertation’s research phase. Lucy Salyer, Greg McMahon, Janet Polasky, Cynthia Van Zandt, Kurk Dorsey and Molly Girard-Dorsey all helped me during the preparations for my exams and mentored me on the teaching front. I also benefitted from the guidance of Jan Golinski, who, as Department Chair, aided me in a number of teaching matters. And finally, it would be remiss for me not to thank the History Department’s excellent administrative
staff – Susan Kilday, Jeannie Mitchell, Thea Dickerman and Laura Simard – for their help over the years.

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At Granite State College, where I have been teaching for the past year, I am thankful to the Assistant Dean of Faculty, Marilyn McGair. She has been supportive of me both as a teacher and a scholar. Academic Coaches Bonnie Argeropoulos and Barbara Grant have cheerfully aided me in any number of (often last minute) administrative and clerical matters.

Parts of this dissertation were presented at a variety of conferences. I presented sections of what eventually became chapters 2 and 4 at the Boston Athenaeum, the 2011 meeting of the American Studies Association and the History Department’s Dissertation Seminar. I presented parts of what became chapter 3 and 4 at the 2010 Second Bi-annual Conference on Race and Society at Monmouth
College (NJ). I presented another segment of chapter 4 at the 2012 annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians. I presented part of chapter 6 at the University of New Hampshire’s Graduate Research Conference, as well as to the University of New Hampshire Department of History’s Dissertation Seminar. I also presented research at the Massachusetts Colonial Society Graduate Student Forum and the University of Maine-University of New Brunswick International Graduate Student Conference. Thank you to all who provided comment.

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meetings of the American Studies Association and the Organization of American Historians.

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I was warmly welcomed at the Old South Presbyterian Church in West Newburyport by its current pastor, Rev. Rob John and Church Archivist Nancy Stokes, who not only granted me access to the Church’s records, but also gave me a private tour of the Church and Whitefield’s crypt. At the W. George Blunt Library at Mystic Seaport, Connecticut, Quinn Sayles, and Maribeth Bielinski assisted me. I am also grateful to the reference staffs of the American Antiquarian Society, the Massachusetts Historical Society (especially Anna Cook), the New York Historical Society, the Lambeth Palace Library (UK), the Parliamentary Archives (UK), the British Library, National Archives (UK) and the Gloucestershire Archives (UK).

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Angelo Kontarinis. Angelo was a dear friend and fellow PhD candidate, who lost a courageous battle with kidney cancer shortly after he passed his qualifying exams. As I prepared the dissertation for filing post-defense, Sonic Woytonik generously provided skillful and expeditious copy-editing support at the eleventh hour. Ian Aebel, a good friend and fellow member of the cohort of 2005, helped me to resolve some formatting issues. Together, the two of them enabled me to file in time to walk in May’s Commencement ceremony. Rhiannon Dowling, Karoline Hay, Kang Tchou, Lara Girdler, Lauren Turner and Heather Roth were my personal cheering squad from across the miles.

Finally, I wish to thank my family. I am indebted to the unconditional support I received from two women who are no longer with us. The first is the late Claire Dolber, my childhood caregiver. She was a woman whose strength and determination is unmatched. My daughter, Lily Claire, carries on her name. The second is my paternal grandmother, the late Ruth Gabriel Parr. She was a consummate supporter of my education, from my grammar school years onward, and helped to finance my undergraduate education. I was completing my master’s program at Simmons when she died. Even after Alzheimer’s disease had robbed her of most of her memory, she still inquired about my schooling.

My parents, Tom and Mary Parr, provided both financial support and helped out with childcare. My sister Sasha, who is close to completing her JD/MPH, and her fiancé, Ryan Corken, also helped take care of their precocious niece on a number of occasions, both so that I could get work done and so that her father and I could enjoy the occasional night out together. My brother, Brendan Parr, who is in the
middle of his own PhD degree in Chemistry, provided both camaraderie and a friendly sibling rivalry. Thank you also to my other sister, Gillian Parr. I am also thankful to family friend, Johan Bjärnemen, who used his travel industry connections to aid me with my flight arrangements for my second research trip to London. My husband’s parents, Domenic and Elaine Cacciapuoti, and his sister, Debra Coveney, also provided childcare.

The two people who deserve the biggest thanks of all, are my husband, DJ Cacciapuoti, and our daughter, Lily. DJ read several drafts and was incredibly supportive during some of the more trying periods of graduate school. When I was in the final revision phase of the full draft, he also took time off from work to spend time with Lily, so that I had more time to write, undistracted. I would not have gotten through this long process without his patience, understanding, love and support. And, while she is still too young to understand, Lily’s happy smiles were a considerable source of cheer and encouragement. She has accompanied me on numerous trips to Dimond Library. At two-and-a-half, she is already showing an interest in libraries, though many times, these trips involved no small amount of effort in trying to keep her eager little hands from dumping the books off their shelves. (“Yay, library! Mama, I touch books!”) Or, avoiding the display case at Zeke’s, the Library’s café (“Mama! Want cookie! Thank you very much!”) I dedicate this dissertation to them, with all my love.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AASHPC</td>
<td>American Antiquarian Society Historic Print Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHR</td>
<td>American Historical Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJT</td>
<td>American Journal of Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWM</td>
<td>American Weekly Mercury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Boston Athenaeum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEP</td>
<td>Boston Evening-Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BG</td>
<td>Boston Gazette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNL</td>
<td>Boston News-Letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPB</td>
<td>Boston Post-Boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Church History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHR</td>
<td>Catholic Historical Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGA</td>
<td>Council of Gloucestershire Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Colonial Office (National Archives UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRG</td>
<td>Colonial Records of the State of Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECL</td>
<td>Eighteenth-Century Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHR</td>
<td>Economic History Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP</td>
<td>Fulham Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GG</td>
<td>Georgia Gazette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHQ</td>
<td>Georgia Historical Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GM</td>
<td>Gentlemen’s Magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Mag.</td>
<td>General Magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GWJ</td>
<td>George Whitefield’s Journals</td>
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<td>HL</td>
<td>Papers of Henry Laurens</td>
</tr>
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<td>HSC1</td>
<td>Ramsey, History of South Carolina, Vol. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC2</td>
<td>Ramsey, History of South Carolina, Vol. 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>JBS</td>
<td>Journal of British Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAH</td>
<td>Journal of American History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JIH</td>
<td>Journal of Interdisciplinary History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LM</td>
<td>London Magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMA</td>
<td>London Metropolitan Archives</td>
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<tr>
<td>LPL</td>
<td>Lambeth Palace Library</td>
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<td>MHS</td>
<td>Massachusetts Historical Society</td>
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<td>MR</td>
<td>Monthly Review</td>
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<td>NAUK</td>
<td>National Archives UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEWJ</td>
<td>New England Weekly Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEQ</td>
<td>New England Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHG</td>
<td>New-Hampshire Gazette</td>
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<td>NJM</td>
<td>New-Jersey Magazine</td>
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<td>NM</td>
<td>Newport Mercury</td>
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<td>New-York Mercury</td>
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<td>NYWJ</td>
<td>New-York Weekly Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>OSPC</td>
<td>Archives of the Old South Presbyterian Church, Newburyport, MA</td>
</tr>
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<td>PG</td>
<td>Pennsylvania Gazette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RR</td>
<td>Religious Remembrancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCG</td>
<td>South Carolina Gazette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHG</td>
<td>South Carolina Historical Gazette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGP</td>
<td>Records of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM</td>
<td>Scots Magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WMQ</td>
<td>William and Mary Quarterly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHRONOLOGY OF WHITEFIELD’S LIFE

1714  

1716  
Thomas Whitefield (father) dies.

1726  
Whitefield begins grammar school at St. Mary de Crypt.

1728  
Conflict with his brother leads Whitefield to quit working at the family’s inn.

1730  
Whitefield learns that a servitor position might matriculation at Oxford a possibility.

1732  
Enrolls at Pembroke College, Oxford.

1733  
Charles Wesley invites Whitefield to breakfast and introduces him to the Holy Club.

1734  
Whitefield’s fasting, etc., leads him to return to his family to recover, though he continues to have health problems throughout his life.

1735  
Finishes his degree and is ordained a deacon by Bishop Benson of Gloucester.
Whitefield becomes interested in missionary work in Georgia, his interest stoked by letters from the Wesleys and others.

1737  
His preaching begins to cause a stir in Bristol and London.
Publishes his first 6 sermons.

1738  
First missionary tour to the American colonies.

1739  
Ordained as an Anglican priest, but finds a large number of pulpits closed to him.
Begins his second missionary tour to the American colonies in August. Meets Benjamin Franklin.

1740  
Publishes his infamous letter “Letter to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina” in the South Carolina Gazette.
Selects the future site of Bethesda Orphan House in Georgia.

1741  
Returns to England and quarrels with Wesley over Calvinism vs. Arminianism.
Marries Elizabeth Jenks, a widow. The marriage is not a happy one.

1744  
Their only child, a son named James, dies at 4 months after a brief illness.
Whitefield experiences another bout of serious illness, but sails for the colonies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year(s)</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1745-1748</td>
<td>Whitefield's third missionary tour of the colonies, which includes stops in New England, Philadelphia and a few months in Bermuda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1748-1751</td>
<td>Lady Huntingdon appoints Whitefield her chaplain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1751-1752</td>
<td>Whitefield arrives in Georgia, for his fourth missionary tour. Financial difficulties with Bethesda Orphan House force him to cut this tour short and head back to England to try to raise funds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1752-1754</td>
<td>Preaching tour of the UK.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1754-1755</td>
<td>Fifth trip to the colonies, which includes receipt of an honorary M.A. from the College of New Jersey (Princeton).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1755-1763</td>
<td>Further preaching tours in the UK, with a brief sojourn to the Netherlands, to seek medical attention, for ongoing health problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1763-1765</td>
<td>Sixth trip to the colonies. Whitefield’s poor health spawns many reports in the newspapers, as well as premature announcements of his death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1765-1769</td>
<td>Returns to the UK, and focuses primarily on his London ministries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1766</td>
<td>Hosts Sansom Occom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1769-1770</td>
<td>Whitefield's final tour to the American colonies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>(Sept. 30) Whitefield dies in the Parsonage of the Old South Presbyterian Church in Newburyport, MA, following a massive asthma attack. He is interred in a basement crypt in the Church days later.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

INVENTING GEORGE WHITEFIELD: CELEBRITY AND THE MAKING OF A RELIGIOUS ICON

by Jessica M. Parr

University of New Hampshire, May, 2012

This dissertation explores the making of the public image of eighteenth-century Anglican missionary George Whitefield through his use of the trans-Atlantic public print networks. Whitefield, who was a consummate self-promoter and publisher of his own work, played a central role in the development of his image. The success of his publishing campaign meant that he reached iconic status, his every move seemingly documented in newspapers and pamphlets around Great Britain and in its American dominions.

Owing to Whitefield’s successful use of the trans-Atlantic public print networks and his itinerant preaching, Whitefield’s influence extended well beyond national, denominational, racial and ethnic boundaries. The extent of his influence meant that his public image took on a life of its own. It also meant that his legacy was profoundly malleable. After his death, it also meant that, as a public symbol, his image had numerous possible meanings and could be “read” in different ways. His followers and other contemporaries could readily co-opt this image into multiple possible narratives, interpreting him in ways that Whitefield almost certainly never intended.
INTRODUCTION

The Many Faces of George Whitefield

This dissertation evolved from a previous project that examined fears that European settlers had about slaves in the new world. During research in the Lambeth Palace Library in London, England, some correspondence between Bishop Gibbons and Anglican missionaries in the Fulham Papers caught my attention. These correspondences described the resistance that a number of the missionaries faced from planters concerning the catechism of slaves. I became intrigued with learning more about how baptism influenced the status of slaves.

As my research expanded, George Whitefield appeared frequently in the primary sources. Anglican missionaries tended to be skeptical of the ability of slaves to handle the religious instruction that the Church of England required for baptism. Whitefield, on the other hand, had no qualms about converting the slaves. He instead saw it as a Christian duty. Yet, relatively little has been written on Whitefield’s attitudes toward race and slavery since Steven Stein’s 1973 study in Church History.¹

As my research continued, I originally thought to write the dissertation on Whitefield’s involvement in southern slavery, but the sources ultimately did not support a book-length project with that as its sole focus. The project necessarily

expanded. The result is a study that builds on Frank Lambert and Harry Stout’s discussions of George Whitefield. The aim became to expand on the understanding of the development of Whitefield’s public image, both by Whitefield’s own extensive efforts, and by his observers. My analysis of Whitefield includes a discussion of the impact his defense of slavery had on his image, but it was no longer the sole focus.

As Lambert, Stout and also Joseph Conforti show, Whitefield was emblematic of a decentralized, or “asynchronous” social and cultural religious movement that renewed passion for religious revivalism across the British Atlantic World. His career came at a time of expansion for an increasingly religiously and ethnically diverse British empire. Not only was there a considerable debate about what it meant to be “English,” there was also a debate about Anglican-ness as the Church of England sought dominion across the growing empire. Whitefield fits into this discussion because he saw himself as a reformer of the Church of England. In his

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quest for reform, his frequent clashes with civil and ecclesiastical authorities in Great Britain and in the colonies meant that he was no longer welcome in many pulpits. A pragmatist, he began to travel around, preaching to multi-ethnic and multi-denominational crowds through the Anglo-American world, spreading a doctrine of New Birth. Particularly to his detractors, this meant that Whitefield was no longer an orthodox Anglican who fit into polite society. Rather, he was a dangerous enthusiast who undermined Protestant unity and who incited challenges to the social order of an expanding empire that desired to hold itself together.

While there were some common criticisms as to Whitefield’s actions, his observers’ responses to him were not always consistent from one region to the next. Among the central observations made by this study is that there are, in fact, multiple “Whitefields.” Geography influenced Whitefield, and also changed the ways he was perceived by his observers.

The southern Whitefield struggled to balance his disdain for the extravagance of the refined planter class, even as he grew to believe that slavery was a necessity for the economic success of Georgia. This culminated in his transition from one who was ambiguous about slavery, to a slavery apologist who actively campaigned for its legalization in colonial Georgia. Ultimately, he embraced a proslavery ideology that was very much in line with polite Anglican society, as eloquently demonstrated by Travis Glasson.\(^6\) Nonetheless this realization came at a price. Seven years earlier, in

1740, during his second missionary tour, Whitefield had published a caustic letter that criticized southern planters both for their treatment of their slaves, and particularly for their failure to provide religious instruction to their slaves. His caustic comments rankled more than a few influential members of southern planter society.

Rather than bringing him into the fold of polite planter society, his turn to defending slavery was met with skepticism and charges of hypocrisy by Anglican planters, under the charge of South Carolina Commissary Alexander Garden. Garden and his followers not only attacked Whitefield for supporting slavery after his caustic criticisms of southern planters, but also implied that he was using money that he collected to support his Bethesda Orphan House – which utilized slave labor – for his own financial benefit. This forced Whitefield to defend himself and his fiscal management of the Orphan House in the colonial press. Indeed, on the advice of friends and supporters, he published notarized excerpts of his financial record books in newspapers around the colonies.

Also ironically, given his proslavery stance, and largely owing to his missionary work in the colonial south, Whitefield became an “accidental abolitionist.” After his death, abolitionist Anthony Benezet seized upon on Whitefield’s early criticisms of southern planters in an unsuccessful bid to convince

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7 “Letter to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, Concerning Their Negroes” (Philadelphia, 1740).

8 “Mr. Franklin; A Minister’s Duty to Men...,” *PG*, Issue 910 (May 22, 1746): 1; and “Advertisement,” *GG*, Issue 99 (21 Feb. 1765): 3
his benefactress and executrix, Selina Hastings, to manumit Whitefield’s slaves.\(^9\)
While he ultimately failed, Benezet was well aware of Whitefield’s influence and hoped to harness his image in support of his antislavery efforts.

More importantly for his relationship with slavery, Whitefield’s preaching emphasized the humanity of slaves and their equality in the eyes of God. In response, a number of evangelized African-Americans, including Phillis Wheatley, Olaudah Equiano and John Marrant, came to believe that this spiritual freedom and shared humanity with whites ought to be expanded to include religious freedom.\(^10\)
While Whitefield was far from the only revivalist clergyman to minister among slaves, he was a common thread in many of their antislavery writings.

Georgia Whitefield’s image in other colonies differed from his image in South Carolina and Georgia. For example, in Pennsylvania, he befriended highly controversial new light Presbyterian ministers William and Gilbert Tennent. His friendship with them cost his reputation dearly. It also made him aware of Gilbert Tennent’s insistence on the conversion experiences as an essential qualification that


surpassed education and ordination. It was an argument that Whitefield loudly supported, and this public support for Tennent did much to erode his reputation both among Anglicans and among the anti-revivalist dissenter clergy.

The New England Whitefield, which has arguably received the most scholarly attention, was drawn to an idealistic Puritan past, even though the Puritan canopy was all but gone by the time of his first visit to the region in 1740. Congregationalist minister Benjamin Colman invited him to Boston in the hopes that he might stir up support for piety in an increasingly refined and commercialized New England. Much as Colman’s anti-revivalist colleague and outspoken Whitefield critic Charles Chauncy feared, the result was a rise in religious discord among already fractious New Englanders, as well as challenges to the authority of its scholarly clergy.

The dissertation concludes with a discussion of Whitefield’s death and entombment in the basement crypt of the Old South Presbyterian Church in Newburyport, Massachusetts. The tomb quickly became a site of pilgrimage and veneration to “the Grand Itinerant,” wherein visitations frequently included a ritualistic handling of Whitefield’s skull and bones. Even in death, Whitefield’s multiplicity remained evident. New Hampshire, Georgia and Great Britain all made separate unsuccessful claims to have Whitefield reinterred (in the case of New Hampshire, interred) in their locales. And, even though he very much remained


culturally and socially significant on both sides of the Atlantic after the American Revolution, there was a growing movement by American evangelicals to “claim” him as a founding father figure in order to construct a trans-denominational American Protestantism.
CHAPTER ONE

WHITEFIELD THE REFORMER

Celebrities have long garnered public attention, adoration, and sometimes contempt. Their public seemingly wants to know all of the intimate details of their lives. Yet, there is an impetus for these public figures to exert a certain degree of control over their own image. The inevitable tension between the celebrities’ projections of themselves and their public’s perceptions of them creates both an air of mystery about them as well as flexibility in the iconic, public image behind the individual. While celebrity can be fleeting and not every celebrity reaches iconic status, when that public image does have “staying power,” it means that that image can take on multiple meanings to observers, which can, and often do, change over time. Sometimes the image, or icon, simultaneously holds multiple meanings. In such cases, the iconic figure can mean different, sometimes contradictory things to different groups of people. This is particularly true of celebrities, or icons like George Whitefield, who generated an enormous amount of public attention and controversy during their lives.

Indeed, few historical figures in British Atlantic or American history have ever generated the amount of controversy that George Whitefield did. As an enigmatic and profoundly polarizing figure of the Early Modern British Atlantic world, he generated great passion both from those who deified him as a hero of religious tolerance, and those who vilified him as an enemy to Anglican tradition, an
instigator of religious discord, and as an underminer of the authority of orthodox, erudite clergy. Whitefield’s missionary work on both sides of the Atlantic affected him in ways that he did not anticipate, or frequently, comprehend. This is particularly evident in his steadfast insistence that he was an Anglican reformer, even as he preached and spread doctrinal messages that were not always consistent with the doctrine and practice of a Church of England that was profoundly concerned with expanding its influence over the growing British Empire.

Biographical treatments of Whitefield illustrate the complexities of Whitefield and his missionary world. Frank Lambert’s recent biography, Pedlar in Divinity, notes Whitefield’s ability to transcend ethnic, racial, gender and even national boundaries in a period before the United States existed. Lambert, along with Harry Stout and Peter Charles Hoffer, explore Whitefield’s influence on the press across the eighteenth century British Empire, and particularly in the press in British Colonial America.¹ Building on the work of Timothy Breen and others, Lambert particularly ties him to a revolution in eighteenth-century consumer culture that “prompted new forms of advertising and in turn, further demand” for products: in this case, the commercialized religion promoted by Whitefield.²


George Whitefield’s career could not have come at a more opportune time. In *The Public Prints*, Charles Clark explores Early American print culture as a phenomenon that existed in a “public sphere,” outside both state and private life. It provided an important link to “Provincial officials, merchants, the more conspicuous divines” and other readers who may not otherwise have had a “regular link to the world at large at all.” Clark’s primary focus is newspapers, but his observation is absolutely true of a provincial print culture that, for British America, came “of age” right around 1739, just as Whitefield’s missionary career took off. Newspapers, and other print media as used by Whitefield, were “vehicles of propaganda, literature and commercial advertising” that were “meant not only to inform but also to persuade, entertain and sell.” This was something that George Whitefield understood well, particularly the power that religious autobiography had as a promotional tool. As such, the first half of his autobiography, *A Short Account of God’s Dealings with the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield*, reflected on a man who was “born in sin, suffering in ignorance,” and “came to grace only through confession, repentance, and seeking.” Whitefield depicted himself, Hoffer notes, as “a pilgrim

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5 Ibid: 11.

6 Ibid: 23.

in progress,” which was easily understood by his intended audience, and offered hope to potential converts.8

As a celebrity, Whitefield made extensive use of this print culture, along with his extensive missionary tours, to brand and to market himself throughout the British Atlantic world, he did not always have absolute control over his own public image, or how it was “read.” This all meant that Whitefield was both a salesman and a symbol for a particular brand of popular Protestantism, in a period where many people across the Anglo-American World were concerned about the decline in piety. In The Divine Dramatist, Harry Stout notes the remarkable success of Whitefield’s self-marketing campaign, in which enormous audiences “white and black, male and female, friends and enemies – all flocked in unprecedented numbers to hear the ‘Grand Itinerant.’”9 Whitefield turned himself into a “self-made hero,” modeled after Jesus Christ, which attracted followers from various Protestant sects, and also from various European ethnic groups, African slaves, Native Americans and women.10 One of the key components of his self-made public image is that he projected himself as a Christ-image, channeling God. This seemed to put him above all others, including his fellow clergymen. It gave him the ultimate authority to deliver his doctrinal messages and to challenge their authority as the figures who set religious

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8 Ibid.
9 Stout, The Divine Dramatist, xiv.
10 Ibid: xv.
and moral standards for the British Atlantic community.\textsuperscript{11} And indeed, his followers found that his conduct was unimpeachable and frequently stepped up to defend him.\textsuperscript{12} His detractors too, picked up on Whitefield’s self-deification. In 1750, one critic wrote of Whitefield’s relationship to his followers that, “he makes himself absolute Master of their Conscience, and somehow or other insinuates himself as much into the Esteem of his Followers, (who are mostly simple Women or illiterate Men) that many of them look upon him, and in a manner worship him as a God.”\textsuperscript{13} The anonymous writer’s generally scathing indictment of Whitefield’s conduct calls this deified public image “purely the Effect of Pride and Vain-glory, that this being his ruling Passion, he sacrifices every thing to that; and that as he makes himself the Head of a Sect, and acquires the Character of a great Reformer, he has his End, and will grudge no Pains to attain it.”\textsuperscript{14} This writer, and others of his mindset, detested Whitefield, and saw him as a dangerous figure who misled his followers.

The result of Whitefield’s highly successful marketing crusade was a community, drawn together by some shared religious principles, that ignored national boundaries and in many ways was more representative than the Anglican establishment of the diversity of the growing British Empire. Thus, this dissertation conceives of Whitefield as an international icon, even as evangelicals and modern

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\item “A Brief and Impartial Account of the Character and Doctrines of Mr. Whitefield and Mr. Wesley: in a Letter from London, September 1743” (Edinburgh, 1743): 10
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid: 10-11.
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Whitefield scholars have tried to re-envision him as a founding-father figure. Recent studies by Jerome Dean Mahaffrey, for instance, have attempted to place Whitefield into the narrative of the Early American Republic by reinterpreting him in this way, even though Mahaffrey does not see revolution as Whitefield’s intent. Mahaffrey rightfully notes that Whitefield’s “artful language” and his construction of the infallibility of the New Birth doctrine as having a profound impact on provincial life in the colonies.\textsuperscript{15} He also notes Whitefield’s ability to stir great passions within crowds, with an impact that continued, well after Whitefield had moved on in his tours.\textsuperscript{16}

Within some contexts during the eighteenth century, passion and sentiment, as Nicole Eustace reminds us, could be construed as a sign of rebellion.\textsuperscript{17} Certainly, Mahaffrey demonstrates that Whitefield is revolutionary as far as his role in creating and spreading a new sort of religious experience across the Atlantic World. This aspect of Mahaffrey’s argument is entirely consistent with the arguments made by Lambert, Stout and others about Whitefield’s successes in branding himself and in marketing both himself and evangelicalism, across the British Atlantic World. Nonetheless, passion, in and of itself, does not necessarily lead to the sort of revolution that ultimately created the United States. Indeed, as will be noted further in this study, there is little evidence to suggest that Whitefield ever engaged in

\textsuperscript{15} Jerome Dean Mahaffrey, \textit{The Accidental Revolutionary: George Whitefield and the Creation of America} (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011) 42.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid: 42-44.

\textsuperscript{17} Nicole Eustace, \textit{Passion is the Gale: Emotion, Power and the Coming of the American Revolution} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2008): 287.
revolutionary politics, or that he would have, had he lived through the American Revolution. His rhetoric instead tended to focus backward, on the British theo-political rhetoric of tolerance in the second half of the seventeenth century. And indeed, his detractors among his contemporaries understood him within this paradigm: as an Englishman who spoke the language of religious tolerance, but who often took it to extremes that they believed undermined the stability and peace of the provincial British Atlantic World, if not their own agendas.

Mahaffrey and others who see Whitefield as a founding-father figure are responding to the debate over the influence of religion in Early American identity, over precisely where that influence begins, and how it evolves. And, ultimately, over whether religion deserves equal consideration with politics as an influence in the American Revolution. Patricia Bonomi, for instance, has argued that revivalism, with its penchant for individualism and challenges to authority, served as an influential precursor for colonists’ rebellion against Great Britain, although that is not necessarily the same thing as identifying it as a cause of the Revolution. To be sure, Whitefield embodied challenges to civil and to ecclesiastical authorities. There is clear evidence that his example influenced a number of his followers to challenge their own ministers, as well as to be very conscious of their own religious choices. But, while suggestive of religious dissent, challenges to civil and to ecclesiastical authority did not automatically lead to the sort of rebellion that fueled the American Revolution. Nor was revivalism’s individualism quite compatible with the American

Revolutionary humanist rhetorical emphasis on the common good. As Nancy Ruttenberg and others have noted, popular Protestantism, as embodied in revivalism, did not fuse with humanism until the nineteenth century, which was well after the American Revolution and decades after the 1770 death of George Whitefield.¹⁹

What studies like those of Mahaffrey help to demonstrate is that George Whitefield’s appeal to a diverse audience also meant that various groups and localities responded to him in different ways, and were able to adapt his image to their own conversations. Whitefield never truly spoke of liberty in the American political sense. His rhetoric concerned a more limited sort of liberty that promoted the freedom of his followers to follow their own religious proclivities. But, because “liberty” is an imprecise and malleable concept, and because Whitefield’s widespread appeal meant that he himself was malleable as a symbol, it meant that his image could readily be appropriated for different aims. His challenges to civil and to ecclesiastical authority throughout the British Atlantic World suggest a challenge to central authoritative structures beyond national boundaries. To see Whitefield only as a potential icon of American Christian liberty is limiting. American Protestant evangelicals who began to cling to his image during the American Revolution are only one of the groups who appropriated Whitefield’s image for their own purposes. Anti-slavery writers, like Phillis Wheatley and Olaudah Equiano, are another. As chapter 4 will show, there is no evidence that

Whitefield ever supported abolition. In fact, he came to see slaves through a veil of paternalism, as a group in need of his aid and particularly his spiritual guidance, as well as an economic resource to be exploited. Nonetheless, through his language supporting religious diversity, he unwittingly helped to inspire the idea of political freedom amongst slaves.

This study instead refers back to the models set by Lambert and Stout, who acknowledge Whitefield’s influence on Early American religious culture, but also posit him as a figure of the British Empire who does not neatly fit into national or denominational boundaries. Aside from the inherent problem of assigning founding father status to an individual who died before the American Revolution began, Whitefield remained a figure of continued reverence for evangelicals across the British Atlantic World. The fact that he actively sought as large an audience as possible during his life, and that his influence remained broad after his death, makes him an unlikely and problematic founding-father figure. In effect, his itinerancy, combined with the status his tomb gained as a site of pilgrimage for international visitors, meant that even after the American Revolution he continued to straddle the British and American worlds. It also meant that his meaning changed (if sometimes subtly) in accordance with local geographic and temporal contexts in which he is “read,” and that he took on multiple meanings, even within a given time and space.

George Whitefield himself was heavily responsible for the pervasive nature of his status as an *Anglo-American* icon, rather than an *American* icon. Whitefield was not always able to control every word printed about him in the press, but Stout’s and Peter Charles Hoffer’s studies demonstrate the deftness with which
Whitefield used the press to advance not only his religious messages, but also his own celebrity, making him the most important influence in the process of his own iconification. Thousands of his sermons appeared in publication over the course of his career, with advertisements for new publications and new additions regularly appearing in the newspapers.

Followers of revivalism flocked to obtain copies of religious tracts and publications. As Mark Valeri notes in *Heavenly Merchandize*, the commercial print network utilized by George Whitefield and other ministerial writers had its roots in the seventeenth century. In the British American colonies, for example, Cotton Mather was a masterful disseminator of his religious writings through publication. Similarly, eighteenth-century revivalists were consummate consumers of religious tracts. They commonly read “Puritan classics” like Joseph Alleine’s *Alarm to the Unconverted* (1641) and Thomas Shepard’s *Sincere Convert* (1641), which spoke to the importance of conversion to achieve salvation. Also popular were the writings of William Law and Solomon Stoddard, who advocated the doctrines of New Birth and justification by faith, which were profoundly influential to Whitefield. The

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revivalists’ appetite for this sort of Christian literature drove an entire printing industry, which, as Frank Lambert argues, Whitefield (and others) capitalized upon to sell his particular brand of Christianity.23 These evangelical publishing networks effectively created a sense of unity in a Christian Atlantic community that had some shared ideologies.24 Its participants on both sides of the Atlantic could “place themselves within an international movement by reading, writing, listening, and talking.”25 Of this phenomenon, Jonathan Edwards wrote, “the Church of God, in all Parts of the World, is but one.”26 Through this exchange of ideas, the Atlantic evangelical community was, as Timothy Breen wrote of “the new imperial story,” an “integrated story, neither American nor English but an investigation of the many links that connected men and women living on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.”27 George Whitefield proved to be a powerful force within this integrated story traversing the Atlantic World. As a symbol of this transatlantic evangelical community, he took on many layers of meaning, which will be unpacked further in the course of this study.

Reports of George Whitefield’s tours, both planned and anticipated, also appeared in papers on both sides of the Atlantic. The result was that his tours, and expectations thereof that sometimes preceded his visits by months, received a huge

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*America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1994): 38

23 Lambert, “Pedlar in Divinity,” 52-94


25 Ibid.

26 As quoted in Ibid.

build-up and fanned the flames of admiration by his followers. Also significant is the fact that public reports of his preaching were seldom, if ever, confined to the locality in which he had preached. One 1748 notice in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* reported the progress Whitefield that made in a tour bound for Bermuda, with plans to proceed to New York or Boston after about a month. Its writer also noted that Whitefield had “a greater Character among us than ever, and better established,” and was “being honoured by Persons of all Ranks.”

Whitefield was profoundly image conscious, and in his journals and other publications, he always depicted himself as having a good rapport with both the humble sort of people he frequently preached among and also figures of authority, even as he often turned around and challenged them. While the report in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* was unattributed, and Whitefield had a number of strong allies in Philadelphia, its tone is entirely consistent with his other writings, and it is quite probable that he had a hand in its appearance in the paper.

Indeed, George Whitefield was an accomplished self-publicist. In the early years of his ministry, he once sat for at least three separate and remarkably unflattering portraits in a relatively short span of time. These portraits were, as Lambert notes, “of a public person, more than an ordinary preacher, indeed, a living symbol of the successful revival of “true religion.”

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29 Lambert, “Pedlar in Divinity,” 5.
Whitefield, Lambert argues, appeared to "recognize that these paintings were 'texts,' and sought to fashion editions which people would 'read' in the way he desired."\(^\text{30}\)

His efforts to project himself as a pious messenger of the "true religion" also afforded his detractors additional opportunities to ridicule him with nicknames like "Dr. Squintum," owing to his strabismus, which was visible in nearly every visual image of him.\(^\text{31}\)

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

\(^{31}\) British actor Samuel Foote invoked "Dr. Squintum" in his unflattering portrayal of Whitefield in his 1760 anti-revivalist play "The Minor." The play outraged Whitefield’s followers and was quashed in part due to the influence of his patroness,
Numerous images of Whitefield in portrait and in cartoon form were available throughout the British Atlantic World, but most of his public image revolved around texts of a more traditional sort. In a manner befitting his early involvement with the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, Whitefield frequently travelled with large quantities of his own published sermons and journal articles as well as religious tracts by other like-minded Christian writers, for distribution. This all made him a force of propagation unto himself and contributed to his rise as a central figure in the provincial British Empire. Lambert particularly unpacks Whitefield's remarkable ability to draw a crowd as well as his arguably unparalleled charisma.

Celebrity, and particularly at the level George Whitefield achieved it, often takes on a life of its own, and this made it impossible for Whitefield to control all representations of himself in the press. So fascinated was the public with Whitefield, that the details of his personal life, from the birth of his infant son to the untimely death of an obscure relative in Annapolis, became international news.\(^{32}\) There were even public speculations about his health, and, on at least one occasion in 1761, premature reports of his death.\(^{33}\) As exemplified by his journals and his

\[^{32}\] “Annapolis, March 26.” \textit{PG}, 23 April 1752, Iss. 1219: 2.

thousands of other publications, Whitefield had a tremendous amount to say about doctrine and religious life in general in the public prints. In contrast, he occasionally complained about his health, and he wrote only very rarely about his family or other aspects of his personal life in his publications. All of this added to his mystique.

Whitefield’s charisma, his self-marketing, and itinerancy meant that he had an almost unrivaled impact on provincial life in the British Atlantic World. His mentors and fellow revivalists, Charles and John Wesley, both published and travelled to the Colonies and around Great Britain, but neither their publications nor their tours reached the same level as Whitefield’s. Connecticut-born evangelical Jonathan Edwards, too, published and exchanged letters with revivalists in Great Britain and around the colonies, but he was not an itinerant. This meant that the Wesleys’ and Edwards’s images and legacies were much more contained than Whitefield’s, and their influence less expansive than his. And, while Jonathan Edwards was known for his lively sermons, his charisma did not attract the numbers of followers or admirers that Whitefield did. Even Benjamin Franklin, an avowed deist who thoroughly rejected Whitefield’s religious message, reported that he found himself persuaded to proffer financial support for Whitefield’s Georgia orphanage.34 As a result of this encounter, the two men developed an unlikely friendship. Franklin, who was both a businessman and deeply impressed with Whitefield’s charisma, earnestness and ability to draw huge audiences, printed many of Whitefield’s sermons and other tracts.35 Franklin, who shared, if not

34 Hoffer, 21.
surpassed, Whitefield’s talents for performance and for utilizing the early press networks, was one of many friends that Whitefield nurtured in his network of printers and editors.\(^{36}\) He was not always successful in controlling his image, but the press remained an important vehicle for him, and on both sides of the Atlantic played a vital role in the iconification of both Franklin and Whitefield.

Another essential aspect of Whitefield’s iconic status was what he meant for religious tolerance. The religious tolerance that Whitefield was concerned with stemmed from seventeenth-century English notions that individuals ought to be able to choose their church and their minister without interference by government.\(^{37}\) As Christopher Hill noted, religious freedom was an aspect of the liberty of conscience that drove the English Civil War. Within this paradigm, religious freedom was a right of English citizens, though by the time of Whitefield’s career, liberty of conscience had become a much less radical concept than it had been in the middle of the seventeenth century.\(^{38}\) Nonetheless, dissenters and their supporters still believed that freedom of religion was an English right and that individuals ought to be able to practice their religion without interference or persecution. This was, however, a limited sort of tolerance for the majority of supporters, only applying to Protestants.

\(^{36}\) Ibid: 3-6, 36.

\(^{37}\) Versus an established, or national church.

Advocates for the liberty of conscience argued that different (typically Protestant) Christian sects ought to be able to live along side each other peacefully. In 1649, this ideology had mass appeal among the religious. One anonymous pamphleteer wrote how “most Christians persecute each other with fire and sword, as I may say, upon account of Religion only.”\(^39\) The pamphleteer, who was clearly responding to the violence of the Protestant Reformation, further remarked:

How much have they degenerated from the Primitive Christians, who would rather have given their own lives for the Spirituall good of their brethren, then have sought the violation of any mans Conscience by the least of many penalties we have seen inflicted by Christians, upon Christians, for dissenting only in points of Faith?”\(^40\)

This pamphlet was written and published as England underwent a period of religious and political upheaval that saw the removal and execution of King Charles I, a monarch profoundly hostile to dissenting Protestants. The pamphlet’s writer went on to assert that religious freedom was a fundamental right of English men, as well as God’s will. “The Presbyterian design,” he wrote, “was to continue and execute the same Laws upon the free-born and well affected People of this Nation, thereby to force their Conscience, and keep them in slavery, but the hand of God hath also stopped their course.”\(^41\) Religious oppression was commonly construed as a form of tyranny, or even slavery, both by these early writers and by dissenters and evangelicals like George Whitefield, who wrote and preached in the next century.


\(^40\) Ibid.

\(^41\) Ibid: 4.
The writer of this particular pamphlet was unusual in that he would extend religious tolerance to Catholics: “it is not improbable that God may not impute the sin of Idolatry to the Papists.”42 The language of liberty of conscience was usually the province of Protestant non-conformists. Most dissenters in this period, and Englishmen in general, tended to espouse anti-Catholicism. Charles I was despised in part because of his Catholic sympathies. In line with this mentality, Whitefield was also rabidly anti-Catholic.

The question of to whom religious tolerance should be extended and how far that toleration should go was complicated. John Locke tied the idea of tolerance into English liberty. “Our Government,” Locke wrote in his 1690 pamphlet, Letter Concerning Toleration, “has not only been partial in Matters of Religion, but those also who have suffered under that Partiality.”43 Locke blamed “the narrowness of Spirit” of those who wrote to “vindicate their own Rights and Liberties” that were “suited only to the Interests of their own Sects” as the “Principle Occasion for our Miseries and Confusions.”44 Religious diversity therefore was, in Locke’s estimation, a necessity for religious liberty, and for English liberty as a whole. He echoed the sentiments of the anonymous writer of 1649, condemning the violence and other persecutions committed in the name of religion, and espousing skepticism of their goal for the “Advancement of the True Church.”45 “If, like the Captain of our Salvation, they sincerely desired the Good of Souls,” he argued, “they would tread in

42 Ibid: 5.
44 Ibid.
the Steps, and follow the perfect Example of that Prince of Peace.” In other words, divisiveness and bigotry was counter to English interests and undermined true liberty. Indeed, in practice, as Chris Beneke reminds us, dissent and the advocacy for religious freedom in theory did not automatically mean true religious tolerance in practice. Dissenters and Anglicans alike were capable of becoming caught up in the sense that theirs was the “only legitimate form of religious truth.” Most early eighteenth-century religious commentators,” Beneke notes, “believed that they had a “responsibility for maintaining the community of believers in the one, true mode of faith.” Church authorities largely believed that they “had the obligation to do as the Lord said unto the servant: ‘compel them to come in, that my house might be filled.’” Even as he accused others of religious bigotry, Whitefield himself was guilty of this on many occasions, in his assertions about the conversion experience and the New Birth.

Locke exported his ideas on tolerance to some of the British American colonies. His 1690 treatise was entirely consistent with the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina that he had authored twenty-one years earlier, which barred the use of religious assembly as a venue for seditious speech, but also declared that: “No person of any other church or profession shall disturb or molest

46 Ibid.
48 Ibid: 25.
49 Ibid: 25.
any religious assembly.” The Colony’s charter and proclivities evolved largely for pragmatic reasons, just as Whitefield would later embrace religious tolerance and interdenominational cooperation with figures like William Penn, William and Gilbert Tennent, and others for pragmatic reasons. Carolina’s charter needed to embrace religious tolerance because “potential settlers had varied beliefs,” though “nonconformity was permitted by reversible dispensation of the Lords Proprietors rather than a right.” If the Lords Proprietors failed to acknowledge these varied beliefs in the early days of settlement, the Colony would have had little chance of attracting settlers. Still, as James Lowell Underwood REMINDS us, it was a limited sort of tolerance. Carolina’s Lockeian toleration did not extend “to those whose religion undermined the moral standard necessary to preserve civil society or to religions that required allegiance to a foreign prince or denied the existence of God.” The Fundamental Constitutions therefore “furnished the rhetorical weaponry for any disputes over religious freedom.” This theoretically included the ability to exclude Catholics and a host of non-Christian religious traditions, though the Fundamental Constitutions “promulgated a generous policy for the


52 Ibid: 3.

53 Ibid.
creation of new churches” as well as language that encouraged the conversion of “heathens, Jews and other dissenters to the purity of Christian Religion.”

Toleration, as Gary Remer notes, does not automatically mean true acceptance. The term toleration is derived from the Latin root tolerare, which means to endure or to put up with dissenting views. It does not guarantee agreement, or even moral approval. Moreover, not every colony that subscribed to religious tolerance subscribed to it or came into it in the same way. Rhode Island founder Roger Williams’s experiment with religious tolerance evolved out of a dispute with the leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Williams, a separatist who believed that religious life in Massachusetts was still too close in character to the Church of England, was exiled from Massachusetts in 1636 for vehement criticisms of the settlements at Plimouth and Salem. He was a firm adherent of the liberty of conscience when it came to matters of religion, but in New England in general, religious tolerance generally meant that the colonists were suspicious of Establishment churches like the Church of England. The precise degree to which different Protestant churches and sects were tolerated, in New England and the other colonies, and the degree to which individuals could play an active role in church governance, varied considerably, depending on the time, settlement and colony as a whole.

54 Ibid.
Revivalist culture drew on both the writings of the seventeenth-century dissenters, and the newer writings of revivalist preachers like John Wesley, George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. Participants in the Great Awakening also shared some of the ideals of the seventeenth-century thinkers concerned with tolerance. Revivalists did not always explicitly link their principles to the liberty of conscience and should, in general, not be conflated with their seventeenth-century counterparts. Like their predecessors, revivalist preachers, including Whitefield, Edwards and the Tennents, were deeply concerned with the right to practice religion, unmolested by civic authorities or by the ecclesiastical authorities of other sects.

Like their dissenter counterparts from the Reformation, revivalists also believed that good preaching was an important function of a good priest. The reformation had changed the role of the laity, to one where “every household” was now “recognized as the true successors of the corrupted monasteries and convents.” The laity were to live their lives in a manner that was “godly and quietly.” The preaching minister retained his role as one who “applied the text with more expertise and a greater measure of authority than any lay man.” He was “the exemplar of sanctity.” The Great Awakening was, in many ways, the next stage

58 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
of evolution in the relationship between ministers and their congregants. It profoundly changed the nature of the way priests interacted with the laity, giving into the hands of the laities, more responsibility for the interpretation and application of doctrine.

The Great Awakening was a Protestant movement that began in the 1730s and spread across Protestant Europe as well as British Colonial America. It challenged the authority of ordained ministers, ritual, and many other formalities of the traditionalist church experience, such as the necessity of a common book of prayer and the convention that religion be confined to a sanctioned pulpit. Sermons were highly charged emotional experiences, with ministers, who were sometimes untutored, preaching extemporaneously to enormous audiences. Eighteenth-century evangelicals also tended to resist denominationalism, which meant that this religious awakening readily crossed ecclesiastical, linguistic and ethnic lines.62

With the exception of having been formally educated at Pembroke College, Oxford and ordained into the Church of England, George Whitefield, “the Grand Itinerant,” readily embodied all of these facets of revivalism. He was an itinerant preacher who drew crowds sometimes reaching into the tens of thousands, though his preaching tended to create discord in the communities, rather than the Christian unity that the forebears of religious tolerance had (however naively) hoped to promote. In many ways, the religious dissidence that often followed in Whitefield’s wake embodied some reservations of Thomas Hobbes about pluralism and whether

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it was good for society.\textsuperscript{63} The factionalism that followed Whitefield’s visit to New England, as described in the fifth chapter, particularly demonstrates divisions over the means of propagating Protestant Christian piety and the role of the minister and his relationship to his congregants that evolved from revivalist preaching.

Particularly in the British American colonies, the Great Awakening evolved out of a sense that piety was in decline and that religious life was “in a deplorable state.” It rapidly produced a loosely organized network of “like-minded preachers,” engaged in a dialog about piety, faith and “biblical truth” that particularly emphasized the conversion experience, or New Birth, salvation, and a personal relationship with God.\textsuperscript{64} The Great Awakening was, as Frank Lambert notes, an “imported divinity” in which “evangelicals” found “delight” in “exchanging revival news across the Atlantic.”\textsuperscript{65} “The friendly Correspondence,” wrote English theologian Isaac Watts and minister John Guyse, “gives us now and then the Pleasure of hearing some remarkable Instances of divine Grace in the Conversion of Sinners, and some eminent Examples of Piety in the American Part of the World.”\textsuperscript{66} British itinerant missionaries like George Whitefield became “pedlars” of this “imported divinity.”\textsuperscript{67}

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\textsuperscript{63} Remer, \textit{Humanism and the Rhetoric of Toleration}, 9.


\textsuperscript{65} Ibid: 88.

\textsuperscript{66} As quoted by Frank Lambert in Ibid.

The Great Awakening had a profound impact on provincial life. Particularly in colonial British America, where “a majority of adults were regular church goers,” church attendance was central to community life. In a time where there were numerous debates over who could be a communicant, a pew holder, or, was “canonically qualified to take communion,” church membership gave individuals a sense of belonging to a community. Yet, at the same time, denominationalism and ethnic pluralism complicated who could be considered “churched.” Revivalist ministers like Whitefield were welcoming across these ethnic and denominational lines. It is therefore easy to understand why revivalism was so successful in the colonies, where no single church effectively managed to establish hegemony.

The Great Awakening also, as Jon Butler eloquently demonstrates, renewed interest in piety and religious life across the British American colonies. It had a significant impact on the nature of relationships between ministers and their congregants. Its emphasis on the participants’ personal relationship with God and the importance of the conversion experience over ecclesiastical erudition put more power and responsibility for spreading religious messages in the hands of the laity. This meant that congregants were far more likely to challenge their ministers than their predecessors had been.

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68 Bonomi, Under the Cope of Heaven, 87
70 Ibid: 89.
Given the wide-ranging scope and impact of the Great Awakening throughout the British Empire, as well as the ethnic, linguistic and denominational diversity of the individuals involved, an “uneven pattern of revival enthusiasm” meant that “responses [to revivalism] differed greatly from colony to colony and region to region.”73 The “web of expectations, beliefs, values, traditions and ideas” of a community all governed its response to revivalism.74 Moreover, these expectations were subject to change. It is thus hardly surprising that the responses to Whitefield varied quite a bit by community as well as chronology, and that his image could be readily co-opted for various ends, be it as a symbol of religious tolerance, or anti-slavery, or as a figure through which anti-revivalist opponents expressed the dangers they saw in revivalism.

Revivalists spoke about tolerance and religious persecution, though in practice they were not always broadminded about doctrinal interpretations that did not match up with theirs. Whitefield was no Lockean scholar and was increasingly intolerant of doctrinal interpretations that challenged his own, but he was still formally an advocate of religious tolerance. It is, therefore, unsurprising that Whitefield saw no incompatibility between advocating the freedom to choose one’s own (Protestant Christian) worship practices and his ties to the Anglican Church, an English institution.

Unfortunately, in a longstanding pattern, Whitefield either misunderstood or miscalculated local and imperial geo-political climates, which meant that his actions

74 Ibid.
were much more likely to be read as seditious by ecclesiastical and civil authorities in Great Britain and the colonies. As Carla Gardina Pestana demonstrates, Whitefield’s missionary career came at a time where the Church of England was quite keen on expanding its spiritual dominance in the New World. The ascendancy of the Church of England to the exclusion of all others remained a point of concern into the eighteenth century and led to spirited debate in the British American colonies long after the fervor abated in England. The influx into the British American colonies of numbers of non-Anglicans who sought refuge from religious repression, however, made it all but impossible for any one church to achieve dominance. The Church of England, particularly, faced an uphill battle, since at least two-thirds of the colonists identified as dissenters, all with their own goals about the propagation of religion and an inherent resistance to established churches.

The Church of England’s hierarchy exercised some pragmatism with regard to its propagation activities in the New World, such as not leaning on its missionaries to pursue the catechism of slaves, when it recognized that those actions could prove harmful to their missionary goals. To catechize slaves against the wishes of their masters, for instance, meant that the plantation owners who contributed to Anglican missionaries’ salaries might become less inclined to lend

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their fiscal and political support.\textsuperscript{78} When there was no clear benefit, or the Church hierarchy believed that something ran counter to Church interests, it was of course disinclined to adapt. For a church body determined to establish spiritual dominance, neither an acceptance of religious diversity, nor a tolerance of doctrinal practice that seemed incompatible with its own, were matters for compromise. Because Whitefield had his own purposes, ones that the Church did not always see as compatible with its own, he was on an inevitable collision course with Church authorities, as each side sought to preserve its own visions, even if Whitefield believed that his vision was of a more orthodox Anglicanism. His actions also led to clashes with non-Anglican ecclesiastical figures.

For his part, a religious tolerance largely born of pragmatism was only part of Whitefield’s message. Within only a few years of the beginning of his missionary career, he also became convinced that the conversion experience was far more important for preaching the gospel than anything else. While the Church of England never accepted his doctrinal assertions about regeneration, Whitefield’s insistence, by 1740, on the dangers of the unconverted minister, along with his failure to adequately distinguish himself from untutored itinerants, alienated him from both the Establishment Church and the more traditional, scholarly disserter clergy.\textsuperscript{79} At one point, Boston Congregationalist Charles Chauncy specifically called upon Whitefield to explain how his advocacy of the conversion experience over all else was compatible with the Church of England’s Thirty-Nine Articles, which


\textsuperscript{79} Oct. 21, 1740, Davis, ed., \textit{GWJ}, 480
emphasized the authority of an ordained minister in matters of scripture and in communion.\textsuperscript{80} These public accusations increasingly plagued Whitefield throughout his missionary career.

All of this cost Whitefield dearly in terms of his reputation with the Anglican Church. The Bishop of London and other members of the Church of England’s hierarchy throughout the British Atlantic World kept a close eye on him and on his association with New Light ministers.\textsuperscript{81} His association with prominent Methodists, like Charles and John Wesley, pre-dated his ordination, but these associations were initially insufficient to undermine his reputation as an Anglican. As his associations with the more outspoken figures of revivalism deepened, and as he preached to trans-denominational audiences, Whitefield’s Anglican respectability eroded.

Because Whitefield looked backward to the seventeenth-century dissenters for his ideas about religious tolerance, and because some studies of Whitefield and revivalism conflate that with the ideals of American religious liberty, it is important to draw a distinction between the two. There were a number of major divergences between revivalists and dissenters who advocated religious tolerance. For one, dissenting ministers were usually assigned to a specific pulpit. These assignments could and did mean that assignments changed in the duration of their careers, but even early missionaries to the New World were typically assigned to a sanctioned pulpit. Indeed, the number of colonial pulpits grew faster than the number of

\textsuperscript{80} Charles Chauncy, “A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Whitefield Publically Calling Upon Him to Vindicate his Conduct, or Confess His Faults” (Boston, 1745): 2.

available ministers. This fed the concerns of British clergy from across
denominational lines about the moral decay of the colonies. The lack of sufficient
ministers with appropriate credentials and character, to attend to the spiritual well
being of the Colonists drove the Church of England and other sects to send
missionaries to the Americas.

In contrast, a regular pulpit, or even a church, was not always a part of the
“church” experience during the Great Awakening. Some revivalists, such as
Jonathan Edwards, John Newton and Gilbert Tennant preached their sermons from a
regular pulpit. A number of revivalist preachers, however, turned to open-air,
itinerant preaching. Whitefield did so out of necessity, as he increasingly found
pulpits closed to him from the early years of his missionary work. Whitefield’s
mentor, John Wesley, was initially not a supporter of itinerancy, because he felt it
was inconsistent with the practices of the Church of England, but he relented when
he saw that open-air preaching had the potential to reach broader audiences.82

The importance of a clergyman’s credentials also differed between revivalist
and dissenters. Many dissenters, or later, “Old Lights” preachers, were also formally
educated and ordained ministers, who tended to take an intellectual approach to
their ministries. John Cotton, Thomas Hooker and Cotton and Richard Mather were
all college-educated and ordained, although Hooker and both Mathers came under
fire from Archbishop William Laud for non-conformity. In contrast, for revivalists
during the Great Awakening, a minister’s credentials became less important than his
conversion experience. The Great Awakening was, as Mark Noll notes, a form of

82 Stephen Tomkins, John Wesley: A Biography. (Eerdmans, 2003): 69
piety that did not share the intellectualist tendencies of the dissenters who preceded it.\textsuperscript{83} This was true on both sides of the Atlantic, though the examples provided here are primarily from the Colonies. A number of the early revivalists, including Whitefield, Edwards and William Tennent, had college educations, but the emphasis on the credentialing of ministers declined amongst revivalists after around 1740. William Tennent’s son, Presbyterian minister and “New Light” Gilbert Tennent, delivered a sermon emphasizing the conversion experience of ministers over their credentials. It rankled the more traditional dissenters, like Boston’s eminent Congregationalist minister Charles Chauncy, but it was an argument that Whitefield wholeheartedly supported.\textsuperscript{84} This in turn, led to criticisms by anti-revivalists, who frequently saw revivalist ministers as unsophisticated, literalist and frequently wrong in their scriptural interpretations.\textsuperscript{85} The more vehement anti-revivalists criticized the schooled revivalists such as Whitefield (whom they often still saw as simplistic) for failing to distance themselves from the untutored itinerants. Charles Chauncy openly blamed Whitefield for the plethora of unschooled itinerant revivalist preachers and for the disorder and disrespect toward the clergy that, Chauncy believed, Whitefield’s preaching created and encouraged.\textsuperscript{86}


\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{85} Joseph Belcher, \textit{George Whitefield: a Biography with Special References to His Labors in America} (NY, 1857): 270.

\textsuperscript{86} Charles Chauncy, \textit{The State of Religion, Since the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield’s Arrival There} (Glasgow, 1742): 8
Another important difference between revivalists and those influenced by the seventeenth century thinkers is that early advocates of humanist toleration like Desiderius Erasmus, John Locke, and William Penn tended to place an emphasis on the community, as well as on ethics, rather than dogma, and were more concerned with “trespasses against morality rather than offenses against doctrine.” While not all dissenters embraced religious freedom on humanist grounds, they still tended to be concerned with the good of the community. Like Erasmus, Whitefield was concerned with morality. He was also profoundly concerned with doctrinal matters. Dissenting humanists also were not individualists, whereas revivalism emphasized an individual’s personal relationship with God. And finally, depending on their attitude toward religion and government, not all religious humanists embraced the idea of pluralism. Thomas Hobbes, for instance, “did not believe that religious pluralism was conducive to the well-being of the state,” instead, arguing that the “sovereign must look to the interest of the commonwealth to decide whether or not to be tolerant.” Such a view was utterly incompatible with either the views of the more militant separatists, or with revivalism’s emphasis on the right of an individual to choose his church without state interference. Whitefield was inspired by the separatist Puritans, though their ministers, too, tended to take a more scholastic approach to religion than did Whitefield and his followers.

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87 Remer, Humanism and the Rhetoric of Toleration, 2-4, 6.
Imagining Whitefield

This study is divided into six subsequent chapters that detail Whitefield’s rise to celebrity and propose a number of ways he became an icon, some existing simultaneously or were intertwining. The next chapter unpacks Whitefield’s British origins and establishes the background of Whitefield, the man, as well as his early efforts to cultivate his public image. It examines Whitefield’s origins from his birth, through his education at Pembroke College, Oxford, and explains how Whitefield came into religious life. According to his own recollections, Whitefield was a fairly conflicted youth who had a complicated relationship with his family. His father died when he was a toddler, and the family’s finances were frequently strained as a result. Whitefield’s early life was marked by quite a bit of uncertainty, both concerning his interest in religious life, and in determining what path his life was to take in general. He attributed much of that anxiety to high expectations that his mother placed on him as a young child, owing to complications she suffered for a year after giving birth to him.\(^{90}\) Religion began to take a central role in his life only late in his teen years, in large part after his introduction to the Wesleys. He had what he described as his first true conversion experience at around the age of seventeen, after which he embraced religious life with a fervent, obsessive zeal.

Over the course of his missionary career, in the eyes of others, he went from an Anglican minister, sanctioned by the Bishop of London, to a man without a

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distinct parish or clear religious affiliation beyond being Protestant. To many Anglicans, he was a dangerous enthusiast who threatened to undermine the Church of England and to derail its inroads in the Colonies. The erosion of his Anglican respectability is important to his malleability as an icon. Whitefield began his career as an Anglican Briton, but his itinerancy and his disintegrated reputation with the Church of England allowed him to become a trans-Atlantic icon.

Chapter two also details Whitefield's first interactions with people from disparate Protestant sects. From early in his career, Whitefield frequently engaged with like-minded individuals and clergymen from different Protestant sects, and he was profoundly influenced by these interactions. Indeed, although he never identified as a Methodist, his early friendships with Charles and John Wesley, and his patronage by Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, were all important in shaping his religious mindset and enabling his career. Owing to this penchant for interacting with those from various Protestant sects, he became a figure in the crusade for religious diversity across the British Atlantic World and remained so throughout his life. As chapter 6 will establish, this, however, did not mean that he was always embraced by other proponents of religious tolerance. To a more traditional sort of dissenters in the British American colonies, who might have otherwise sympathized with his message of religious tolerance, he was a source of religious divisiveness. Whitefield was also seen by Anglicans, and by some of these more traditional dissenters alike, as responsible for eroding the respect and authority normally accorded to educated and sanctioned members of the clergy.
Finally, Chapter Two begins to place Whitefield into the international, Anglo-American, Great Awakening context in which he rightfully belongs. A number of Whitefield biographies, like that of nineteenth-century American revivalist Joseph Belcher, acknowledge his English roots, but they tend to “Americanize” him by emphasizing his missionary work in the colonies. This chapter describes the British roots of the Great Awakening as well as the British ideological roots of Whitefield’s emphasis on religious tolerance. His experiences in the British Americas had a profound impact on him, but the transformation of his image occurred in response to events on both sides of the Atlantic.

The third chapter centers on Whitefield’s first missionary tour of Georgia and South Carolina, and examines the months immediately thereafter, when his Anglican respectability began to unravel. Throughout his missionary career, Whitefield continued to brand himself as an Anglican who was engaged in a dialogue with the Church of England, and the provincial British Atlantic World as a whole, about religious tolerance. For the hierarchy of the Church of England, and for other English civil authorities in Great Britain and its colonies, his doctrinal messages of regeneration and justification by faith, and his rabid advocacy of religious tolerance, proved incompatible with true Anglicanism. Some clergymen of the Church of England closed their pulpits to him in response to his pre-departure preaching about regeneration, but the number of pulpits closed to him after reports spread of his activities in the Colonies markedly increased. It was then that Whitefield began to take on preaching outdoors and in other unconventional places as the primary mode of delivering his sermons. He had occasionally preached outdoors prior to his
departure, but his activities during and after this first missionary voyage were sufficient to garner widespread negative attention from both ecclesiastical and civil authorities. This unraveling of his public Anglican brand was all but complete by around 1739, most dramatically exemplified in his very public fall-out with South Carolina Commissary Alexander Garden.

The fourth chapter continues the analysis of Whitefield as an icon of religious diversity and adds analyses of the expansion of Whitefield’s celebrity through his preaching tours and through his exposure in the press. The geographic focus of this chapter is on his experiences in New York and the middle colonies, and particularly on the impact of his relationships with William Penn and the Tennents. Whitefield’s tendency to preach to pluralist audiences pre-dated the start of his missionary activities in the Colonies, as did his association with non-Anglican clergyman. Nonetheless, Whitefield’s exposure to Penn’s liberty of conscience, which he greatly admired, and his budding friendship with Gilbert Tennent, who was a central figure in the controversy over credentials versus the conversion experience of ministers, quickly became factors in the erosion of Whitefield’s Anglican respectability. Whitefield’s support of Tennent’s arguments for the centrality of the conversion experience of ministers, which he called “unanswerable,” ruffled more traditional preachers because it all but negated the importance of formal erudition and ordination in a minister. In essence, it proposed a model of religious liberty in which an individual had (as Whitefield did) a personal relationship with God, rather than a need to bind themselves to conventional churches or ministers. When he visited New England, his support of Tennent led some dissenters to question
Whitefield’s commitment to Anglican doctrine. Later, his association with and defense of revivelist, and particularly New Light Presbyterian ministers, undermined his credibility as an Anglican with members of the Colonial Anglican clergy.

The fifth chapter examines a number of separate threads of meaning for Whitefield as an icon, primarily through his defense of slavery. The first considers his importance as a figure in the debate over the relationship between slavery and Christianity. From the sixteenth century on, a number of clergymen, particularly those of dissenting sects, struggled initially with the questions of whether slaves could become Christians, and what sort of religious instruction to slaves ought to be permitted. As Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood note, many early Europeans were “scandalized” by what they saw as the lack of religion on plantations in the Colonies, along with the “near universal refusal” of planters to permit the religious instruction of slaves, but that did not lead to their widespread catechism. Whitefield was unusual as an Anglican minister who vehemently supported the catechism of slaves. Many Anglican missionaries were politically and financially beholden to planters who opposed religious instruction on their plantations, and this made Anglican clergymen far less inclined to pursue aggressively the conversion of slaves.

Whitefield believed that slaves ought to be catechized and saw it as a moral failure

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91 Charles Chauncy, “A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Whitefield Publically Calling Upon Him to Vindicate his Conduct, or Confess His Faults” (Boston, 1745): 2.

92 Ibid.

not to do so. Indeed, the failure to catechize was among Whitefield’s harsh criticisms of southern plantation owners in his notorious 1740 “Letter to Southern Planters” that was published in the *South Carolina Gazette*. He roundly criticized both planters and Anglican ministers who did not live up to his expectations on this front and went further still, to assert that the 1739 Stono Rebellion was a sign of God’s judgment of planters for their treatment of slaves and their refusal to provide slaves with religious instruction. In part as a response to this letter, South Carolina Commissary Alexander Garden, Whitefield’s most outspoken critic, formed his “Negro School House” in 1742. Garden hoped this would “nullify the impact of evangelical Protestantism that was beginning to infiltrate slave quarters in the Low Country,” in large measure due to the influence of Whitefield’s “two most eminent converts,” Hugh and Jonathan Bryan. Garden’s school was also a counter to Whitefield’s Bethesda Orphan House, and a means of imparting “one certain uniform Method of Teaching ‘bondpeople,’” as well as to channel the influence of young male black preachers who could counter that of evangelical Africans. Periodic flirtations with the religious instruction of slaves was another facet of the Church of England’s efforts to attain spiritual dominance over the British American colonies, as well as an extension of the debate over the Christianization of Africans. Outside of Alexander Garden’s “Negro School,” however, the Church played only a “modest role” in the conversion of Africans, despite its “virtual monopoly” over missionary

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94 Ibid.
95 Ibid: 72.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
work in plantations during "the first half of the eighteenth century."\(^9\)\(^8\) The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel provided "prayer books, hymnals and religious tracts" for use by their clergy in the religious instruction of slaves, but there was little in the way of support for a formal or widespread program of religious instruction until the 1760s.\(^9\)\(^9\)

As this chapter will show, Whitefield’s advocacy of catechizing slaves evolved from a paternalistic attitude towards slaves, rather than a belief that they were equal to whites.\(^1\)\(^0\) This belief can be seen most clearly in his role in the legalization of slavery in Georgia, which necessitated overcoming the reluctance of James Oglethorpe, the Trustees of Georgia, and several other British founders of the colony. Oglethorpe and company were reluctant to permit African slavery in Georgia, out of a fear that it could create unsafe conditions in that colony. A host of Georgia’s settlers, which included Whitefield by the early 1740s, rejected this argument and insisted that white settlers alone were incapable of performing the

\(^9\)\(^8\) Ibid: 63.


labor necessary for the Colony to become prosperous. Nonetheless, his outspokenness on the conversion of slaves, combined with his harsh criticisms of masters who did not treat their slaves well, had an unintended outcome – Whitefield became an unwitting symbol of abolitionism, even though he was never an abolitionist. Almost forty years after Whitefield’s 1740 Letter to Southern Planters, and well after Whitefield came to embrace slavery, Franco-American abolitionist Anthony Benezet used Whitefield’s own language to challenge slavery. Benezet wrote of the inhumanity of the treatment of slaves, and echoed Whitefield’s warning to planters that slavery could lead to violent uprisings, as it had during the 1739 Stono Rebellion. In his 1776 pamphlet, Benezet noted the incompatibility of the “growing consideration” of the “general rights and liberties of mankind, and the preservation of those valuable privileges transmitted to us from our ancestors,” with the “deplorable state of slavery.” Benezet quoted at length Whitefield’s letter of 1740, in which he had acknowledged the potential illegality of perpetuating wars in Africa by “Christian nations” in order to procure slaves, as well as the fact that household pets and cattle received better care than slaves:

...many Negroes, when wearied with labour, in your plantations, have been obliged to grind their own corn, after they return home; your dogs are caressed and fondled at your tables; but your slaves, who are frequently styled “dogs or beasts,” have not an equal privilege.


102 Anthony Benezet, A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies, in a Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions (Philadelphia, 1776): 3

103 Ibid: 10-11.
Benezet also quoted Whitefield’s analogy between slaves and cattle, in which he argued, “The Scripture says, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that tread-eth out the corn. Does God take care for oxen; and will he not take care of the Negroes also? Undoubtedly he will.” Whitefield intended this argument to support better treatment of slaves, and particularly to advocate their access to religious instruction. He did not necessarily see slaves as their masters’ equals – rather, he frequently advocated for obedience – nevertheless, he also believed that the poor conditions of slaves provided a powerful motivation for rebellion and a dangerous situation for settlers. Benezet took Whitefield’s arguments, along with those of other observers of slavery from across the British Atlantic world, to create a picture of slaves as rational, hard-working and most importantly, human beings who were just as entitled to liberty as their white counterparts. Thus, Whitefield, the symbol, was re-invented and inserted into the anti-slavery cause. Benezet simultaneously petitioned Selina Hastings, Whitefield’s executrix, to free the slaves from the estates she inherited from Whitefield, arguing that slavery violated Christian morality and that Christian proslavery arguments greatly undermined the abolitionist cause. It is evident that Benezet understood precisely what a powerful symbol Whitefield was and how, even though he had defended slavery in life, his image could be used in death to help put slavery to an end.

Whitefield was also an important figure in the Christianization of African Americans and what Milton Sernett calls the tension between “slave piety” and

104 Ibid: 11.
“slave holding piety.”105 Whitefield, and others who saw Christianity as a mode of control over slaves, saw no conflict between these two sorts of piety. To many proponents of converting slaves, it was a means to “lessen the influence of influential spiritual guides among them.” 106 This could mean lessening the influence of indigenous African religious practice in slave communities, but, as the example of Alexander Garden’s “Negroe School” demonstrates, it was also a means to impart a particular brand of more “desirable” Christianity on slave populations. African Americans became, as Frey and Wood note, “a great prize in the evangelical contest for church membership and gathered souls.”107

Evangelical Christianity spoke particularly to many slaves. Conversion gave slaves, as Sernett notes, “a fixed point in a world filled with uncertainty, contradiction and crisis.”108 “Conversion,” Sernett continues, “involved the discovery that God was not remote and unconcerned but at their side in all the sufferings of daily life,” even if whites were often skeptical of the validity of slaves’ conversions.109 Whitefield, with his bold, charismatic style of preaching, was a considerable force in expanding evangelical influences in the Christianization of

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106 Sernett, Black Religion and American Evangelicalism, 93.

107 Frey and Wood, Come Shouting to Zion, 119.

108 Sernett, Black Religion and American Evangelicalism, 85.

109 Ibid.
slaves, along with inspiring black preachers amongst the slave populations. As Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood note, Protestant Christianity “provided a framework for the unprecedented social and cultural changes,” beginning in the later decades of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{110} This framework shared the Great Awakening’s construction of a lively trans-Atlantic community, as described by Frank Lambert, Harry Stout and Mark Valeri.\textsuperscript{111} It would produce, not only a considerable number of black preachers (some itinerant) and the founding of African-American churches like the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the nineteenth century, but also inspired a vast amount of abolitionist literature.\textsuperscript{112}

George Whitefield’s preaching about equality in the eyes of God, and the spiritual freedom in the afterlife it suggests, inspired a number of slaves to openly clamor for political freedom in the last decades of the eighteenth century, as abolitionism took hold in the Atlantic World. Among those inspired by Whitefield were John Marrant, Phillis Wheatley and Olaudah Equiano, whose responses to evangelical Christianity will be explored in more depth in the chapter. There is no

\textsuperscript{110} Frey and Wood, \textit{Come Shouting to Zion}, 118.


evidence that Whitefield ever advocated abolition. However, his preaching did inspire a number of black abolitionists, as many planters feared that the religious instruction of slaves would. As several narratives by African Americans show, Whitefield’s highly emotional style of preaching spoke to African Americans in a way that the more restrained Old Light style of preaching did not. His practice of preaching to racially and ethnically diverse audiences, combined with his status as a symbol of religious freedom and his assertions of equality in the eyes of God, all made it relatively easy for his black audience to envision freedom from slavery. “Liberty” and “freedom,” after all, are imprecise terms that can be co-opted and used in ways that the original author or speaker may not have intended. Liberty, like tolerance, had many different potential meanings that could vary in accordance with context.

In the course of his successful campaign to legalize slavery in colonial Georgia, Whitefield advocated his own slaveholding through a paternalistic lens, arguing that he could be a humane master towards his slaves and see to it that they received the moral guidance and religious instruction necessary for them to receive salvation in the afterlife. As this chapter will show, Whitefield was not the first, or only proslavery Christian, but he played an important role in the legalization of slavery in Georgia. Still, even though he came to embrace slavery as an economic necessity, and a paternalistic opportunity for him to personally oversee the spiritual welfare of a few slaves, his shift to a very mainstream Anglican position did nothing to garner him respect from establishment figures. His adoption of the language of the planter class that he had so often criticized failed to elevate him into a member
of polite society. On the contrary, the change of tone had quite the opposite effect and became a source of mockery for his critics. Alexander Garden, along with Whitefield’s other critics, questioned the sincerity of Whitefield’s proslavery Christian claims and used them, at every turn, to demonstrate that Whitefield’s inconsistency, if not outright hypocrisy, exposed the inconsistencies and hypocrisy of revivalism as a whole.

The sixth chapter unpacks Whitefield’s missionary experiences in New England and what he meant there for revivalists and anti-revivalists. New England had a particularly staunch, if fractious, dissenter identity, rooted in seventeenth-century ideals about religious liberty and church governance. As in many other colonies, religious liberty in the New England colonies was of a more limited sort, opposing establishment churches and affording the laity a role, if often modest, in the governance of the church. Whitefield’s visits to this region only underscored the fissures in New England’s religious life. His message of religious tolerance had obvious appeal to many New Englanders, who, even after the dissolution of Puritanism, remained inherently mistrustful of anything that resembled an establishment church.

Some New England clergymen saw Whitefield and his appeal to large audiences as a potential opportunity to reverse New England’s trend towards religious apathy, even if some were anxious about his then-controversial reputation. Benjamin Colman, Thomas Foxcroft and other prominent dissenter clergymen saw Whitefield in that vein. When he published his 1740 sermon, *Souls Flying to Jesus*
Christ, Colman added a prefix in which he praised Whitefield’s success in drawing new recruits to religious life:

That many of them, who were sent to these Seats of the Muse by their wealthy Parents, only for the Sake of a more polite Education, are now so full of Zeal for the Cause of Christ, as to determine to Spend the Remainder of their Time in the Study of Divinity.\(^{113}\)

Colman castigated the ministers of “the established Church,” saying that they “should be so far divested of a Party Spirit, as to admit a Minister of another Denomination into their Churches and Pulpits, to preach the common Salvation.”\(^{114}\)

Others, including the ministers of whom Colman wrote, saw Whitefield as a dangerous enthusiast who undermined the region’s scholarly religious tradition, instilled disrespect for the ministry, and inspired unschooled itinerant preachers. Charles Chauncy, as this chapter will note, was the most vehement of this group of critics.

Some ministers, like revivalist Jonathan Edwards, saw Whitefield as a sympathetic Anglican figure, with whom dissenters could create a dialogue on religious tolerance, but he was in the minority.\(^{115}\) Whitefield found the pulpits to most Anglican Churches closed to him, and members of its clergy challenged his doctrine of the New Birth and his relationship with New Lights as unorthodox. Other clergymen, including Chauncy, found his emphasis on the conversion

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\(^{113}\) Benjamin Colman, “A Sermon Preach’d to a Very Crowded Audience, at the Opening an Evening-Lecture, in Brattle-Street, Boston, Tuesday, October 21, 1740” (Boston, 1740): iv.

\(^{114}\) Ibid.

experience over erudition contrary to the Church of England’s Thirty-Nine Articles, which placed the responsibility for the spreading of the Word and distribution of Communion exclusively in the hands of schooled, orthodox ministers.\textsuperscript{116} Whitefield’s conduct during his first missionary visit to New England in the fall of 1740 greatly undermined his Anglican-ness on a number of levels.

The seventh and final chapter explores Whitefield’s death, the significance of his memorialization in the Colonies, and the origins of his heroic American image. In death, he became a powerful symbol that could be even more readily co-opted for multiple purposes, whether for abolitionist causes, the continued promotion of religious revivalism, or, after the American Revolution, even as a national icon for the fledgling United States.

Whitefield still considered himself an Anglican at the time of his death. The success of his missionary career, however, was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, he met his goal of spreading his message of the New Birth and justification by faith to the widest audience possible. On the other hand, his doctrinal differences with the Church of England, his itinerant preaching, and his success in producing converts from across Protestant denominations meant that, to many observers, he was no longer recognizable as an Anglican – or at least an Anglican in good standing. The fact that he spent a considerable part of his adult life in the British American colonies, and was buried in one, further complicated his image.

\textsuperscript{116} Chauncy, “A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Whitefield Publically Calling Upon Him to Vindicate his Conduct, or Confess His Faults” (Boston, 1745): 2.
This chapter tackles ways in which American evangelicals began to claim him as a founding-figure, shortly after his death. Indeed, of late, it has been somewhat of a trend for historians and amateur scholars alike to claim individuals as revolutionaries, or particularly as “forgotten” founders.\textsuperscript{117} It is easy to see how readily an enigmatic and larger-than-life figure like Whitefield could readily be co-opted into the narrative of American nationhood. However, there are a number of insurmountable problems in claiming Whitefield as a founding father.

The first and most obvious is that he died before the start of the American Revolution. It is more accurate to see Whitefield as a powerful symbol of evangelical Christianity who continued to draw together a loosely-organized international religious community, much as he had in life. The community network that began as the result of the Great Awakening, and particularly the prolific publication of his work, stopped neither with Whitefield’s death, nor with the American Revolution. Rather, both continued to evolve. For American evangelicals, he was a figure who helped to carve out a post-Revolutionary religious identity within a young republic still in the process of shaping its national brand. As Saul

Cornell argues, those of a dissenting tradition were inherently suspicious of centralized authority, whether it be an established church or a too-powerful federal government.\textsuperscript{118} This was an aspect of what Mark Noll has labeled a “theistic common sense,” which was profoundly concerned with “common sense ethics, part of a shift in thought in which the United States’ religious leaders gradually took up the language of republicanism, though the full transition to American Christian republicanism “did not occur until after the American Revolution, and certainly not in Whitefield’s lifetime.”\textsuperscript{119} It is not surprising that religious Americans of a dissenting persuasion were concerned about the continuance of religious liberty alongside political liberty. Cornell rightly places this connection in the era of the Early Republic, beginning around 1788, eighteen years after Whitefield’s death, and just as the dialog on the relationship of post-Revolutionary Christianity and state began.\textsuperscript{120} striving to carve out an identity for itself after the American Revolution. In his analysis of the relationship between the Founding Fathers and religion, he argued that their “religious settlement, embodied in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, gave legal sanction to an American revolution of religion


\textsuperscript{119} Noll, \textit{America’s God}, 73-113. Note: Noll sees flashes of republican language from some colonial religious leaders (though not Whitefield), but does not see a “Christian synthesis” where in Christian language clearly and consistently engages with republicanism or humanism until after the Revolution.

\textsuperscript{120} Cornell, \textit{The Other Founding Fathers}, 1-50, 147-220.
that redefined the place of religion in America.”¹²¹ What was different from the
Colonial Period, Lambert argues, is that “the planters of a given colony shared a
common faith, believed that their particular formulation of Protestantism was the
correct one, and accepted the responsibility of ensuring its purity within their
jurisdiction.”¹²² “The Founders,” Lambert continues, “made religious freedom the
cornerstone of faith in the new republic.”¹²³

Lambert sees what he calls “The American Revolution of Religion” as
originating in 1776, six years after Whitefield’s death.¹²⁴ Its intent, Lambert
contends, was to create a new republic that would safeguard the religious liberties
of those of dissenting and establishment persuasion. Dissenters, including the
followers of the late George Whitefield, wanted something that went beyond “mere
toleration,” to a more radical, or even revolutionary, form of religious freedom.¹²⁵
As one of the most recognizable symbols of religious toleration, Whitefield was an
obvious choice for evangelical American Christians of almost any variety, who
looked for a symbol to tie this new American religious community together. Indeed,
he had carefully branded himself as just such a figurehead. Still, the context of
Whitefield’s own work was different, which is why it remains problematic to
consider Whitefield as a founding father in the conventional sense.

¹²¹ Frank Lambert, The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America
¹²² Ibid.
¹²³ Ibid.
¹²⁴ Ibid: 207.
¹²⁵ Ibid.
A second problem for claiming Whitefield as a founding father is that he was influential on both sides of the Atlantic and remained an international figure after his death. His British roots were deep enough that, at one point, there were plans to disinter his remains from its crypt in the Old South Presbyterian Church in Newburyport, Massachusetts, and to reinter him in Westminster Abbey, an honor reserved for Britons of the highest fame.\textsuperscript{126} To claim him exclusively as American even after his death suggests a false exceptionalism.

A third problem with claiming Whitefield as a founding father is that he never explicitly identified himself as an American. Any passage from the British rhetoric of toleration to the American rhetoric of religious liberty through the lens of Whitefield is problematic; Whitefield himself did not live long enough to see the maturation of the rhetoric of liberty. While he was frequently bombastic in his interactions with authority figures on both sides of the Atlantic, his rhetoric was neither particularly radical nor limited to an American context. He was an equal-opportunity agitator, and there is no evidence that he intended or expected that a political revolution would be the outcome of his actions. Indeed, he was very quick to deny any charges of being a schismatic.

Founding father figures like Benjamin Franklin and George Washington consciously asserted their revolutionary intentions, but, as Mark Noll notes, Whitefield’s preaching shows little evidence of American Revolutionary rhetoric.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{126} Report: Suggested Removal from America to Westminster Abbey of Remains of George Whitefield, GBR/L/6/23/B856. CGA.

\textsuperscript{127} Pestana, \textit{Protestant Empire}, 15-99; Butler, \textit{Awash in a Sea of Faith}, 7-36 and Noll, \textit{America’s God}, 76.
Rather, his sermons shared much in common with the dissenters. They were loaded with references to the religious persecution of the Reformation, and when they did delve into politics, they focused on “papist threats” like “the young pretender” and the “old pretender,” references to the exiled Prince of Wales, James Francis Edward Stuart (who styled himself James III), and his son Charles Edward Stuart, Catholic sympathizers with aspirations of restoring the House of Stuart to the British throne.

Neither his occasional references to tyranny, nor his association with dissenters on their own are sufficient to demonstrate that Whitefield was a revolutionary. His preaching focused on dogmatic matters, like the New Birth and the conversion experiences.\(^{128}\) He belongs neither to humanist nor the civic humanist traditions that served as key underpinnings of the American Revolution. In short, while ephemeral flashes of seventeenth-century rhetoric about religious liberty appeared in his sermons, along with warnings about the seductions of overconsumption, he simply was not “political” enough during his life to be a founding father.\(^{129}\)

This study is not conceived as a biography in the strict sense; it does not follow a precise chronology of his life. Rather, the emphasis is on how his experiences during his missionary tours and in different parts of the British Atlantic World helped to unravel his Anglican-ness and to transform him into a pluralist


\(^{129}\) Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity,* ‘217.
icon. This pluralism is essential to understanding the malleability of his posthumous legacy.

There are also a few important notes on language and usage. It should be noted that “dissenter,” and “non-conformist” are used interchangeably here. These terms can refer either to separatists or non-separatists. The specific terms of separatist versus non-separatist dissenters are applied in the discussion of New England religious topography in chapter five in order to avoid confusion on the varying dissenter communities. I refer to “England” before 1707’s Act of Union, and “Great Britain” is used thereafter. Throughout the dissertation, every effort has been made to preserve the historic spelling in quotes and in place names. The city of Charleston, South Carolina is referred to by its historic spelling Charles Town, and should not be confused with Charlestown, Massachusetts. So too, is the historic spelling of Plymouth Plantation, preserved as Plimouth. In quotations from primary sources, the historical spelling has been similarly preserved, wherever possible.
CHAPTER TWO

TRANSFORMATIONS

Early in the nineteenth century, a friend of a Mr. Bolton, an English admirer of George Whitefield’s, went so far as to steal Whitefield’s humerus bone from his coffin and sent it in a parcel to England. Bolton had expressed a desire to “obtain a small memento of the great preacher,” but later saw the theft of Whitefield’s bones as paramount to sacrilege and returned it to its resting place in the crypt of the Old South Presbyterian Church in Newburyport, Massachusetts.¹ A procession of 2,000 admirers of Whitefield followed the bone through the streets of Newburyport, as it was returned to its crypt in 1837.² This incident shows the tension between revivalists who “claimed him” for the future United States, and those in the country of his birth, who never forgot that Whitefield was an Englishman. Just as no singular denomination could truly “claim” him and his legacy, he was no longer fully British, but, in part because he died before the Revolution, he was not quite American either.

When Whitefield set out as missionary in 1738, he had two primary goals. Firstly, he hoped to secure the broadest audience possible for his message about the

² Ibid.
New Birth. This goal, as Frank Lambert, Harry Stout and other historians have noted, was implemented not only through Whitefield’s extensive missionary tours, but also in no small part, also through his prolific and careful use of the trans-Atlantic press networks.\(^3\) Aside from propagating his particular, popular brand of Protestantism, Whitefield worked tirelessly to generate a public image for himself that was carefully calculated to draw followers. This chapter chronicles not only Whitefield’s early life, and the early years of his career, as he made the transition from a young, unknown minister, to a well-known public figure. It also notes the transformations that were pivotal to the attrition of public perceptions of him as an Anglican.

Even as he began to challenge various members of its hierarchy, Whitefield was careful to publicly assert his allegiance to the Church of England. As will be noted below, he believed that he was in a conversation (at least his public figure was) with the Church hierarchy and his public, about religious tolerance and practice. Whitefield’s critics (Anglican and otherwise) repeatedly charged that his conduct and his teachings were incompatible with Church doctrine and practice. Nevertheless, Whitefield never saw schism as a desirable outcome. Instead, he fully expected to be able to use his public image to convince the Church of England to be more welcoming and pragmatic to those of other Protestant persuasions – to develop more of a trans-Atlantic Protestant community.

The second goal was to advocate religious tolerance, in a period where the idea was gaining in importance on both sides of the Atlantic. Tolerance, which was

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not the same as religious liberty, evolved from seventeenth-century English
ideologies that, to varying degrees, suggested a separation between church and
state. Particularly in Whitefield’s version, tolerance meant that individuals had the
inherent right to choose their own church and their own minister. It was an
ideology that potentially resonated both with those who either sought reform in the
Anglican Church and those who were dissenters. For Whitefield, this doctrine also
justified him in accusing his opponents of bigotry, as he frequently did.

Relatively early into his missionary career, he embraced the itinerancy that
resulted when an increasing number of pulpits were closed to him and recognized
that it allowed him to reach enormous audiences crossing denominational lines.
This itinerancy, combined with his embrace of the New Birth and his brashness, led
to charges of enthusiasm and accusations that he had strayed from Anglican Church

4 The literature on toleration and varying attitudes about the separation of church
and state is vast, but see especially: Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside
Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution (NY: Penguin, 1984); Christopher
Hill, Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of
the 17th Century (NY: Palgrave, 1997); Beneke, Beyond Toleration: The Religious
Origins of American Pluralism (NY: Oxford University Press, 2008); Chris Beneke and
Christopher S. Grenda, eds, The First Prejudice: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in
Early America (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Frank
Press, 2001); James F. Cooper, Jr., “Higher Law, Free Consent, Limited Authority:
Church Government and Political Culture in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts.”
The New England Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Jun., 1996); James F. Cooper, Jr, Tenacious
of Their Liberties: the Congregationalists in Colonial Massachusetts (NY: Oxford
Evangelical Revival: England and New England Compared.” Journal of British Studies,
Vol. 26, No. 4 (Oct., 1987); Gary Remer, Humanism and the Rhetoric of Toleration
(University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); Edwin
Gaustad, Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America (NY: Judson Press, 1999):
and Susan Wabuda, Preaching During the English Reformation (NY: Cambridge
University Press, 2002).
teachings. His association with John and Charles Wesley in Great Britain, and New Lights like Gilbert Tennent and Jonathan Edwards in the British American colonies, only heightened these controversies.

Whitefield had fully expected to advance his goals while maintaining his status as a respectable Anglican who sought reform within the Church. Ultimately, his desire to maintain his Anglican identity while pursuing his missionary goals failed. He continued to self-identity as an Anglican but, as his association with revivalism grew, he found it increasingly difficult to get others in the Anglican Communion to accept him as such. Even when he came to the defense of slavery, something very much in line with Anglican ideology, he was met with skepticism and derision. The final straw for Anglicans came with his death and memorialization in Massachusetts, in a Presbyterian Church that he helped to found. His tomb became a site of pilgrimage for many evangelicals from both Britain and the United States. He was transformed into an international icon of revivalism as he was transformed away from Anglican respectability.

Contemporaries typically perceived him in one of three ways. One was as a dangerous enthusiast who threatened to undermine the Church of England and to derail its inroads in the Colonies. Those with this viewpoint, not surprisingly, were usually Anglican clergymen or members of the Anglican hierarchy – people who potentially had a lot to lose by the growth of revivalism. A second was typical of people who did not necessarily agree with his message, but who respected the ways his preaching brought attention to religious life, and his passion and ability to draw in huge crowds. Benjamin Franklin was in this group. So too, were a number of
dissenting clergy in New England, such as Benjamin Coleman, the eminent Congregationalist preacher of Boston’s Brattle Street Church. A third sort of perception came from revivalists, who thoroughly embraced Whitefield. Gilbert Tennent, a Presbyterian preacher from Philadelphia, William Hobby, a Congregationalist preacher from Reading, Massachusetts, and any number of New Light ministers fell into this category, as did Whitefield’s many non-clergy followers, including slaves who were spurred to pursue abolition by their revivalist religious convictions.

Because he preached to such a broad audience throughout the British Atlantic World, Whitefield’s legacy was complicated. Revivalism crossed denominational lines, as did Whitefield’s preaching. His pluralism and advocacy of religious tolerance (if qualified tolerance) meant that, while his actions were very influential in the founding of the Methodist Church, he also had fervent admirers from Presbyterian, Baptist and other denominations. His near-constant traveling led to connections in multiple places, and his ability to influence an entire provincial community. After his death, questions arose about just whose hero he was. Among other things, it led to a squabble between the denizens of Savannah, Georgia, where Whitefield first embarked in the colonies, and those of Newburyport, Massachusetts, over his final resting place.5

**Origins of a Grand Itinerant**

George Whitefield was born in Gloucester, England on the sixteenth of December 1714, the sixth child and fifth son of innkeepers Thomas and Elizabeth

5 Belcher, *George Whitefield*, 447.
Jenks Whitefield. His father died two years after his birth. Whitefield noted that his mother “was used to say, even when I was an Infant, that she expected more Comfort from me than any of her other Children.” The lofty expectations placed on Whitefield were related both to his father’s premature death and to chronic ailments that Whitefield claimed that his mother endured for a year after his birth.

From an early age, Whitefield showed a talent for theatricality – and mischief. In his autobiography, Whitefield described an endless list of “youthful offenses,” including swearing, pilfering money from his mother’s purse and goods from local merchants, playing cards, and reading romances. Harry Stout describes Whitefield as a “Young Rake,” but also recognized that there was a purpose both in Whitefield’s depiction of his imperfect childhood in his autobiography and the biblical tone of that autobiography. In playing the “reformed sinner” who gradually achieved true grace, Whitefield demonstrated to his followers the evolution of his piety, granting hope to potential followers who read and heard about him and considered their own conversions. This was a recurrent theme in the first installment of his autobiography. During his grammar school years at Saint Mary de Crypt in Gloucester, Whitefield took pleasure in performing in school plays, noting that his “good elocution and memory” made him ideally suited for theater. He was so fond of these performances that he was known to skip school on the day of the play “in

\[\text{\footnotesize \textsuperscript{6} George Whitefield, } An Account of God’s Dealings...\textsubscript{, } 8\]
\[\text{\footnotesize \textsuperscript{7} Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize \textsuperscript{8} Ibid: 9.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize \textsuperscript{9} Stout, } The Divine Dramatist\textsubscript{, } 1-15.\]
order to prepare.”\textsuperscript{10} While grateful to his schoolmaster’s diligence in teaching him to speak and write artfully, he eventually came to see his acting as “debauching the mind” and “raising ill-passions,” echoing early modern Christian belief that theater was a “favorite haunt of Satan.”\textsuperscript{11} Here, Whitefield not only outlined the progress on his own path to true grace, but also channeled the writings of the early revivalist writers who so influenced him. In 1759, Law published a pamphlet that specifically spoke to the “dangers” of theater and depicted those who saw no sin in partaking in stage-entertainments as “under a piety; that is in Obedient to the authority both of Church and State, and that they are at the same time kept entire Strangers to the Scriptures.”\textsuperscript{12} These individuals, Law attested, are “strangers to the True Religion.”\textsuperscript{13} In their criticisms of theater, Whitefield and Law both outline what they saw as “appropriate Christian conduct.” Whitefield’s was, in many ways, more public and more poignant because, in using himself as an example, he modeled how his readers could change to achieve “true religion” just like he had.

Whitefield left grammar school at approximately fifteen years of age, knowing that his mother lacked the means to send him to university. Additionally, Whitefield believed that further education would “spoil him for a tradesman.”\textsuperscript{14} After leaving school, he worked at his family’s inn and, in his spare time, began to

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid: 9.


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14} Whitefield, \textit{An Account of God’s Dealings}, 14.
compose sermons. He frequently read his Bible at night and began to slowly regret his decision to leave school; watching the neighborhood boys go off to their studies “cut him to the Heart.” One local boy, who went regularly to the Whitefield inn and pub, entreated Whitefield to “go to Oxford,” but Whitefield knew that his humble family means were a significant obstacle to any sort of higher education.

Later in life, Whitefield tended to emphasize his humble tradesman’s background. While his own actions were not always devoid of boastfulness, Whitefield believed that Christians should humble themselves before God, and themes of humility and also of the potentially corrupting power of wealth frequently appeared in his sermons, and most famously in his sermon “The Pharisee and Publican,” where he discusses the motives of men for prayer and the importance of humbling oneself before God as a necessity for achieving true Grace. Whitefield’s emphasis on his roots as an innkeeper’s son in his widely read autobiography was significant because it allowed him to project a humble and pious public image.

Moreover – although in contradiction to his contentions for humility - playing up his tradesman’s roots made him appear Christ-like. Whitefield was convinced that his own conversion to “the true religion” meant that his actions channeled God. Channeling God in turn legitimized Whitefield’s actions. In his accounts of his life, he emphasized his birth in an inn, just as Christ was born in an inn. His was a

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15 Ibid: 15.

16 Ibid.


tradesman’s beginning, just as Christ had been a tradesman – a carpenter. While
Whitefield had a number of wealthy patrons, many of his followers had come from
humble backgrounds, so identifying with their modest roots allowed Whitefield not
only to project himself as a model of true Grace, but also positioned him to build a
greater rapport with such would-be converts.

Whitefield’s mother’s declining health led her to leave the Inn when he was
about sixteen years old. At around the same time, the family business was tendered
over to one of Whitefield’s married brothers. The initial plan was for Whitefield to
remain as his brother’s assistant, but he did not see eye-to-eye with his brother’s
new wife. Frequent rows ensued, after which the two did not communicate for
weeks on end.19 As a result, Whitefield went to seek the advice of an older brother
who lived in Bristol. There, at Saint John’s Church, he had what he described as his
first true religious conversion experience, in which he felt God speaking through
him. Thereafter, he would come to describe the disputes with his sister-in-law and
his experiences during his subsequent trip to Bristol as a sign that he was intended
for a higher purpose than inn-keeping. He wrote to his mother to tell her that he
would not return to work at the inn.20

Whitefield did return to Gloucester after about two months, but he stayed
only briefly at the inn before moving into his mother’s house. He wandered rather
aimlessly for some time, engaging in the reading of plays and other pastimes, not yet
determined on the path his life was to take. One play, which Whitefield did not

19 Whitefield, An Account of God’s Dealings..., 15.
20 Ibid: 16.
identify, particularly struck him – so much so that he was compelled to read it to his sister, after which he announced: “God intends for me something that I do not yet know of.” As fate would have it, a former classmate, who was a servitor at Pembroke College, Oxford came to visit Whitefield and his mother at this time. The classmate described the servitor program, which allowed him to discharge his college expenses and to earn a small wage by performing menial tasks for the wealthy students. Elizabeth Jenks Whitefield immediately seized upon this plan, reportedly crying out: “this will do for my Son! Will you go to Oxford, George?” According to Whitefield, he replied: “with all my Heart.” The former schoolmate immediately prevailed upon those who had helped him to help Whitefield attain a servitor’s position of his own.

Designs on Oxford set, Whitefield returned to school to complete his previously abandoned studies prior to matriculation at Pembroke College. Reflecting back on this period of his life, an older Whitefield portrayed an intensely divided young man. In illustrating the internal conflicts in his early life, Whitefield showed his potential followers that the path to true grace was an ongoing process, or struggle, that was not always easy. On the one hand, he continued to associate with friends whom the older Whitefield described as “atheistic” and to partake in activities like playing cards that he described as “corrupt.” On the other hand, he began to dedicate his life more to religion – an account echoed by Whitefield’s fellow

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21 Ibid: 18.
22 Ibid.
evangelist, John Wesley, who wrote that the beginning of Whitefield’s serious
dedication to religious life occurred when he was approximately seventeen years
old. Whitefield’s devotion to religious life only increased after his admission to
Pembroke College.25 He had dreams that Whitefield interpreted in his later years as
further conversion experiences.26

When Whitefield entered Pembroke, just shy of eighteen, he was among the
most fiscally humble of students. The Master of Pembroke had, contrary to
expectation, accepted Whitefield’s application to become a servitor on the
recommendation of a family friend. Another family friend “took up ten pounds
upon bond” to help cover first year’s expenses, a loan which Whitefield later
repaid.27 He wrote that his tutor gave him some little presents and “for almost the
first three years” Whitefield “did not put all his relations together above twenty-four
pounds.” Young Whitefield found that his previous work at the family’s inn made
him well suited to his servitor position.28 He waited on young men from wealthy
families, waking them, running errands, serving at parties, polishing their shoes and
even completing their assignments. Being a servitor was a thankless job that meant
reporting errant classmates who violated their curfew to the college Master. The
“gentlemen students” retaliated by “chasing the servitors though the college halls,
clanging pots and candlesticks in imitation of a fox hunt.”29 Whitefield described the

26 Whitefield, An Account of God’s Dealings..., 22.
27 Ibid: 23.
28 Ibid.
29 Stout, The Divine Dramatist, 18.
students he worked for as “being so extravagant in their living that it unfitted them for prosecution of their proper studies.”

Whitefield also found that his workload effectively prevented him from joining other students in “excesses of riot,” as he spent so many hours alone at his studies, his limbs were “benumbed.” His criticisms of his wealthy classmates not only underscored the humble self-image that Whitefield hoped to project, but also spoke to his frequent criticisms of the corrupting nature of wealth. Whitefield tapped into commercial networks and used them for his own gain – to sell his image and his religious messages through his writings and his publications. Nonetheless, he saw no contradiction in using these commercial networks to advance himself, because he saw himself as enriching the spiritual lives of others, rather than potentially fattening his own wallet. Whitefield operated within what Mark Valeri calls a “puritan worldview,” in which “religious discipline defined the proper bounds of commerce.” Whitefield admired the Puritans because of their association with religious tolerance. But, his regular, public use of this sort of language, critical of the corrupting influences of wealth, was understandably problematic for an individual who hoped to remain in good standing as an Anglican clergyman because of its association with dissenters.

The excesses of wealth were a common theme in Whitefield’s sermons and in other writings. Themes of fiscal humility, of course, also appear in the Bible, not

31 Ibid: 25.
32 Valeri, Heavenly Merchandize, 12.
33 Sun. Sept. 14, 1740, Davis, ed, GWJ, 452; and Belcher, George Whitefield, 153
only in depictions of Jesus Christ, but also in favored biblical figures like King Solomon:

   And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king...  

For a man who hoped to project himself in Christ’s image, Whitefield’s frequent unfavorable representations of the potential corruptions of wealth as well as his favorable projections of himself in contrast to others in that regard, are wholly unsurprising. They were a part of Whitefield’s careful construction of a public image of piety and humility, in this case playing the Plebian to his wealthy classmates’ Pharisee.  

   It was at Pembroke College that George Whitefield solidified his interest in ecclesiastical life and also became attuned to the extensive religious commercial print network. He could read the religious volumes that shaped his outlook, including Mr. Law’s Call to a Serious Devout Life, which he had known of prior to university, but could ill-afford. He began to pray daily and to receive the weekly sacrament at an Anglican church near the College, as well as at the Castle, where

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“the despised Methodists” received communion once a month.\(^{37}\) Whitefield noted that his sympathies for the Methodists pre-dated his days at Pembroke College. He used to regularly defend them to the other Pembroke College students – to the point where he was rumored to be one of them.\(^{38}\)

Methodism, a movement of Protestant Christianity that originated in Great Britain, began as a small movement with an aim of reforming the Church of England. John and Charles Wesley, who were early mentors to Whitefield, were key figures in its founding and particularly in writing its tenets. The name “Methodist” evolved from a derisive nickname by its opponents, who scoffed at the “methodical” approach its followers took to religious life. In its early years, its followers hoped to reform the Church of England, as its early leaders saw schism from the Anglican Church as undesirable. Around 1780, believing that the two schools of thought were irreconcilable, the Methodist Church officially split from the Church of England and evolved into its own Protestant denomination.


\(^{38}\) Ibid.
Whitefield began his acquaintance with the Wesleys shortly after he matriculated at Pembroke. Charles Wesley was at St. Mary de Crypt Church to receive the Holy Eucharist one day, when a young woman from a local workhouse attempted suicide. Bystanders prevented her. Whitefield notified Charles Wesley of the attempted suicide, believing the Wesleys were “ready to do every Good Work.” In an effort to remain modest, Whitefield asked not be identified, but the Wesleys soon learned his name. Whitefield, before this known to Charles Wesley as a solitary figure whom he had seen walking the town’s streets alone, received an invitation for breakfast the following morning. Whitefield gratefully accepted Wesley’s request, as he was looking for more friends who shared his growing religious devotions.

From then on, Whitefield saw Charles Wesley regularly. Wesley lent him an array of important religious tomes, including works by George Byron Koch, William

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40 Ibid.
41 Wesley, “A Sermon on the Death of...George Whitefield,” 27.
Law, and Henry Scougal. Koch was a seventeenth-century theologian whose 1680 book served as a personal guide for the Wesleys and their followers. William Law was an eighteenth-century English theologian whose writings, and particularly *A Practical Treatise on Christian Perfection* (1726) and *A Serious Call to Devote and Holy Life* (1728) were incredibly influential to the Wesleys, Whitefield and other important figures in early revivalism. Henry Scougal was a seventeenth-century Scottish theologian whose writings, including *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (1677), like Law's, were important influences to Whitefield, the Wesleys and other early revivalists. Upon reading Scougal, "Whitefield realized that what the author described as 'falsely placed religion' applied to his own conception."42 Religion, as Scougal described it, meant "going to church, doing hurt to no one, being constant in the duties of the closet [prayer]" as well as performing acts of Christian charity toward less fortunate "neighbors."43 "Whitefield discovered that 'true religion was [nothing less than] union of the soul with God, and Christ formed within," Frank Lambert argues.44 Although he was still an Anglican at this point, Whitefield's consumption of this body of literature, so influential to the Methodist revivals in Great Britain, serves as an early indicator of the later decline of his reputation within the Anglican Church. Indeed, the idea of "Christ forming within" influenced Whitefield’s belief in the conversion experience, which was one of the ideas that eventually cost him his good standing with the Church of England. Scougal’s

42 Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity,* 11.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
writings about Christian charity were another idea that, when Whitefield implemented his own charitable causes, undermined his reputation at Pembroke and beyond.

As the circulation of these books also demonstrate, Whitefield was far from the first minister to make use of trans-Atlantic publishing networks, either to read like-minded clergymen and theologians, or to advance his own particular brand of religion. As Mark Valeri demonstrates in his *Heavenly Merchandize*, an entire commercial publishing industry in the seventeenth century was devoted to the dissemination of religious tracts and guidelines for living a religious life.45 Whitefield attributed Wesley's friendship, and his generosity with his personal library, to helping Whitefield understand “what true religion was.”46 As Whitefield was exposed to the ideas of “New Birth” and “Good Works,” his religious fervor deepened, although his own “New Birth” differed from that of his Methodist contemporaries in that “his conversion was not a private moment of grace, but rather a public event.”47 This difference can be attributed to Whitefield’s desire for a public, pious image. In order to “sell” both his image and the “New Birth,” he needed his conversion to be a public event. He achieved this by producing public accounts of his conversion experiences in his journal, the two installments of his autobiography, his sermons, and other religious tracts. These publications served as

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45 Valeri, *Heavenly Merchandize*, 1-73
fodder for Whitefield’s detractors, but they also carried considerable weight amongst his followers, reappearing in multiple editions.

In his studies, Whitefield went from a focus in “the dry sciences” to studying religion exclusively.48 His association with the Wesley family cost him socially and otherwise. His classmates scorned him, even occasionally throwing dirt on him. The ridicule was such that at one point, Whitefield confessed that “he would have excused Wesley” from escorting him from Church to College.49 The projection of Whitefield’s public ridicule, and particularly of having dirt thrown at him, also had a Biblical significance that Whitefield would have been entirely aware of. There are a number of Biblical accounts of Early Christians being subjected to this sort of scorn because of their faith. David, for example, was “showered with dirt” and had stones thrown at him as he walked along with his followers.50 These sort of images cast the profoundly image-conscious Whitefield as a martyr for his faith, and resonated with his followers. Members of Pembroke College’s administration and faculty were also hostile to Whitefield’s entanglements with the infamous Methodists. The Master of Pembroke threatened to expel him because of the work Whitefield undertook amongst the poor at Charles Wesley’s influence.51 Neither was Whitefield’s family,

48 Whitefield, A Short Account of God’s Dealings..., 30.
51 Whitefield, A Short Account of God’s Dealings..., 35.
having heard “concerning” reports from Oxford, pleased with the religious turn his life took.\textsuperscript{52}

While at Oxford, Whitefield was struck by a serious illness that left him weak and convinced that the devil had taken over his body, though the weakness may in fact have been caused by his near-constant religiously-motivated fasting.\textsuperscript{53} He wrote at length of his experiences in the first installment of his autobiography, was first published in 1740.\textsuperscript{54} Gradually, his health returned. His tutor, physician and others urged Whitefield to go to the country, at least partly, Whitefield believed, so that it might temper the intensity with which he focused on his religious studies. Whitefield did return to Gloucester but was dismayed at what he described as attempts by his friends and family to dissuade him of his “constant use of grace” and weekly sacrament.\textsuperscript{55} He felt this as a betrayal; he described their “prejudices against him” and found himself without “spiritual companions.”\textsuperscript{56}

During his time away from Oxford, he continued to read regularly, and in a fashion to minister to the poor and the sick, even though he was himself in difficult economic straights.\textsuperscript{57} His religious beliefs began to solidify, and he began to see them as an orthodox interpretation of the Doctrine of the Church of England.\textsuperscript{58} This set the stage for his future perception of himself as a reformer within the Church,

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid: 35, 51.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid: 48.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid: 36-50.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid: 51.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid: 53-54.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid: 54-55.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid: 56.
rather than as a schismatic. Later in his ministry, his tendency to make what can charitably be described as “impolitic” statements about the goal of reform shrouded him in controversy. He insisted on the superiority of his own beliefs and piety while publically deriding those of other, often very powerful, individuals in Great Britain and its colonies. His fervent embrace of “New Birth” theology and his lack of polish both proved to be obstacles to gaining recognition as a respectable member of the Anglican clergy.

Approximately nine months after he left Oxford, during his visit home, he began to think about receipt of his Holy Orders, which frequently depended on the right connections and were not guaranteed. He prayed regularly and wrote to friends, soliciting their prayers that he be permitted to enter the ministry, though he later claimed, he prayed not out of a desire to enter the ministry, because it would be impious to “desire.” Bishop Benson of Gloucester laid hands on him on June 20, 1736, although he was then two-and-a-half years under the canonical age of twenty-four. In 1738, he had to return to England from his first voyage to the colonies, to formally receive his priest’s orders from the Bishop of London. Whitefield noted in his autobiography that he believed that God sent him a dream prior to receiving his call before the Bishop, letting Whitefield know that ordination was to occur. Lady Selwyn, a member of one of Gloucestershire’s more prominent families, had

59 Ibid: 62

60 Abel Stevens, *The Women of Methodism: its Three Foundresses, Susanna Wesley, the Countess of Huntingdon, and Barbara Heck; with Sketches of their Female Associates and Successors in the Early History of the Denomination* (NY” Carlton & Porter, 1866): 147

recommended Whitefield’s ordination to the Bishop and made him a gift of “a piece of gold” some days beforehand.\footnote{Ibid: 63.} The Bishop reportedly told young Whitefield that, “he had heard of his Character and liked his behaviour at Church.”\footnote{Ibid.} Bishop Benson also told Whitefield that “he would ordinarily not ordain anyone under the age of twenty-three, but thought it his duty to ordain him whenever he came for Holy Orders.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Whitefield resolved to present himself for Holy Orders at the next Ember Day, though the matter of “what part of his Lord’s Vineyard [he] would be sent to labour first” remained “in dispute.”\footnote{Ibid: 64.} The Anglican Church in Great Britain did not immediately assign him a pulpit, because of his young age. Instead, for the time being he remained in Oxford at the behest of John Philips, a wealthy English merchant, who offered him thirty pounds a year to tend to the spiritual needs of the prisoners in Oxford and others in the Wesley brothers’ absence.\footnote{Ibid: 66.} He also preached his first open-air sermons.\footnote{Ibid: 67.} At this point, Whitefield had not yet developed much of a reputation, either among the Anglicans or other religious denominations; nonetheless, these open-air sermons were a precursor of his itinerancy, a practice that only expanded after his travels to the colonies. Relatively early in his career,
however, a series of events unfolded that would put him on the path he would
follow for the rest of his life.

In 1735, Whitefield’s mentors, John and Charles Wesley, travelled to Georgia
at the request of Governor James Oglethorpe, who was in need of a minister to head
a parish in the new settlement of Savannah. During their 1735 voyage from
Liverpool to Georgia, the Wesley brothers came into contact with a group of
Moravians. Their piety and confidence during a bad storm encountered in the
crossing particularly impressed John Wesley. The Wesleys’ visit last only a few
months. John fled to England following a scandal involving the niece of Georgia
Magistrate Thomas Causton. Plagued by allegations of sexual misconduct and
disputes with a number of important Colonial officials, Charles Wesley had already
departed Georgia.\textsuperscript{68} Though their mission was unsuccessful, the Wesleys remained
interested in furthering missionary work in Georgia.

It was shortly after the Wesleys’ return that Whitefield fell under their
mentorship. He wrote of their mission as a success, noting they had planted a “small
grain of mustard-seed” which had “grown into a great tree...and fill[ed] the land.”\textsuperscript{69}

As a result of the circumstances that led him to missionary life, Whitefield quickly

\textsuperscript{68} Kathy W. Ross and Rosemary Stacy, “John Wesley and Savannah.”
[http://www.sip.armstrong.edu/Methodism/wesley.html]. On the allegations
surrounding Charles Wesley, see Alex Hudson, “The Secret Code of Diaries,” BBC
accessed on 29 March 2011. Charles Wesley also had a falling-out with Oglethorp.
See entries starting Thurs. 25 March 1736, The Diary of Charles Wesley, Wesley
Center Online [http://wesley.nnu.edu/charles-wesley/the-journal-of-charles-
wesley-1707-1788/the-journal-of-charles-wesley-march-9-august-30-1736/]

\textsuperscript{69} Whitefield, An Account of God’s Dealings, 32.
came to believe that God “had called him to publick work.” Captivated by a number of letters that the Wesley brothers sent him from Georgia, Whitefield decided that he should undertake missionary work in the colonies. After careful vetting by Georgia’s colonial governor, James Oglethorpe, Edward Gibson, the Bishop of London, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Whitefield embarked on his first voyage to the Americas in 1738. This was the beginning of a life’s journey that led him to travel to the Americas seven times and to produce an estimated 18,000 writings and formal sermons, some seventy-eight percent of which were published. Whitefield’s mighty publishing labors were a quintessential aspect, from the beginning of the creation of his public trans-Atlantic image.

**Whitefield the Anglican Evangelical: Origins of His Transformation**

The initial phases of Whitefield’s transformation into a public icon of revivalism involved both a change in his relationship with the Church of England, and what he came to mean for religious diversity at a time when freedom of religion was the subject of considerable debate in both Great Britain and in the Colonies. As Whitefield began to preach in Great Britain, and then in its colonies, he wholly desired to promote religious diversity. He sought, and achieved, large audiences for his religious message. Perhaps naively, Whitefield was also quite keen to maintain

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70 Ibid: 6, 7. Note, it is clear that although Whitefield did not self-identify as an evangelical, he nonetheless admired them – the autobiography particularly notes their lack of “false piety” and willingness to recognize “the dark side of human character” vis-à-vis an example of “evangelicals not hesitating to mention of Jesus casting “sin out of Mary Magdalene seven times.”

his standing as a reputable member of the Anglican community, even while seeking
the broadest audience possible and promoting religious tolerance. In the long run,
these two goals were not compatible. As his success in evangelizing grew, he faced
more contention from the ecclesiastical authorities of the Church of England on both
sides of the Atlantic.

The term “evangelicalism,” of course, can apply to a variety of Protestant
sects and practices. The evangelicalism described in this study had its roots in Great
Britain in the 1730s, particularly for Whitefield. Evangelicalism, that is, was not a
uniquely American phenomenon, although the profound effect it had in the colonies
differed from what occurred in Great Britain itself.

Whitefield is specifically identified with a brand of protestant evangelicalism
derived from the Anglican Church, one that formed the foundation of the Methodist
Church in both the colonies and Great Britain. While sympathetic to the Methodist
movement, Whitefield was not, himself, a Methodist. In fact, according to Carla
Pestana, true Methodism did not really appear in the Colonies until the 1760s,
twenty or more years after Whitefield’s initial arrival in Georgia. Because
Whitefield split with Methodist founder John Wesley over their virulent
disagreement over Calvinism versus Arminianism in 1741, when Methodism was
still in its infancy, Whitefield is more properly understood in an Anglican context.

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72 See D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicals in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to
the 1980s*, NY: Unwin and Hyman, 2008 and also, Larry Eskridge, “Defining
73 Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, 192
Whitefield continued his allegiance to the Church of England for three reasons. Firstly, in spite of his disagreements with certain church practices, he always identified himself as a clergy member of the Church. He was, in fact, very quick to emphasize his formal training and ordination in the Church of England to his prospective congregants, as a means to assert his legitimacy.\(^{74}\) Formal erudition, ordination and licensure was essential for any reputable Anglican minister in this period, and Whitefield would have been acutely aware of these standards. His latitudinarian approach was comparable with that of a number of his lesser-known contemporaries. James Hervey, an English minister, a fellow Oxford alumnus (though, of Lincoln College) and member of the Wesleys’ Holy Club who received ordination about the same time as Whitefield, had a similar approach to Whitefield’s, in that he embraced Whitefield’s bombastic Calvinist style of revivalism but preserved his affiliation with the Church of England.\(^ {75}\) Whether their reputation was deserved or not, unsanctioned and itinerant preachers were identified popularly with dissent.

\(^{74}\) Whitefield, *An Account of God’s Dealings*, 6

Furthermore, Whitefield came of age not long after the Jacobite Catholic rebellions of the early eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{76} While Catholics and dissenters are entirely different groups, the climate of suspicion created by the Jacobites made those who criticized the Church of England particularly prone to accusations of “enthusiasm,” which was associated with sedition in this period. There was also considerable paranoia about the “threats” posed by the Catholic Church, and particularly by Catholic Spain and France. Accusations of popery were common. During Whitefield’s lifetime, English Methodists were sometimes attacked as “Catholics in disguise.”\textsuperscript{77} At one point, Irish Presbyterian Minister David McGregor accused Whitefield of being a “secret Catholic.”\textsuperscript{78} This association of itinerant preaching with subversion and conspiracy carried over to the New World during the Great Awakening, in which Whitefield became a major force.\textsuperscript{79} Particularly for one who sought reform, it was politically expedient not to appear to be an outsider of the Church. Until shortly before his death, Whitefield continued to appeal to the Bishop of London for permission for his activities.\textsuperscript{80}

A second reason behind Whitefield’s desire to remain a part of the Church of England is that, while he was frequently argumentative and imprudent in his

\textsuperscript{76} Pestana, \textit{Protestant Empire}, 163.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid: 191.

\textsuperscript{78} Kidd, \textit{The Great Awakening}, 124.


\textsuperscript{80} Stevens, \textit{The Women of Methodism}, 165. Whitefield and the others specifically resisted being classed with the Dissenters. Letters and Papers of and about Archbishop Secker [1739?]. \textit{FP, American Colonies File, Vol. 1, MS 1123/1 item 24}. LPL.
conflicts with influential persons, in his own mind, he never fully crossed the line between disagreement and outright dissent. He did possess an open attitude toward dissenting denominations that was not shared by other members of the Church of England in America or by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. In this era the Anglican Church sought dominance in the British American colonies, and religious uniformity was considered paramount.\textsuperscript{81} To Whitefield, however, engagement across denominations was a pragmatic response to the pluralism of the British American colonies, rather than an act of religious dissent.\textsuperscript{82} His attitude was summed up in a 1769 sermon he gave at the Tabernacle at Moorfields, prior to his final departure for the colonies, where he would live out his final year. He told his congregants that “Christ does not say, are you an Independent, or Baptist, or Presbyterian? Or, are you a Church of England-man? Nor did he ask, are you a Methodist? All these things are of our own silly invention.”\textsuperscript{83} Similarly, when he founded his college in Georgia, he argued against a requirement that the head of the College be a member of the Church of England, asserting, “probably a majority of the contributors are dissenters.”\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{81} Pestana, \textit{Protestant Empire}, 8; Butler, \textit{Awash in a Sea of Faith}, 170-171.


\textsuperscript{83} “A Sermon by the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, Being His Last Farewell to His Friends...Preached at the Tabernacle at Moorfield...August 30, 1769 Immediately Before His Departure...” (London, 1767): 10.

\textsuperscript{84} Archbishop of Canterbury to the Earl of Northington, 28 Aug. 1767 and George Whitefield to the Archbishop, 13 Oct. 1767. \textit{SPG}, ff. 255, 259-260. LPL.
Arguments over religious liberty and the role of government in religious life abounded around the time of Georgia’s founding, as they had since the English Civil War. That conflict (1642-1651) between Royalists and Parliamentarians was, in part, a debate over the religious authority of the English Crown and the relationship of religion and state.\textsuperscript{85} As Christopher Hill has noted, however, religion was not the entire cause of the tumultuous state of affairs in seventeenth-century England. The liberty of conscience that drove the English Civil War did include religious liberty, but for some revolutionaries “the liberating effects of toleration extended beyond the purely religious sphere.”\textsuperscript{86} Owing to the humbling “experience of defeat” by radicals, the idea of liberty of conscience became less radicalized. In the context of the colonies, it simply meant that dissenters ought to be able to live and express their religious convictions without persecution.\textsuperscript{87}

In 1733, an article appeared in \textit{The Gentleman’s Magazine} in London, as part of a regular series titled “Civil Power in Matters of Religion.” The author insisted that individuals should be permitted to embrace doctrinal differences from the Church of England and complained that “The Legislature encourages one Method of Religion, in Distinction from all others.”\textsuperscript{88} He asserted that the Legislature had “no right to compel any to join in a Worship they didn’t approve.”\textsuperscript{89} Whitefield shared

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\textsuperscript{86} Hill, \textit{Puritanism and Revolution}, 5

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
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this view and spoke the language of religious tolerance. He believed that neither
the state, nor the hierarchy of an established church, should be permitted to compel the
religious practices of individuals. A more cynical analysis also notes that Whitefield
was quite fond of embracing ideologies when it was expedient for him to do so, and
tolerance absolutely supported his goal of reaching broad audiences, without
interference. In spite of this debate, and especially given Georgia’s proximity to
Catholic Spanish Florida and the ongoing antagonisms between Florida and the
colonies of Georgia and South Carolina at the time of Whitefield’s initial arrival, in
1738, religious tolerance was a difficult sell to members of the Anglican hierarchy
both in the colonies and in Britain. Early on in his missionary work in America, the
fact that Protestantism was associated with a defense against Spanish Florida’s
militant Catholicism lent an instant authority to formally educated and vetted
missionaries like Whitefield. Whitefield’s then-respectable image as an Anglican was
thus, quite advantageous to him, and his reputation on this score was aided on two
fronts: first, prior to his travels, he was vetted by both the Bishop of London and
James Oglethorpe; second he was also vehemently anti-Catholic.

Ultimately, the ways in which Whitefield adjusted his preaching practices to
suit the colonial environment began to undermine his Anglican-ness in the eyes of
ecclesiastical and in some civil authorities, as well as in the eyes of the public.
Behaviors labeled by the hierarchy of the Church of England as counter to, or
undermining of, established practices of the Church were, to Whitefield, mere
adjustments in style that helped him reach his colonial audiences. For example, he
was accused failing to use the Church-mandated Book of Common Prayer, which
was a pragmatic response to the realities of preaching to large crowds of congregants who neither possessed, nor knew how to use, the Book of Common Prayer.\textsuperscript{90}

His increasing willingness to preach outside of a sanctioned pulpit over the course of his missionary career also undermined his Anglican-ness. Itinerant preaching had been historically associated with religious and political dissent. Whitefield’s obstreperous nature meant that he tended to alienate those who could grant him preaching licenses and assignment to, or even access to a pulpit. Frequently lacking access to an established church, and reaching enormous audiences that exceeded the capacity of colonial churches, he either had to evade expectations or give up preaching entirely. The “enthusiasm” he was accused of was, at least in part, a function of projecting to outdoor audiences that sometimes numbered in the tens of thousands. Certainly, he was more moderate, and in some ways modern than many other ministers of the Great Awakening – some of whom were open to trances, convulsions and other bodily manifestations that ministers had at times embraced as evidence of conversion and the work of the divine.\textsuperscript{91}

There is no evidence that he intended to create a schism, but Whitefield did become a symbol for religious freedom in the colonies. That is one critical facet of his transformation. The struggle for religious liberty, or at least religious tolerance, 

\textsuperscript{90} David T. Morgan, Jr., “The Consequences of George Whitefield’s Ministry in the Carolinas and Georgia, 1739-1740.” GHQ, Vol. LV (1971): 64, 67; and Stevens, The Women of Methodism, 158-159. Whitefield’s congregants were known to have included slaves, the conversion of whom was still controversial in this period. Moreover, conversion into the Anglican Church required prescribed, formal instruction.

\textsuperscript{91} Butler, Awash in a Sea of Faith, 184-186.
is not uniquely American by any means. Nevertheless, religious absolutism, or the
hegemony of one church (namely the Church of England) to the exclusion of all
others, remained a point of concern and caused spirited debate in the American
colonies long after the fervor for religious tolerance abated in England. The influx
into the American colonies of a variety of non-Anglicans seeking an escape from
religious repression made it unlikely, as Patricia Bonomi has written, that “any
single church could achieve hegemony.” Indeed, a full two-thirds, if not more, of
the colonists could be categorized as dissenters. Whitefield’s ability to transcend
denominational lines and to captivate enormous audiences in a period where formal
religious life in the colonies was on the decline was incredibly threatening to the
ecclesiastical authorities on both sides of the Atlantic. This was true both of
Anglican clergy and their dissenter counterparts.

Whitefield’s obstreperous style in his interactions with colonial elites also
threatened to change the nature of relationships between ministers and their flocks.
In the words of one historian: “the deference traditionally accorded the Puritan
clergy gave way to a spirit of popular criticism.” Whitefield’s preaching
emphasized the role of God; he interpreted his own conversion to mean that, “the
convert’s every word, gesture, decision and action would directly signify God.”

92 Bonomi, Under the Cope of Heaven, 195.
93 Ibid: 35-36; Pestana, Protestant Empire, 8.
94 Bonomi, Under the Cope of Heaven, 195.
95 Ruttenburg, “George Whitefield,” 429.
96 Noll, America’s God, 618; Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American
Revolution (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Quentin Skinner, The
Foundations of Modern Political Thought (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1969);
Invoking God enabled Whitefield to claim that he exercised legitimately – that is, ‘innocently’ - ‘liberty,’ ‘and ‘freedom of speech' with ‘great boldness.’”

Whitefield's extemporaneous, emotional style, frequent belligerence, and challenges to the piety, and moral authority of important members of the Church of England’s hierarchy in the colonies served to democratize religion. Since religion and politics were frequently intertwined in the colonies, “eighteenth-century Americans found it far easier to break through the classic taboos against schism and public contention in the religious rather than the political sphere.” George Whitefield served as a model for breaking this “taboo.” His projection of a public and pious image allowed him to challenge civil and religious authority figures in a way that did not put off his followers. His influence would later be echoed not only among white Americans, but somewhat ironically, given his later embrace of slavery, also among black abolitionists with ties to the Americas, like Olaudah Equiano. This was one of the ways in which the symbol of Whitefield was co-opted and used in ways that Whitefield never intended.

The Third Thread of Transformation

So far, the transformation of Whitefield into an icon of revivalism has included the development of a public, pious image and the erosion of his reputation with the Church of England. The next signifier of Whitefield’s transformation relates


to his views on slaves. At first, Whitefield was concerned with the treatment of slaves, the lack of religious instruction on plantations, he shared common doubts concerning the legality of perpetuating wars in African in order to facilitate the procurement of slaves. Later, his turn to the defense of slavery failed to bring him back into the Anglican fold, becoming a new arena in which his critics could attack him.

Anglican views on slavery had fluctuated in this era. Anglican ministers in this period routinely defended the institution, even as questions were raised about its morality and the legality of the African slave trade. Innumerous pamphlets and other publications, among these, A Speech Made by a Black of Guadaloupe (1709), came into the hands of a member of British Parliament. This pamphlet interrogated the justness of the wars through which slaves were procured and challenged the right of slave traders to buy and sell individuals, as well as the practice of taking slaves who were “Banish[ed] for some supps’d Crime.” The anonymous author also raised questions about whether the slaves purchased in Africa were truly and legitimately criminals, rather than individuals snatched by

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corrupt traders: “how did the Buyer know there ever was a Crime committed, or
that the Sentence was just?” Questions about the legality of slavery continued to
appear in contemporary periodicals, including The Boston News Letter and The
Gentleman’s Magazine (London), well into the eighteenth century.

It is also clear that, as early as the seventeenth century, missionaries, and
especially puritan and reform missionaries, found the harshness of slavery
problematic. Dissenting missionaries Richard Baxter, Morgan Godwyn and Thomas
Tryon all criticized slavery, while stopping short of calling for abolition.

Anglican clergy were less inclined to criticize slavery, in large part because,
while the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) was administered through
London, Anglican clergy in the colonies were still beholden to the good will of their
colonial parishes, which, in many cases, supplemented their salaries. In some
cases, like South Carolina Commissary Alexander Garden, they became firmly
ingrained into local culture. Garden married into a prominent planting family and
became an entrenched member of the planting elite. It is thus understandable that
Whitefield’s caustic and very public censure of southern planters played a central

102 Ibid.
103 Boston News Letter, Jun. 8, 1721. Issue 9, p 2; Letter to Guinea Traders, and etc.,
GM, Vol. 10 (July 1740): 341-342. Copy from the collections of The HathiTrust
Digital Library.
104 John Donoghue, “Out of the Land of Bondage: the English Revolution and the
105 Glasson, Mastering Christianity, 28.
role in the deterioration of what began as an amicable relationship with
Commissary Garden.106

Many Anglican missionaries found their attempts at converting slaves
stymied because of a belief on the part of many slaves and planters alike that
Christians could not legally be enslaved.107 The distinction between “Christian” and
“slave” quickly proved problematic for these missionaries, who hoped to ensure
Anglican spiritual dominance of the new world by converting all the people of the
colonies, black, white and red. The leadership of the SPG, recognizing this potential
pitfall, proceeded with caution in their efforts to convert slaves, but local opposition
by planters was not enough to convince the Society to abandon the conversion of
slave completely.108

Anglicans also faced competition from Spanish missionaries, and the
missionaries of many dissenting churches had already made inroads in the New
World.109 Catholic missionary rivals were unhampered by the religious and political
obstacles to converting slaves that dogged their Anglican counterparts. Since 1493,
Pope Alexander IV’s Inter caetera (Among other Works) effectively “divided the

107 John Codman Hurd, The Law of Freedom and Bondage in the United States (NY: Applewood Books, 2009): 187-188. There was never a law that slaves were automatically manumitted through baptism and it is not clear that a significant number of slaves were manumitted explicitly due to baptism. Nevertheless, the belief persisted.
109 Note: the specifics of these inroads will be discussed later in this chapter, under the appropriate colony.
world between the Portuguese and the Castilians,” giving the Spanish “the legal basis for Spanish possession of the Americas, less Brazil,” as well as a theoretical basis to assure the safety of Catholic missionaries who hoped to convert non-Christian native peoples they encountered. It also defined the nature of the relationship between Christian and non-Christian and gave (Roman Catholic) Christians not only legal supremacy in the event of land disputes, but also moral pre-eminence.

This meant that the conversion of slaves by Catholic missionaries was only nominally controversial among Catholics, and their missionaries did not face the same resistance to conversion that the Anglican missionaries did. They also did not face the same debates over whether Africans should be converted. The Catholic Church saw the slaves as possessing immortal souls and pushed for their conversion. This was a view embraced by Whitefield but not shared by all Protestants, or all Anglicans. Records of slave baptisms in St. Augustine in Spanish Florida date to the second half of the sixteenth century, approximately a


century prior to the establishment of any English settlements in the region.\textsuperscript{112} The Catholic success at converting slaves caused insecurity within the Anglican Church. Some Anglican missionaries questioned the validity of these conversions, in part because they did not require the degree of religious instruction required of converts to the Church of England.\textsuperscript{113} No doubt, these criticisms were motivated in part by jealousy.

A sense of competition with the Catholic Church led some Anglican missionaries to champion laws at the local, colonial level that directed masters to provide religious instruction to their slaves, while requiring the Church of England’s oversight of this instruction.\textsuperscript{114} On at least one occasion in 1726, due to concern about the consequences of conversion efforts among the slaves, the Bishop of London commissioned a survey of his colonial clergy about their activities and the attitudes of plantation masters toward conversions.\textsuperscript{115} As the eighteenth century

\textsuperscript{112} Mary E. McGann and Eva Marie Lumas, “The Emergence of African American Worship.” \textit{U.S. Catholic Historian, Vol. 19, No. 2 African American Spirituality and Liturgical Renewal} (Spring, 2001): 2


\textsuperscript{114} Reading to Gibson; Scot to Gibson, G. (Marquis) Duquesne to (Henry) Newman and de Bomeval to Gibson, James White to Bishop Gibson, Vere Parish, Apr. 1724 and James White to Bishop Gibson, Kingstone, June 3, 1726, \textit{FP XII: General Correspondence, Jamaica, 1661-1739: ff. 185-188, 193-194, 199-202, 246-257 and 282-283; and Wilbanks: 8. LPL.}

\textsuperscript{115} Thomas Dell to the Bishop of London, June 1, 1724 in William Stevens Perry, ed., \textit{Historical Documents Relating to the American Colonial Church, Vol. 1: Virginia} (NY: AMS Press, 1969): 253; For examples of the Bishop of London’s survey, see also \textit{FP
unfolded, the Church of England became ever more zealous in its oversight of religious instruction and conversions in the colonies.

In these circumstances, Anglican missionaries saw that there must be no link between baptism and manumission, so as to remove a large potential obstacle to their missionary efforts in the New World. These missionaries hoped that a law or court decision, declaring that the enslavement of Africans who had converted to Christianity was legal would reduce the reluctance of plantation masters to allow catechizing amongst their slaves. This, as Travis Glasson notes, “intersected with a quintessentially eighteenth-century Anglican belief in cooperation between church and state.” 116 While Whitefield was not typically a supporter of the legal restrictions on religious diversity, neither was he was opposed to cooperation between church and state when it suited his purposes.

A decade before Whitefield began his missionary work in the colonies in 1738, the Yorke-Tabot Opinion (1729) had largely settled the question of whether or not baptism necessitated the manumission of slaves in the British Empire. The Opinion, authored by English crown law officers Philip Yorke and Charles Talbot, declared in part:

We are of the opinion, that a slave, by coming from the West Indies, either with or without his master, to Great Britain or Ireland, doth not

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116 Glasson, Mastering Christianity, 238.
become free...baptism doth not bestow freedom on him, nor make any alteration to his temporal condition in these kingdoms.\(^\text{117}\)

This opinion effectively removed baptism as a legal ground for slaves who wished to challenge their enslaved status. Although it was an advisory legal opinion, rather than an act of law, it would remain the principal legislative influence on the slave trade until the 1772 Somerset Case. Some of the British American colonies had already passed laws barring manumission by baptism prior to the Yorke-Talbot Opinion. Virginia, one of the earliest, passed such an act in 1667.\(^\text{118}\) Carolina was another; Article number 117 of the 1669 Fundamental Constitution declared:

> It shall be lawful for slaves, as well as others, to enter themselves, and be of what church or profession any of them shall think best, and, therefore, be as fully members as any freeman. But yet no slave shall hereby be exempted from that civil dominion his master hath over him, but be in all things in the same state and condition he was in before.\(^\text{119}\)

The colonial-level laws helped mitigate controversies over baptism in individual colonies, but having a decree at the imperial level helped to legitimize existing colonial laws. It also provided guidance to colonial governments like Georgia, which did not (initially) have the authority to make their own local laws.

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At the time of Whitefield’s arrival, preaching to slaves was not quite as controversial as it once had been, but some masters still resisted the formal catechistic instruction required of Anglican conversions.¹²⁰ Some officials of the Church of England, concerned with effecting Anglican spiritual dominance over the New World, began to censure slaveholders who did not see that their slaves learned “the tenets of the national church.”¹²¹ There were also a number of religious individuals who saw disconnect between the teachings of Christianity and the holding of slaves long after Yorke-Talbot, including some high-ranking members of the Church of England.¹²² And certainly, in some cases, religion and itinerant preaching (especially by slave preachers) took on an abolitionist bent by the time of the American Revolution.¹²³

Early in his missionary work to British America, Whitefield was at least conflicted about slavery, but yet not an egalitarian in the celestial sense.¹²⁴ Whitefield differed from the Wesleys and other eighteenth-century evangelical


¹²¹ Brown, Moral Capital, 33


¹²³ Pestana, Protestant Empire, 241-242.

preachers, in that he embraced preaching to slaves where they did not.\textsuperscript{125} He sought “signs of rebirth” in anyone, “whether white or black,” and valued signs of true conversion above all else, including their slaves’ willingness to study catechism and to commit to religious life.\textsuperscript{126} All told, his initial views on slavery in his early years in the colonies were sufficiently anti-slavery to reportedly earn the admiration of the Quakers.\textsuperscript{127} In 1740, Whitefield publicly expressed doubts about slavery’s legality, ruminating that “whether it be lawful for christians [sic] to buy slaves, and thereby encourage the nations from whence they are brought to be at perpetual war with each other, I shall not take upon me to determine.”\textsuperscript{128}

Despite raising doubts about slavery, Whitefield left the task of determining slavery’s morality in the hands of others. His initial distaste for slavery was not unlike that of other missionaries who had raised questions about its morality or legality. Charles Wesley, for instance, chafed in his diary at the cruel punishments he witnessed. He called the actions “horrid,” but attributed them to the “rough” environment of the colonies, and he never went so far as to call for manumission or emancipation.\textsuperscript{129} Though more inclined to criticize slavery than many of his fellow

\textsuperscript{125} “A Letter from the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South-Carolina,” \textit{PG}. Issue. 552. April 17, 1740, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{126} Pestana, \textit{Protestant Empire}, 208.
Anglicans, he was not particularly radical in his views. In later defending slavery and actively petitioning for its legalization in Georgia, Whitefield embraced conventional Anglican views on slavery, and also cooperation between church and state. In essence, he “performed” as an Anglican, even as he disagreed with the Church on its views about inter-denominationalism. This was in part a response to his missionary experiences to the New World, but also an example of Whitefield’s (failed) efforts to fit in to polite Anglican planter society. Instead of integrating him back into the Anglican fold, it provided fodder for his critics, like Alexander Garden, to point out inconsistencies between his conduct and his projected image.

Whitefield’s paternalistic attitude towards slaves pre-dated his defense of slavery. Even while he raised questions about slavery, he also advocated the obedience of slaves to their masters.\footnote{George Whitefield, \textit{Journal of a Voyage from London to Savannah in Georgia in three Parts} (London: W. Strahan, 1741): 486-488.} His change to a bona fide proslavery stance came approximately nine years into his missionary enterprises. In reaching this position in 1747, Whitefield had taken note of how the wretched economic condition of the Colony of Georgia, where slavery was prohibited, paled in comparison with the flourishing economy of neighboring South Carolina.\footnote{George Whitefield to a Generous Benefactor Unknown, March 17, 1747, Charleston, George Whitefield, \textit{The Works}, Vol. 2, 90} This led him to believe that slavery was a necessity for the success of the colonial economy, a position that those without personal experience or economic stake in the British American colonies – whether they lived in Britain or the colonies – did not always accept. Indeed, in a letter written in 1751 to an acquaintance, he wrote that while
he still disagreed with the manner in which slaves were brought from Africa, he argued that “had Mr. Henry been in America, I believe he would have seen the lawfulness and necessity of having negroes” in America. His justification of slavery on the grounds of economic expediency and paternalism influenced other evangelical residents of the Americas who were also entrenched in the slave trade.

Whitefield had never advocated abolition, but his embrace of slavery marked a departure from his earlier reservations. In a different 1751 letter, Whitefield asserted that he “had no doubt of the lawfulness of slavery” and suggested later that year that he might curry God’s favor by “purchasing slaves, making them comfortable and raising a foundation for breeding up their posterity in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” His change in stance is hardly surprising, since, in ten years' time, Whitefield had gone from disinterested observer to one who actively benefitted from slave labor. He held slaves on a plantation in South Carolina, the proceeds of which helped to fund his Bethesda Orphan House. His critics claimed that he was not the pious, charitable figure that he projected, but profited quite a bit as an individual from slavery; these criticisms led him to publish regular accounts of the finances of his orphanage in the colonial newspapers. One example appeared in a public letter to his friend, Benjamin Franklin. The letter was published in Franklin’s The Pennsylvania Gazette in 1746. In it Whitefield wrote, “As it is a Minister’s Duty to provide Things honest in the Sight of all Men, I thought it my

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132 Letter To Mr. B., Bristol, March 22, 1751 in Ibid: 404-405.
133 Whitefield to Mr. B., Bristol, March 22, 1751 in Ibid, 404-405.
Duty, when lately at Georgia, to have the whole Orphan House Accounts audited.” 134 He implored Franklin to publish this account, saying that his “Friends thought this was the most satisfactory way of proceeding,” suggesting that both Whitefield and his supporters were concerned for his reputation. 135 An excerpt from the accounts book, which was co-signed by James Habersham, was sworn before two Savannah bailiffs and spanned from 1738 to 1746. 136 Another example of Whitefield’s campaign to protect his reputation appeared in The Georgia Gazette on February 21, 1765. It was a notice, sworn by Noble Jones, an officer of Georgia’s General Court, that Whitefield presented “a just and true account of all the monies collected by or given to them.” 137 The notice asserts that, “the disbursements, amounting to the sum aforesaid, have been faithfully applied to and for the use of the same (Orphan House).” 138 Another similar notice, also sworn by Noble Jones, appeared on the first page of The Boston Evening-Post about two months later. It included a portion of the Orphan House’s record books between January 7, 1739 and February 9, 1765, which suggests that it referenced the same accounts that The Georgia Gazette referenced. 139 It was not unusual for such notices to appear in multiple papers and in multiple colonies within the span of a few weeks. 140 Unfortunately for Whitefield, this public campaign to prove that he was using the funds collected for the Bethesda

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134 “Mr. Franklin; A Minister’s Duty to Men...,” PG, Issue 910 (May 22, 1746): 1
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
139 “Advertisement,” BEP, Issue 1545 (15 April 1765): 1
140 Clark, The Public Prints, 126-127, 170
Orphan House honestly and was not redirecting any wealth for his own personal use
did little to rehabilitate his image among the southern planter elite. In this sense, he
became transformed from a respectable Anglican to a disreputable revivalist.\textsuperscript{141}

His proposal to minister to the souls of the slaves served as a salve for his
guilty conscience; it was also a conscious tool of control. In other words, the tending
to of the souls of slaves was balm to those conflicted about the morality (as distinct
from the legality) of slavery.\textsuperscript{142} Later in life, Whitefield issued several specious
denials that he had changed views on slavery and disavowed any role in bringing
slavery to Georgia.\textsuperscript{143} His defensiveness on the matter speaks further about his
feelings of guilt and moral quandary over slavery.

Whitefield’s paternalistic if morally ambiguous view on slavery was not
unusual among evangelicals in the British American colonies. In a 1757 sermon
titled \textit{The Duty of Christians to Propagate their Religion among the Heathens},
evangelical Presbyterian preacher and College of New Jersey President Samuel
Davies wrote: “immortality gives [a man] a Kind of infinite Value...Let him be white
or black, bond or free.”\textsuperscript{144} The overall tone of Davies’s sermon was decidedly

\textsuperscript{141} Americanized in this sense refers to Whitefield falling into the prevalent planter
attitude that slavery was an integral part of the American economy.

\textsuperscript{142} Guilt, or at least doubt, existed in other arenas as well. Plantation master Henry
Laurens, who eventually turned against slavery, expressed in a letter that he “had
rather lose a large annual profit by keeping my Negroes together in families.”
Laurens assuaged his guilt in consciously asserting the “humanness” with which he
treated his slaves. Laurens to Richard Oswald, Bath, Aug. 16, 1783 in \textit{HL, Vol. 16}

\textsuperscript{143} Wilbanks, \textit{The Revolution and Righteous Community}, 8.

\textsuperscript{144} Samuel Davies, \textit{The Duty of Christians to Propagate their Religion Among
Heathens, Earnestly recommended to the Masters of Negroe Slaves in Virginia}...
paternalistic and hardly abolitionist, as he referred to the “faithfulness” of slaves to their masters at many points.\textsuperscript{145} He did, however, press masters to acknowledge the humanity of their slaves, referring to “the glorious privileges of religion” as the “prerogative of human nature.”\textsuperscript{146} He also acknowledged a singular heaven and hell, with the promise that “all Sons of Men” shared a common fate in the afterlife.\textsuperscript{147} Whitefield supporter Henry Laurens, a slave owner and devoutly evangelical member of South Carolina’s government, also became conflicted in his views on slavery, in large part through his religious beliefs. “I have quitted the Profits arising from that gainful branch,” he wrote in a letter to William Fisher, “principally because of many acts from the Masters and others concerned, toward the wretched Negroes from the time of purchasing to that of selling them again.”\textsuperscript{148}

As with Whitefield, and with Whitefield’s executrix, Selina Hastings, Laurens’s religious convictions never led him to give up ownership of his slaves. Gregory Massey notes that Henry Laurens and his son, John, “were the only

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\textsuperscript{146} Ibid: 9, 46.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid: 14. Davis’s arguments were not without controversy. He advocated teaching slaves to read, a practice that was increasingly prohibited as abolition took off. See Ibid: 44-45.

prominent native South Carolinians who consistently expressed misgivings about the institution of slavery.”\textsuperscript{149} Henry Laurens shared some of Whitefield’s ambivalence toward slavery, as well as an awareness of the dependence of South Carolina’s wealth on slavery.\textsuperscript{150} It is clear that he felt some guilt about his involvement in slavery, guilt that manifested itself in complaints about the treatment of slaves in letters to his associates, as well as in displays of paternalistic “humane” gestures, such as the keeping together of slave families and the allowance of cash earnings to some. Like Whitefield, Laurens’s tone was at times defensive. He claimed in one letter that he gave all his slaves “every proper indulgence” and even claimed to have offered freedom to some of his slaves, but “they declined the bounty.”\textsuperscript{151}

Whitefield and Laurens were “hypersensitive about both the slave trade and their public images among their contemporaries.”\textsuperscript{152} They were “certain of the superiority of British culture” but “fearful that they might fall short” of the “high standards” of that culture.\textsuperscript{153} Both men believed that “Christian freedom had nothing to do with ‘(slaves) ‘outward Condition.”\textsuperscript{154} They saw slaves as “equally

\textsuperscript{149} Massey, “Limits of Antislavery Thought,” 496.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid: 498.
\textsuperscript{152} Massey, “Limits of Antislavery Thought,” 500.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
deserving to hear the Gospel” as whites. Nonetheless, they were acutely aware of a growing sense by some that the ideals of natural rights, on the lips of many English in the eighteenth century, were potentially in conflict with slavery. Seeing “Christian freedom” and “political freedom” as two separate entities, they recognized no conflict between owning slaves and professing Christianity. Whitefield addressed this potential problem by painting himself as a kind and humane father figure who treated his slaves well, unlike the planters he himself had criticized. For this reason, Whitefield’s critics were somewhat justified in questioning his sincerity when it came to his defense of slaves. Laurens responded in a similar vein, projecting himself in letters to family, business associates and friends as a benign master who understood the cruelties of slavery while he still often “went out of his way” to help new, young merchants to “enter the slave trade.” Both Whitefield and Laurens were accused of hypocrisy, but neither man “showed any sense of irony or awareness of self-contradiction.” Their responses to slavery were part of the paternalistic attitude that many evangelicals (and others) had toward slaves as “Person[s] who have need of Guardians,” as John Woolman observed in the 1762 follow-up to his 1754 abolitionist pamphlet Considerations on Keeping Negroes. Laurens, who sided with the Americans at the outbreak of the

155 Ibid.
156 Ibid: 42.
157 Ibid: 49.
158 Massey, “Limits of Antislavery,” 400-500; and Harris, The Hanging of Thomas Jerimiah, 51.
American Revolution, continued to fault the slave trade. As the Revolution approached, however, he echoed Thomas Jefferson and disingenuously shifted the blame for slavery on the British without recognizing the fallacies of his own position. Laurens’s ideals were reflective of a large number of Early American Methodists who “privately abhorred” slavery, but were, publicly, slavery apologists.

The official position of the eighteenth-century Methodism on slavery is difficult to pin down prior to the Annual Conference in 1780. This is because the movement was still evolving at the time of Whitefield’s death. Its founder, John Wesley, was virulently anti-slavery and saw “Negro slavery as one of the greatest evils that a Christian should fight.” In the 1743, he had “prohibited ‘the buying or selling the bodies and souls of men, women, and children with an intention to enslave them.’” In defending slavery, Whitefield obviously fell short of this Wesleyan ideal. That John Wesley failed to propose a plan for ending slavery in spite of his extensive public expressions of contempt for the institution no doubt

159 John Woolman, Considerations on Keeping Negroes; Recommended to the Professors of Christianity, of Every Denomination (Philadelphia: James Chittin, 1754); and John Woolman, Considerations on Keeping Negroes; Recommended to the Professors of Christianity, of Every Denomination. Part Second. (Philadelphia: B. Franklin and D. Hall, 1762): 9.

160 Brown, Moral Capital, 141-142.


162 Ibid: 5.

made it easier for Methodists to continue to rationalize it.\textsuperscript{164} Echoing John Wesley’s sentiments, early Methodist pamphlets proclaimed slavery “unjust, un-Christian, and un-natural,” but Methodists were deeply divided on the matter.\textsuperscript{165} Methodists Bishops later determined, after the denomination formally separated in 1790, that slavery went against the “laws of God and nature” and affirmed a measure that called for members of the Methodist Church to free their slaves.\textsuperscript{166} Owing in large part to the influence of Francis Asbury, one of the first two Bishops of the American Methodist Church, circuit riders voted to adopt a policy akin to the Quakers, which excommunicated members who “sold slaves or bought them for non-humanitarian reasons.”\textsuperscript{167} Official Methodist policy under Asbury’s jurisdiction was also to “warn then suspend” local preachers who would not “emancipate slaves in the states where the laws admit it.”\textsuperscript{168} Among the key limitations of these policies was that the Methodist leaders understood that they were beholden to local civil code. The Church leadership could threaten ecclesiastical consequences to members and preachers who did not live up to Church mandates on slavery, but they could not order their preachers to emancipate slaves in states where slavery was legal. Another limitation was that the majority of American Wesleyans lived in

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid: 6.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid: 3
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid: 9.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid: 9
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
slaveholding territory and beyond Asbury’s jurisdiction.\footnote{Ibid.} This sharply limited the Bishop’s ability to intervene when it came to slavery.

Moreover, the requirement that Methodists not buy slaves for “non-humanitarian” purposes was somewhat vague. As the posturing by Whitefield and Laurens suggests, it still left open the possibility that individuals with a paternalistic attitude who thought that they were doing their slaves a favor in buying and caring them would strive to justify their continued slaveholding on “humanitarian” grounds. Had Whitefield still been alive in the 1780s and beyond, his language in justifying his slave ownership leaves little doubt that he would have thus rationalized his ownership of slaves. Reactions among the Methodists were largely negative and the rule was not consistently enforced even though it remained in the Book of Discipline.\footnote{Richard M. Cameron, \textit{Methodists and Society}, \textit{Vol. 1} (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961): 97-101. As late as 1816, Methodism continued to face problems of growth and organization, having developed from “a small sect” in the Church of England into “the largest Christian denomination in the United States.” This led the Church’s Committee on Slavery to conclude that “under the present, existing circumstances in relation to slavery, little can be done to abolish the practice so contrary to the principles of moral justice.” The Committee and Church Council believed that Methodists were “too easily contented with laws unfriendly to freedom,” and did not believe that the Gospel “would gradually eradicate slavery” as the Church leadership once hoped. Around 1845 this disagreement over slavery would lead to a divide between the Wesleyan Methodists (Wesleyan Methodist Connexion) and Free Methodists, who remained opposed to slavery, and The Southern Methodist Church. See Mathews, \textit{Slavery and Methodism}, 28.}

\textbf{George Whitefield: Transformation through Memorialization}

The final phase of Whitefield’s transformation began almost immediately after his death, with his burial in Massachusetts. At the time of his death in 1770,
Whitefield was a pastor at the Old Presbyterian South Church in Newburyport, Massachusetts. By that time, Whitefield had been a resident of the colonies on and off for many years. The details of his funeral had been, to a significant degree, carefully orchestrated by Whitefield himself. Some seven years earlier, he composed a hymn “to be sung over his corps.”171 At his direction, following the funeral, he was interred in a crypt underneath the Old Presbyterian Church he had helped to found. The results were pure theatricality. When he died, the pandemonium at his funeral was such that the mourners’ “focus on the man, rather than his message,” was seen by several observers as “unseemly and excessive.”172

The obsession with Whitefield continued with his corpse, elevating him to a cult-like status.173 His tomb was entered and the body viewed on at least four occasions between 1775 and 1834 in a manner that, as Jon Butler notes, can be seen as suggestive of an early example of the cult of the dead that emerged in the nineteenth century.174 The first was a group of officers, including Benedict Arnold, who viewed the body, then removed Whitefield’s clerical collar and wristbands “to pass amongst their soldiers.”175 A trio of Methodist ministers, who lifted the coffin lid to peer inside, viewed Whitefield’s body a second time in 1789. Sometime in the 1820s, another Methodist minister named Abel Stevens, visited the tomb and

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171 A Hymn Composed by the Reverend Mr. Whitefield to be Sung Over his Own Corps Taken from the Original, May 1, 1764.


174 Ibid: 188.

175 Ibid.
handled Whitefield’s skull. Finally, a Freewill Baptist minister, David Marks visited
the tomb fourteen years after Stevens.176

Whitefield’s death brought about an outpouring of emotion. Some of it came
from expected sources. It is hardly surprising that his dear friend, the Countess of
Huntingdon, began an intense campaign to immortalize George Whitefield shortly
after his death. In his will, Whitefield left her all his Georgia holdings, including his
slaves and Bethesda College, bidding her to continue his work.177 Lady Huntingdon
committed herself to these tasks with great devotion, though her ministrations were
frustrated by the seizure of British-owned lands in Georgia during the American
Revolution.178 Four years after Whitefield’s death, she commissioned Reverend
John Gillies, a Scottish-born theologian, to undertake a two-volume memoir of his
life. The volumes, sold by subscription, included many of his sermons, thoughts on
Whitefield’s character, and an account of his death and funeral.179

Some remembrances, like the eulogy delivered by John Wesley, was perhaps,
less expected, given the tension between the two men. Wesley’s funerary sermon
extolled, in great detail, the devotion and vigor with which Whitefield executed his

176 Ibid.
177 George Whitefield’s Will (March 22, 1770), in John R. Tyson and Boyd S.
Schlenther, eds, In the Midst of Early Methodism: Lady Huntingdon and Her
was named as her alternate, in the event Lady Huntingdon pre-deceased Whitefield.
178 Correspondence: To George Washington (Feb. 20, 1783); To Anon. (Feb. 23,
1783); To William Piercy [senior] (Apr. 4, 1783); all in Tyson and Schlenther, eds.: 230-231
MA...Late Chaplain to the Rt. Hon. Countess of Huntingdon...in 2 Volumes (New
York, 1774).
ministerial duties.\textsuperscript{180} In the second part of his sermon, in which he described Whitefield’s character, Wesley praised the “divine pathos” with which Whitefield “persuade[d] the impertinent sinner to embrace the practice of piety and virtue.”\textsuperscript{181} No mention was made of the theological differences that had torn asunder their once-deep friendship.

Phillis Wheatley, then seventeen years old, was another to publically eulogize Whitefield, in a much-read, much-acclaimed poem titled “An Elegiac Poem, on the Death of that Celebrated, Divine, and Eminent Servant of Jesus Christ, the Late Reverend, and Pious George Whitefield.” Wheatley depicted him as a heroic knight, of sorts, sailing across from “his native Britain” to “his Americans” to “see America’s distress’d abode.”\textsuperscript{182} She posited him as a champion of Americans:

He long’d to see America excell;  
He charg’d its youth to let the grace divine  
Arise, and in their future actions shine\textsuperscript{183}

Wheatley’s mistress, Susannah Wheatley, was an admirer of Whitefield. Phillis Wheatley no doubt shared her mistress’s admiration for his piety and also likely admired his commitment to preaching and instructing black congregants.\textsuperscript{184} This

\textsuperscript{180} Wesley, “A Sermon on the Death...Whitefield,” 7-14.

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid: 15.


\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.

was despite Wheatley’s anti-slavery sentiment, which contrasted with Whitefield’s proslavery paternalism. For African American abolitionists like Wheatley, John Marrant, James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Olaudah Equiano, and others, the religious enthusiasm modeled by Great Awakening leaders like George Whitefield was valuable because it gave them means to espouse their own personal literacy and piety, and so “make a case against slavery.” But more centrally, this poem and its popularity clearly denotes Whitefield’s transformation articulating Whitefield’s significance in American religious life, and in his saving Americans from the moral decay that was perceived by many eighteenth-century Protestant ministers and their followers.

Eulogies of Whitefield were numerous and were reprinted widely following his death. So too, were a number of his sermons, letters and papers. Although Whitefield was a prolific publisher of his writings in life, neither his brief will, nor other written instructions to his followers indicated that they should continue to publish his works, or those of others about him. Their publication came not at his


185 Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, 235. Enthusiasm can have a number of meanings. Here, it refers to the tendency to identify grace and zeal – typically as exemplified by itinerant preachers – as “enthusiasm.” While Whitefield differed than many Great Awakening preachers in that he was degreeed and ordained, he is relevant here because his preaching was infectious and inspired many itinerant preachers who had neither degree nor ordination. See Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm*, 178-194. At one point in 1749, Whitefield confessed his excessive zeal and that “he had written and spoken from his own spirit too much.” Ibid: 190.

186 Examples include a multi-volume edition of his letters published in 1772, most likely under the direction of Lady Huntingdon. See *Letters of the Late Reverend George Whitefield...Chaplain to the Rt. Hon. Countess of Huntingdon...in 3 volumes* (London, 1772).
behest, but rather out of the desire of his followers to preserve his legacy. Centuries later, this tradition of publishing and propagating his life’s work continues by modern-day evangelist admirers. As Frank Lambert demonstrates, Whitefield left “no lasting structures,” but his example in using the media and his careful nurturing of a public image serves as a model to revivalists like Billy Graham.\textsuperscript{187}

\textsuperscript{187} Lambert, ‘\textit{Pedlar in Divinity},’ 228.
CHAPTER THREE

WHITEFIELD AND THE SOUTH

Whitefield began his ministerial career with modest, localized activities among the poor in Oxford, England. It was not long before his ambitions expanded. About a month into Whitefield’s ministries, he began to receive letters from Charles and John Wesley as well as from Benjamin Ingraham, an Anglican minister who was assigned to Georgia in 1735 and who would eventually return to England in 1741 to become a Methodist under the Wesleys’ influence.¹ These correspondences stoked Whitefield’s imagination, making him long to take his missionary work abroad. He wrote “I felt at times such a strong attraction in my Soul towards Georgia that I thought it almost irresistible. I strove against it with all my power,” he continued, “begged again and again with many Cries and Tears that the Lord would not suffer me to be deluded.”² Whitefield turned to his friends for advice, who encouraged him

¹ Frederick Lewis Weis, The Colonial Clergy of Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina (Genealogical Publishing Co, 1976): 100. Note: Rev. Ingraham married Lady Margaret Hastings, the daughter of 7th Earl of Huntingdon, Theophilus Hastings, who held sympathies to James II following the Glorious Revolution, after the King proffered several appointments on the Earl. Whitefield’s dear friend and patron, Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, was married to the 9th Earl of Huntingdon, Theophilus’s son, who was also named Theophilus. Note: Because was under the canonical age when the Bishop of Gloucester laid hands on him, he had to return to England for formal ordination.

² Whitefield, “A Further Account,” 8
to continue his current work, noting that ministers were needed in England. Still, he wrestled for several months over what his calling was to be.

These were the first inklings in George Whitefield’s transformation. Religious diversity was not unique to the Americas, and his engagement with dissenters began before his first voyage to the colonies. Although Great Britain had its national church, it was also home to Quakers, Presbyterians, Moravians, those of the Methodist movement, and a host of other Protestant sects. That the Church of England had much less of a hold in the colonies than it did in Great Britain provided an ideal climate for Whitefield’s goals of religious diversity and itinerancy. A number of the colonies, including Georgia and Pennsylvania, served as asylums for religious refugees, which also helped to shape an ideal climate to advance Whitefield’s goals. Whitefield continued to assert himself as an Anglican minister throughout his missionary career, but in the eyes of observers, and particularly his critics, his willingness to engage dissenters eroded his Anglican-ness.

Not surprisingly, Whitefield’s embrace of religious tolerance was exclusively directly towards Protestants. Like many eighteenth-century members of the Anglican clergymen, his interpretation of religious freedom and expression did not extend to Roman Catholics. When he visited a Catholic Church in Gibraltar en-route to Georgia for the first time, he denounced the “pageantry” of its “reliques,” as befitting common Protestant beliefs of the period. Whitefield reserved a particular scorn for a small collection of silk and damask-clad Virgin Marys as idolatry and a “whoring of their [Catholics] own inventions” and a “departure from the simplicity

3 Ibid.
of Christ.”

In another example, during his highly publicized dispute with South Carolina Commissary Alexander Garden, he compared the Commissary’s proclamations to a “Papal bull.” Such a comment was particularly inflammatory when directed at an Anglican divine commissary.

In spite of what he came to mean for religious tolerance in British America, over the course of his missionary work, Whitefield grew increasingly censorious of even Protestants who did not share his doctrinal interpretations. Early in February of 1739, he referred to those who preached the “nature and necessity of New Birth” as “true pastors” and accused those who did not believe of spreading “false doctrines.”

While this tendency towards censure of dissenting theological views makes him a questionable symbol of religious freedom, it is nevertheless true that he attracted followers from across Protestant sects. It is his ability to appeal to a wide audience, combined with his inspiration of other itinerate preachers, that is central to his transformation into a symbol of tolerance.

Whitefield’s first trip to British North America was in 1738, two years after the Bishop of Gloucester laid hands on him. His first sermon, which he delivered at

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4 20 Feb. 1737, Part II: Gibraltar to Georgia, William V. Davis, ed., GWJ, 120. In his journal from this time period, Whitefield also displays an uncharacteristic (for Anglicans of this time) tolerance and respect towards Jews. Ibid: 128.

5 Morgan, Jr., “The Consequences of George Whitefield’s Ministry in the Carolinas and Georgia, 1739-1740,” 65

6 Journal Entry for 12 Feb. 1739 in Davis, ed., GWJ, 205
the same church where he was baptized, was on the “benefits and necessity of religious society.” It would prove to be a theme for his life’s work.

**The Colonies Grow on Whitefield’s Consciousness**

George Whitefield’s decision to embark on missionary work in the colonies was not an easy one for the young minister, who also felt a sense that he was needed in Great Britain. Before he made the decision to travel to the colonies, he consulted a number of friends and supporters. Among them was Lady Betty Hastings, the sister of the 8th Earl of Huntingdon. Her nephew’s wife, Selina, who became Countess of Huntingdon, became Whitefield’s greatest and most enthusiastic patron. Lady Hastings introduced Whitefield to “a gentleman” who took a liking to the young minister. On the recommendation of Lady Hastings, and without any sort of request from Whitefield, this unnamed gentleman lent Whitefield money for his work with the poor, and to help pay off the remainder of his debt from Pembroke College. He also put forward Whitefield’s name as a Corresponding Member of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), an Anglican missionary society founded in 1698. Whitefield shared the Society’s goals of charity, the advancement of personal morality, and Christian faithfulness.

Both the SPCK and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), founded in 1701, evolved from an effort by Thomas Bray to establish parish

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7 George Whitefield, “A Further Account of God’s Dealings with the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield...from his Ordination to his Embarkment to Georgia... “London, 1747: 5.

8 John A. Grigg, “‘How This Shall Be Brought About:’ The Development of the SSPCK’s American Policy,” *Itinerario.* (2008) 32: 43-60

9 Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith,* 34.
libraries in the British American colonies, out of concern about the “lax Christian
presence in America.” The two missionary societies aided Anglican endeavors in
the Americas – the SPCK, primarily by publishing suitable Protestant Christian tracts
and making them available to settlers, and the SPG, primarily by sending ministers.
As an earnest young minister who had been properly educated, sanctioned by the
Church of England, and yet somewhat controversial, Whitefield was an ideal
candidate for this sort of work. Both of these organizations provided a model for
Whitefield’s future ministry. SPG missionaries were typically assigned to specific
pulpits for a period of time, as would be the case in Whitefield’s initial voyage, but it
also provided a model for bringing religion to the colonies in general, expanding
throughout the British Atlantic, the products of a growing print network of religious
ideology that the dissenters had made proficient use of in shaping their own
religious communities. Whitefield built upon SPCK’s model of disseminating

10 Ibid: 194; and “An Abstract of the Law in Maryland...Relating to Libraries,”
“Bibliothecae Americane Quadripartitae” (excerpt), “A True Narrative or Memorial
Representing the Rise Progress and Issue of Dr. Bray’s Missionary Undertaking,” and
“A Catalogue of Books Sent to Spanish Town in Jamaica,” in Thomas Bray, The
Reverend Thomas Bray, 1656-1730, Founder of the American Public Library System,
The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts and the Society for
Promoting Christian Knowledge: a Selection of his Papers (Catalogue 152) (NY: H.P.
Kraus: 9-10 and 13.

11 Valeri, Heavenly Merchandize (2010); Clark, The Public Prints, 2, 11, 23, 80;
Lambert, ‘Pedlar in Divinity,’ 13, 52-94; Breen, “An Empire of Goods: the
473; O’Brien in Noll, et al, eds, Evangelicalism, 39; and Hoffer, When Benjamin
Franklin Met the Reverend George Whitefield, 37.
religious tracts to the American colonies, though he built on in considerably by adding his own religious tracts to the distribution scheme.12

Indeed, George Whitefield’s list of contacts and acquaintances grew considerably during the early years of his ministry, as he developed a network that became essential to his ministry later in his career. He met the Reverend Mr. Kinchin, an Anglican minister from Dummer Parish in Hampshire, who shared Whitefield’s open attitude toward the Methodists. Whitefield officiated at Kinchin’s congregation while it was determined whether Reverend Kinchin would be called up to serve as Dean of Corpus Christi College. His tenure at Kinchin’s parish whetted his appetite for preaching to “poor and illiterate people” and he delighted in their “artless conversation.”13 While his descriptions of his hearers were frequently condescending, Whitefield’s public descriptions of his missionary work among the poor were intended to project an image of charity and humility. Clearly hoping that his public image would exemplify Christ, Whitefield’s depictions continued to invoke images of Jesus and other favorable Biblical figures serving and working among the poor.14

In spite of what, by Whitefield’s own account, was a relatively happy and fulfilling time at Dummer Parish, Georgia remained on his mind. In mid-December of 1736, he received word that his friend Charles Wesley had returned from Georgia.

Wesley, who undoubtedly wanted to escape rumors of his scandalous tenure in Georgia, had returned to England in search of “labourers.” A letter from his brother, John Wesley, echoed this sentiment, but appealed to Whitefield directly:

God shall stir the Hearts of some of his Servants, who putting their Lives in his Hands shall come over and Help us, where the Harvest is so great and the Labourers so few. What if thou art the Man, Mr. Whitefield?\(^\text{15}\)

This letter spoke directly to Whitefield’s yearnings to go abroad. As he read John’s words, his “heart leapt within him.”\(^\text{16}\) The timing of the Wesley brothers’ appeal could not have been more fortuitous. Reverend Kinchin was obligated to live in Oxford as the newly appointed Dean of Corpus Christi. This meant that Kinchen was able to take over Whitefield’s ministry work with the prisoners, alleviating some of Whitefield’s guilt over leaving individuals he saw as in need of his charitable work and spiritual guidance. Another unnamed minister took over Kinchin’s parish at Dummer.

Whitefield quickly resolved to travel to Georgia, with the understanding that he would need to return to England after a time to take his ministerial orders. He also wrote his family to inform them of his intentions, rather than speaking directly with them. He told them that he would only come “take his leave” if “they would promise not to dissuade me from [my] intended voyage.”\(^\text{17}\) He then made a visit to Oxford to say goodbye to his friends and visited Gloucester to see his family and to receive the blessing of its Bishop. The Bishop told him that he approved of

\(^{15}\) Ibid: 10-11.
\(^{16}\) Ibid: 11.
\(^{17}\) Ibid: 12.
Whitefield’s decision, having little “doubt but God would ‘bless [him]’ and that [he] should do much Good abroad.”\(^\text{18}\)

Whitefield made an additional trip to Bristol to visit some other relatives. There, he offered lectures at St. John’s Church and at St. Stephen’s, at the invitation of the parish ministers. According to Whitefield, these lectures, which emphasized the New Birth, drew considerable attention to the as-yet relatively unknown young minister. The doctrine of the New Birth, or regeneration, which is the antecedent to modern born-again Christianity, draws inspiration from a number of Biblical passages, particularly, John 3:7: “ye must be born again.”\(^\text{19}\) As the Wesleyan Methodists practiced it, adherents of the New Birth doctrine believe that for a person to be a true follower of Jesus, he or she must undergo a conversion experience. The person was then, as John Wesley described it, “born of God, born of the Spirit, in a manner which bears a very near analogy to the natural birth.”\(^\text{20}\) Those who experienced conversion frequently described it as though a light came through them, causing them to view sin and salvation in a new way.\(^\text{21}\) This “New Light” doctrine was not a teaching of the Church of England and it rankled many in the Anglican clergy as well as the clergy of more traditional dissenter or “Old Light”

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\(^\text{18}\) Ibid.


sects as a threat to their authority. For Whitefield to preach this doctrine, therefore, presented a considerable problem for his reputation as an Anglican clergyman.

Some among Whitefield’s congregants were apparently shocked at the idea that he might minister to Indians, as the Wesleys had done. Others encouraged him to go join the Kings-Wood Colliers, rather than to go to Georgia, if his motive was to convert Indians. The Kings-Wood Colliers were a set of miners who had a reputation for unruliness; Whitefield’s mentor, John Wesley had preached among them. The derisive comment, comparing the miners to Indians, painted both as “savage.” Whitefield declined these suggestions, his mind and heart set on Georgia.

In mid-February 1737, he returned to Oxford to finish his studies, then returned to London to await the return from the colonies of James Oglethorpe, Georgia’s colonial governor, and Georgia’s Honorable Trustees. Whitefield needed to receive formal approval from Oglethorpe, and then from Edmund Gibson, the Bishop of London, for his plans to go to Georgia. Bishop Gibson was known as an ecclesiastically conservative who intensely disliked Methodism. Whitefield survived the Bishop’s scrutiny, noting particularly the Bishop’s concern not to send anyone of

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“sinister views.” In spite of his association with the Wesleys, he was clearly not yet associated with the Methodist movement by the hierarchy of the Church of England in London. He could still “pass” as an Anglican clergyman in good standing with the Church, in no small part because he was still not yet all that well known. After successfully passing these examinations, Whitefield settled in London, waiting impatiently for Oglethorpe to determine when it was time to sail for Savannah. Oglethorpe was to follow on a separate ship.

Whitefield’s departure was delayed for several months, during which he continued to travel around England to preach. His sermons on the New Birth garnered the attention of dissenters, who were surprised to hear such sermons from an Anglican minister. He made the acquaintance of many who shared his belief in the doctrine of New Birth, and he began to draw the large crowds that would soon become typical of his sermons in the colonies and would also undermine his reputation as a true Anglican. His new acquaintances included James Habersham, later a faithful ally and administrator of Whitefield’s Orphan-House and plantations in Georgia. During this period, he also met Reverend Benjamin Ingraham, who had recently returned from Georgia and shared stories of his life in the colonies, further inflaming the young preacher’s desire to go abroad.

Whitefield’s growing popularity, his appeal to dissenters, and particularly his preaching about New Birth began to draw the ire of Bishop Gibson. The Bishop’s

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26 Ibid: 19.
ability to censor Whitefield at this time was limited, however, because there had been no formal complaints against him by a member of the Anglican clergy. The Bishop of London heard from a clergyman who had heard Whitefield preach “a plain Scriptural Sermon,” which belied concerns about Whitefield as a potentially seditious character. Whitefield had begun to preach the regeneration, or New Birth doctrine, but because it was not yet a consistent part of his preaching, he could be a revivalist and still retain his integrity as a respectable Anglican minister. Moreover, since a license was not required to preach in Georgia there was little purpose in denying Whitefield a license to preach, unless the Bishop wanted to make a political statement. That Georgia was a new colony, with little in the way of a strong, formal political or ecclesiastical authority yet in place, worked in Whitefield’s favor. Both Whitefield and Bishop Gibson were acutely aware that the Bishop’s hands were largely tied in the absence of complaints or substantive evidence of radical behavior.29

While the Bishop could not officially sanction Whitefield, his preaching did not escape controversy. Shortly after his audience with the Bishop, two Anglican clergymen summoned Whitefield to tell him that he could no longer preach in their parishes unless he would “Renounce that part of [my] Sermon on Regeneration.”30 Whitefield declined to meet their demands and, in a later recounting of this part of his life, he wrote:

What I believed irritated some of my Enemies the more, was my free Conversation with many of the Serious Dissenters, who invited me to their Houses and repeatedly told me, “That if the Doctrine of the New Birth and Justification of Faith was preached powerfully in the Church, there would be but few Dissenters in the Church.”

Whitefield found this logic entirely reasonable, seeing the hostility against the dissenters as counterproductive and arguing that the way to bring them over was “not by Railing and Bigotry, but by Moderation and Love.” For Whitefield and his followers, as well as many New Lights generally, the goal was to be able to practice religion unmolested by government, by the Church of England. They firmly believed that religious liberty meant that one’s beliefs need not be “certified by the state,” and that one could change church or chose one’s minister without fear of persecution. Whitefield also saw preaching about regeneration as necessary to advance “the true religion,” and as part of his “responsibility to maintain the community of believers in the one, true mode of faith,” as Chris Beneke observes about eighteenth-century notions of religious freedom. Toleration, therefore, meant that Whitefield believed that he should able to preach about regeneration and justification by faith without jeopardizing his standing as a minister in the Anglican Church, even though neither was consistent with Church doctrine. In practice, preaching this non-standard doctrine would prove to be incompatible with standing as a respectable Anglican clergyman. Both Anglicans and dissenters had proclivities

31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Beneke, Beyond Tolerance, 139.
34 Ibid: 17.
toward asserting that they spoke the “only legitimate form of religious truth,” but his preaching of dogma commonly associated with dissenters while performing as an Anglican marked a rise in Whitefield’s embrace of latitudinarian theology.35 His conduct and teachings were not always consistent with the expectations of the Church, or even with his public assertions for religious tolerance. As one bent on reform, Whitefield saw no problem with these inconsistencies, but many others of the Church of England obviously did. Opponents from among the ranks of the Anglican clergy in Great Britain, whose ranks were growing, called, among other things, a “pragmatical rascal.”36 Whitefield arrogantly attributed at least some of the hostility against him to “Godly jealousy” over his success.37 This is further evidence of Whitefield’s image as a pious reformer and somewhat of a martyr in his efforts to engage the Church in a conversation about religious tolerance; tolerance in this period did not guarantee the moral approval or agreement that Whitefield clearly hoped and expected to obtain from the Anglican Church.38 Some of his admirers shared Whitefield’s claims that he was an object of jealousy and a victim of a bigoted established Church hierarchy. One image was published of Whitefield on a cushion, with a “bishop looking enviously over [his] shoulder,” and labeled a “Mitred drone.”39 The image, which has not survived to modern day, appeared in a newspaper that had solicited a recalcitrant Whitefield to sit for a picture. While

35 John Locke, A Letter Concerning Toleration, 12.
37 Ibid: 25.
38 Remer, Humanism and the Rhetoric of Tolerance, 6.
certainly bombastic in his own interactions with the Church hierarchy, the notoriously image-conscious Whitefield saw the publication of this sardonic picture as little more than an effort to stir up trouble. Upon consultation with friends, he finally acquiesced to sit for a picture for the offending publication, in the hopes that he could regain control over his image and repair the damage from the earlier image. Whitefield, as Lambert has noted, was keenly aware that images could be read as text and were thus another means to shape, or in this case rehabilitate, his public reputation.\footnote{Lambert, "Pedlar in Divinity," 5} Unfortunately, sitting for a new picture failed to quell the outrage the first picture had caused.\footnote{Whitefield, “A Further Account,” 26.} He was becoming a polarizing figure, but, just when his situation in Great Britain hit a fevered pitch, Whitefield finally received the call for departure, in December 1737. He proceeded to Deptford, England in anticipation of his journey, on Wednesday, December 28, a full year after receipt of the Wesley brothers’ letters.

Whitefield boarded the ship \textit{Whitaker} two days later, on December 30, though the vessel did not set sail until January 6. Whitefield spent much of the eight days leading up to departure reading, writing in his journal, and preaching aboard the ship’s deck and at a local church. The journal he kept was eventually published, initially as excerpts and eventually in full volumes, as part of his commercial campaign for his public image and for his brand of religion.\footnote{Stout, \textit{The Divine Dramatist}, xiv} He also conversed with and catechized many of the passengers and soldiers aboard the ship, including

\footnote{Lambert, "Pedlar in Divinity," 5}
\footnote{Whitefield, “A Further Account,” 26.}
\footnote{Stout, \textit{The Divine Dramatist}, xiv}
a tense exchange in which Whitefield asserted the necessity of “New Birth” to an unresponsive passenger.\textsuperscript{43} Just days into the voyage, Whitefield counted approximately twenty catechumens from amongst his fellow passengers. He tutored Habersham, who had begun to learn Latin, and began to read nightly prayers to the \textit{Whitaker’s} captain.\textsuperscript{44} Whitefield’s growing friendship led the Captain to invite Whitefield to lead regular prayers and public worship on the \textit{Whitaker}.\textsuperscript{45}

That a sea captain and a preacher formed a friend friendship was not surprising, as Christian rituals were frequently performed as part of a ship’s preparation for voyage. As Steven Berry notes, “mariners ritualized their response to the unique challenge of the sea with a formulaic call upon the divine at the beginning of voyages.”\textsuperscript{46} This was partly in response to the dangers and uncertainties of a transatlantic crossing, as well as “a desire to avoid tempting fate by presuming success.”\textsuperscript{47} Neither was it uncommon for mariners to offer pre-voyage prayers. Such voyages were dangerous and brought with them a “very real prospect of death.”\textsuperscript{48} The maritime environment was ideally suited to producing the religious conversions that revivalist ministers like Whitefield, sought. “Prayers,


\textsuperscript{46} Steven Russell Berry, “Seaborne Conversions, 1700-1800” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2005): 152.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid: 153.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid: 153, 154.
omens, and dreams furnished seamen an extra edge in understanding the world around them,” Berry observes. 49

Because the *Whitaker* made stops portside every few days in the first weeks of the voyage, Whitefield had frequent occasion to go ashore and to receive letters from his companions back in London. He regularly dined on shore with Habersham and Captain Whiting. He also visited and preached aboard other ships, including the *Amy* and the *Lightfoot*.50 In his journal, Whitefield wrote that he found these to be “excellent opportunities” for “discouraging for a considerable time on our fall in Adam, and the necessity of our New Birth in Jesus Christ.”51 Whitefield’s belief in New Birth and regeneration took on an increasing fervor during his voyage, in part because of his exposure to new audiences and a more religiously diverse set of people. In the providential environment that maritime life created, sailors anxious about the prospect of death and the afterlife were understandably drawn to a charismatic young minister for receiving reassurance.52

During one of the *Whitaker*s many stops, Whitefield and Habersham met a group of soldiers from a garrison at Gibraltar who had formed a small prayer group. Labeled “New Lights,” the soldiers originally met in dens, but eventually received permission to use a church in Gibraltar. Whitefield rejoiced when some of the soldiers later held public prayer aboard *Whitaker*. Some of the officers urged Whitefield to stay to minister to the soldiers in Gibraltar, but Whitefield was

49 Ibid: 159.
52 Berry, “Seaborne Conversions,” 159.
determined to press on for Georgia, believing that it was divine will for him to do so. Some of the soldiers from the Garrison went on to Georgia onboard another ship. Whitefield asked the garrison’s colonel and its Governor to order those soldiers to come to Whitefield’s church in Georgia, so that Whitefield might “have an opportunity of telling them how to behave in that land which they were going over the sea to protect.” His request was granted. Aside from his eventual print network, Whitefield was also a prodigious networker who drew new followers nearly everywhere he went. He had his growing commercial print network, which, at this point, included some of his own sermons. His followers contributed by printing their own letters and pamphlets about Whitefield. Through his travels, he also became the figurehead of a growing provincial community that looked to him for religious guidance or defended him from his critics. His followers were interconnected across the British Atlantic world both through personal contact and the print network that he generated. While his followers never matched Whitefield’s level of publication, they did tap into the print network he created, resulting in several letters and pamphlets that defended him against critics.

Whitefield finally arrived in Savannah, Georgia at around seven in the evening on Sunday, May 7, 1738. The British had colonized Georgia only five years

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55 “A Brief and Impartial Account of the Character and Doctrines of Mr. Whitefield and Mr. Wesley: in a Letter from London, September 1743” (Edinburgh, 1743): 10.

prior to his arrival, based on plans laid out by James Oglethorpe. The positive political ramifications of Oglethorpe’s proposal pleased King George II, who granted a charter for the lands between the Savannah and Altamaha rivers and promptly named the newly chartered colony after himself. Georgia’s 1732 Charter named a London-based board of twenty-one men to serve as overseers of the Colony, with James Oglethorpe as its first governor.

Official settlement began in February of 1733, as a modest colony of forty-four men, twenty women, twenty-five boys and seventeen girls, which then grew rapidly. Some of the earliest settlers included convicted criminals, sentenced to transportation. Many of these were from Britain’s over-crowded debtor’s prison, under a 1729 proposal by Oglethorpe, that brought him “considerable acclaim in religious and philanthropic circles.” Many of the colonists, both from Britain and other European countries, came to Georgia on charity. Johann Kramer, a Dutchman, wrote in a letter that “his group of colonists would go to Pennsylvania if they could afford passage, but that those too poor might still proceed to Georgia on charity.” Those who went to Georgia at the Trustees’ expense were required to be at least twenty-one years old, healthy enough to work, and capable of firing a musket to aid

57 Lane, ibid: xvi.
59 Lane, ed., General Oglethorpe’s Georgia: Colonial Letters, 1733-1743: Vol. 1, xv; and Coleman, Colonial Georgia: a History, 15. Dr. Thomas Bray, a founder of both the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, was among the early supporters of Oglethorpe’s proposal.
60 Ibid: xxvi.
in the colony’s defense.\textsuperscript{61} These were, of course, the kind of people among whom Whitefield found missionary work immensely appealing.

The “unfortunates” were to be put to work growing silk, flax, linen and other raw goods, so that Britain would no longer be reliant on foreign trade with France, Russia or Madeira for these goods. Colonists who were sent to Georgia on charity were required to stay in the colony for three years and to agree to plant one hundred white mulberry trees on every ten acres of his land, to feed silkworms.\textsuperscript{62} Within ten years of its initial settlement, an additional 5,000 Britons joined the settlements along Georgia’s coast, though the number of debtors who embarked to Georgia was only around a dozen.\textsuperscript{63} The early years of settlement were marked by weak leadership from its Trustees in London, substantial bickering among the colonists, and a weak local leadership that did not have the authority to make any laws.\textsuperscript{64} For their part, the Trustees believed that colonists “uncomplainingly follow directions from London.”\textsuperscript{65}

Colonial Georgia was, in many respects, a frontier between the Spanish American settlements in Florida and Georgia’s much more established, wealthier

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid: xi-xii, xxv.
\textsuperscript{65} Coleman, \textit{Colonial Georgia: a History}, 26
colonial “sibling,” South Carolina. Its government was weak, scandal-prone and plagued by corrupt and ineffectual officials. Thomas Christie, the colony’s Recorder, for example, had a reputation for “signing anything when drunk.” Colonist John Terry wrote: “I long very much to get out of Savannah, for there are here Human Snakes, much more dangerous than the Rattle ones.” Oglethorpe and Georgia’s Trustees hoped that religion might bring a degree of order to the Colony and help to mitigate the corruption and chaos, which is why missionaries like the Wesleys and Whitefield received invitations to set up missions there.

Settlers in Whitefield’s Georgia also lived for its first six years, under a near-constant state of fear and expectation of war with Spain. Any report of Spaniards, and particularly Spaniards and their Yamassee Indian allies, was cause for alarm, as Georgia’s settlers fully expected a Spanish invasion. Oglethorpe saw the Spanish as a threat to be dealt with and believed that it would be “easier to dislodge them


68 Ibid.


70 Thomas Gapen to the Trustees, June 13, 1735; James Oglethorpe to the Trustees, June 1736 and Thomas Causton to the Trustees, February 24, 1737 in Lane, General Oglethorpe’s Georgia: Colonial Letters, 1733-1743: Vol. 1, xv; and Coleman, Colonial Georgia: a History, 190, 268-276. For a more in-depth analysis of the Spanish-Yamassee alliance, see Steven J. Oatis, A Colonial Complex: South Carolina’s Frontier in the Era of the Yamassee War, 1680-1730 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). For a description of British-Indian relations in South Carolina during this period, see: Ramsay, HSC1, 31-53, 84-124.
from Augustine than from Savannah.”

This, and the tendency to blame the Spanish for starting a slave rebellion on the Stono River in South Carolina in 1739, were among the reasons that led Oglethorpe to instigate an unsuccessful siege of St. Augustine, in December 1739. The fighting had widespread ramifications, including driving the Moravian settlers in Georgia, who had so impressed John Wesley, to move to a tract of several thousand acres of land they purchased at the forks of the Delaware River in Pennsylvania. This move was partly orchestrated by George Whitefield.

In 1735, John and Charles Wesley had travelled to Savannah at the request of Governor Oglethorpe, who was in need of a minister to head a parish in Savannah. Unfortunately, their voyage did not go according to plan, but rather was plagued by scandal. While aboard the ship, John met a young woman named Sophia Hopkey, after her mother employed him to tutor her in French. The two began a romantic relationship. John Wesley struggled with the relationship and ended it rather abruptly on the advice of his friend, Moravian Bishop Spangenberg, whom he knew from the ship. Hopkey believed that Wesley had promised to marry her and was furious at Wesley’s termination of the relationship, though she eventually married another man. John Wesley further angered Hopkey when he refused communion to

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71 James Oglethorpe to the Trustees, April 2, 1734 in Lane, ibid: 40. In this letter, Oglethorpe paints the French as a much more assiduous threat than the Spanish.


73 Lane, ibid: xxxii.

her and her new husband, William Williamson. The couple sued and Wesley faced charges. Though the ordeal ended in a mistrial, the damage to Wesley’s reputation was irrevocable and gossip abounded in Colonial Savannah. Unfortunately for Wesley, Sophia Hopkey was also the niece of Thomas Causton, a disgraced colonial administrator who sought revenge. Causton blamed Wesley for his removal from his cushy position in Colonial Georgia’s Office of the Magistrate after Wesley informed on Causton for cheating the Moravians. William Williamson tried to bring a second set of charges against Wesley, but John fled to England, his mission resoundingly unsuccessful. Plagued by allegations of sexual misconduct of his own and disputes with a number of important colonial officials and with his brother, Charles had already departed Georgia only months after his arrival.75

In the few years between the Wesleys’ unceremonious departures and Whitefield’s arrival, the Colony’s economy further deteriorated. It was thus to a dysfunctional Georgia that Whitefield arrived. Many Georgia settlers were fleeing to Carolina in search of land, slaves and trade. Between 1737 and 1741 it is estimated that Georgia’s population may have dropped drastically, from 5000 to

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500 settlers. In spite of the chaos, Whitefield reported that he was received with “great civility.” Georgia's colonial leadership saw missionaries like Whitefield as a potential break on the colony's decline, and the Trustees were determined not to give up on the colony, in spite of its failure to prosper. In his correspondence with the Trustees in London and others in this period, Oglethorpe embraced Christianity as a positive and civilizing force. It was determined by Georgia’s Magistrates that Whitefield would live in Frederica, a small settlement approximately 100 miles southwest of Savannah. He was to have a house and tabernacle built there, its construction funded by an unknown benefactor, but owing to the paucity of ministers in the Colony, he would also serve in Savannah. As Thomas Causton, a bitter enemy of Whitefield’s friend John Wesley, was among the Magistrates who graciously received him, the uneventful settlement of Whitefield’s parish assignment and housing was no doubt of considerable relief to the young preacher.

Whitefield quickly got to work in the colony, describing his interactions with a relatively diverse population that included English, Swiss, Creek Indians and one Jew. There was a history of tension between the Lower Creek Indians and South Carolina, particularly given the Indians' former alliance with the French and Spanish. By the time of Whitefield's arrival, largely owing to Creek leader

76 Lane, ibid: xxxii-xxxiii
77 Ibid.
78 Gallay, The Formation of a Planter Elite, 23.
79 James Oglethorpe to the Trustees, May 14, 1733 and April 2, 1734 in Lane, ibid: 15, 41
80 Lane, ibid: xii.
Tomochichi's skills as a negotiator and mediator, the Lower Creeks and Georgia's local governance had reached a friendly and peaceful accord.⁸²

Even more significantly for Whitefield's encounter with religious diversity, the colony also included a considerable number of religious refugees. Georgia's Trustees received large numbers of applications for religious asylum from the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany and elsewhere. The colony's religious landscape included settlements of Salzburger Lutherans and other German Protestants, Swiss Protestants, Moravians, French Huguenots and Scot Highlanders.⁸³ The Salzburgers reported being graciously received by Oglethorpe, who welcomed them and offered advice on their settlement, encouraging them to learn the "primitive" Creek language and to refrain from drinking rum.⁸⁴ Many of the Scot Highlanders were refuges from the Jacobite Risings of 1715, and anti-Jacobite and anti-Scottish sentiments were strong among the English in this period. Not surprisingly, they faced considerable hostility from the English colonists. Complaints surfaced about the Scots dancing, drinking illegal rum, racing horses, and being generally slothful.⁸⁵

In spite of Georgia's dysfunctional government and rotting economy, and its religious divisions, Whitefield had high hopes for Georgia's religious and economic

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⁸³ Lane, ibid: xxii.

⁸⁴ Hector Beaufain to Mr. Simond, January 23, 1734; Extract of an Anonymous Letter, January 26, 1734; James Oglethorpe to the Trustees, April 2, 1734 and John Martin Bolzius to James Vernon, July 13, 1734 in Lane, ibid: 35-43; and Journal Entry, Anonymous Salzburgers in Edwin S. Gaustad and Mark A. Noll, eds: 132.

⁸⁵ Lane, Ibid: xxix.
development. He was quick to dispel speculation by some back in Britain that the colonists in Georgia, as a whole, had been idle. He saw considerable progress, and praised the work of John Wesley, writing that “his name is very precious among the people; and he has laid such a foundation, that I hope neither men nor devils will ever be able to shake.”86 He did not report anything of the scandals surrounding Wesley’s stay in the colony. Either rumors of his friend’s troubles escaped Whitefield’s ears, or he elected to ignore them.97 He was also disheartened at a lack of resources in the colony that particularly disadvantaged the children. This conclusion strengthened his resolve to construct a long-planned Orphan House in Savannah, with the hope that those of means would give charitably toward its support.88 Like his missionary work in Oxford, Bethel Orphan House became another vehicle by Whitefield could publically express his religious message, writing of it in his journal, publishing accounts of it in newspapers and other periodicals, and by speaking of it in his sermons in Britain and in the colonies.89

His new life in Georgia was not without its challenges. Like many eighteenth-century clergymen Whitefield was hostile to religious viewpoints that directly undermined his own work, or that he even perceived as undermining his work. Thus, while Whitefield spoke of tolerance, it was a qualified sort of tolerance that did not mean true acceptance, but willingness to live alongside (if sometimes

grudgingly) those of other religious denominations.\textsuperscript{90} One incident, approximately a month after his arrival, led to a confrontation with a parishioner who was “broaching many heretical doctrines” and “particularly in denying the eternity of hell torments.”\textsuperscript{91} This parishioner exemplified one of the challenges to a philosophy of religious tolerance calling for individuals to choose their own religious paths without interference from ecclesiastical or civil authorities.\textsuperscript{92} Whitefield advocated this brand of tolerance but like many eighteenth-century preachers, was not always consistent in practice. He confronted the parishioner, but was unable to convince the recalcitrant man of the veracity of eternal torment. When the parishioner asserted that “he believed that it his duty to inform mankind, that they were to be annihilated,” Whitefield stripped him of his eligibility to receive communion.\textsuperscript{93}

A few months after his arrival, Whitefield also refused to read the Burial Office over a man who was a “most professed unbeliever.”\textsuperscript{94} Whitefield’s refusal to perform burial rites in this situation was somewhat personal, but also reflective of concerns by the Anglican clergy over the moral decline in the colonies and their desire for uniformity under Anglican dominance.\textsuperscript{95} Whitefield had several conversations with the deceased prior to his death, in which the man expressed his


\textsuperscript{91} Journal Entry, 2 Jun. 1738, Davis, ed, \textit{GWJ}: 151-152.

\textsuperscript{92} Schwartz, \textit{“A Mixed Multitude:” the Struggle for Toleration in Colonial Pennsylvania} (NY: New York University Press, 1987). While limited in scope to Pennsylvania, this study is still useful in terms of understanding the challenges that pluralism created among early settlers.

\textsuperscript{93} Journal Entry, 5 Jun. 1738, Davis, ed, \textit{GWJ}, 152.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{95} Pestana, \textit{Protestant Empire}, 8; Butler, \textit{Awash in a Sea of Faith}, 170-171.
confusion over religion, saying, “Religion was divided into so many sects he knew not which to chose.” No amount of probing produced the desired profession of faith, and Whitefield saw his refusal to read over the decedent as a “warning to surviving unbelievers.”

Whitefield was more charitable to those of other Protestant denominations. He expressed surprise at being received openly and freely by the Freemasons and wrote favorably of them in his journal, though he did not recognize them as Christians. He also took inspiration from the “order and industry” of the Salzburger settlement and characterized them as “worthy of God’s assistance.”

This exemplifies Whitefield’s tendency to publically admire provincial communities or Protestant sects who posed no threat to him, but not to recognize their religious ideologies as equal to his own. Whitefield was particularly heartened with their Orphan House and he donated some of his stockpile of supplies intended for his own planned orphan house. His reactions to both the Salzburgers and the Moravians echoed those of James Oglethorpe, John Wesley and his friend Benjamin Ingraham, who called the Moravians “the most useful and the holiest society of men in the

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96 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Along the lines of what Beneke and Remer discuss, though it is important that, like many eighteenth-century religious commentators, Whitefield’s tolerance was more forthcoming when the other religious society was either complimentary to his beliefs or he did not believe it to be large or visible enough to undermine him. Beneke, Beyond Tolerance, 17; Remer, Humanism and the Rheotoric of Tolerance, 6.
whole world.” Incidents like this underscore how the colonies increased Whitefield’s exposure to a multiplicity of Protestant denominations and to opportunities for interdenominational cooperation.

During this first missionary trip to the colonies, Whitefield also visited South Carolina. Among all the colonies, South Carolina was second only to Rhode Island when it came to religious tolerance. The founding grant by King Charles II stated that the grantees be:

...excited with a laudable and pious zeal for the propagation of the gospel, begged [sic] a certain country in the parts of America, not yet cultivated and planted, or only inhabited by some barbarous people who had no knowledge of God.  

Though officially an Anglican colony, the grant called for the allowance of “indulgences and dispensations in religious affairs” and that “no person.... was to be molested for any difference of speculative opinions with respect to religion, provided he did not disturb the peace of the community.” Its Fundamental Constitution, authored by John Locke in 1669, set only three terms concerning religion. The first required that its residents believe that there was a (Christian) God. Second, they were required to worship that god. Third, every man had to “bear [sic] witness to the truth” upon demand by persons of authority.  

There is no evidence that Whitefield was inspired by Locke, but he would have been keenly

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102 Benjamin Ingham to Sir John Phillips, September 15, 1736 in Lane, Ibid: 279. Note: Sir John Phillips was Whitefield’s sponsor for his missionary work in Oxford before Whitefield undertook his first voyage to Georgia.  

103 Ramsay, HSC1, 15.  

104 Ibid.  

105 Ibid: 17.
aware of the Colony’s position on religious tolerance. Its approach to religion was promising, in that it suggested that he could propagate his religious messages without interference by South Carolina’s local government. Particularly because he projected himself in Christ’s image, Whitefield thought of himself as a “person of authority,” who could legitimately, demand that individuals “bear [sic] witness to the truth.”  

Unlike other colonies, Carolina, under the Proprietary Government, had a vibrant and largely unfettered dissenter majority. One of Charles Town’s main churches was the Independent, or Congregational Church, which was co-founded between 1680 and 1685 by the English Congregationalists, Scots Presbyterians and French Huguenots. A Baptist church was formed in Charlestown in 1685, and first ministered by Reverend Mr. Screven, who had begun as a missionary in the Colony two years previously. Under South Carolina law, although only Anglican Churches received monetary support, any group of 15 or more free men could found a church, provided that they declared, “the Christian Church is the true religion.”

All of these sects were Christian, but one challenge for Whitefield, South Carolina Commissary Alexander Garden and other religious leaders, was that each believed

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106 Ibid; Wabuda, 65. While Whitefield came to play an important role in undermining the authority and expertise of a minister to “apply the text” versus the laity, this is still an important part of the way the preacher’s role was perceived in the eighteenth century.

107 Ramsay, HSC1, 19.


109 Ibid: 33 Tract A1, BA
that theirs was the “true religion.” Whitefield, of course, was particularly assertive in claiming the superiority of his own religious ideals. As the quarreling by Whitefield and the members of South Carolina’s provincial community suggests, the idea of “true religion” complicates tolerance, pitting different sects against each other over which ideal is the “true religion.”

The religious tolerance extended by Carolina’s government, accordingly, did not mean that each sect received equal favor from the Proprietary Government or that churches always lived in harmony with each other. It was a qualified sort of religious tolerance that raised concerns of those in dissenting factions about their ability to practice their faith without sanction or persecution. In 1727, a quarrel broke out between the French Huguenot settlers and Anglicans. The Huguenots believed that the Anglicans, spurred by Commissary Garden, were “molesting them.” The Huguenots were not the only ones who complained of opposition. Anyone with suspected or confirmed Jacobite ties faced rampant hostility, including opposition to their appointment to any position of leadership. Quarrels from the old world, thus spilled into the new. Dissenters enjoyed positions of influence in the Government and were also seen by the Proprietors as “men of honor, loyalty and

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113 Anonymous Fragment Objecting to the Appointment of Colonel N, *FP, Vol. X: General Correspondence, 1735-Undated: South Carolina*, f. 243. LPL. Note: The fragment is undated, but LPL staff date it as belonging to the proprietary period.
fidelity.”¹¹⁴ This worried those in London who wanted to create an Anglican Church in the colonies in the image of the Church in England.

The colony’s inclinations towards religious tolerance and a shortage of Anglican clergy in South Carolina also meant that many clergy in the Anglican commune back in Great Britain saw the colony as a maelstrom of immorality, marked by “idleness, drunkenness and swearing.”¹¹⁵ In order to quell “immoral behavior” and to undermine the influence of dissenters, the SPG sent missionaries into the region.¹¹⁶ The concern over the dominance of dissenters also motivated the creation of an Act “to settle a maintenance on a minister of the Church of England in Charlestown” in 1698.¹¹⁷ In spite of all these efforts, there was only one Episcopal Church, but three dissenter churches, for the 5,000-6,000 white inhabitants of South Carolina in 1704.¹¹⁸ It is therefore wholly unsurprising that Whitefield’s latitudinarian approach to religion caused considerable problems for him among the local ecclesiastical authorities appointed by the Church of England.

Further frustrating Anglican efforts was the fact that the secular powers in England were reluctant to suborn an Establishment church that could potentially

¹¹⁴ Ramsay, HSC1, 19-20.
¹¹⁵ David Ramsay, HSC2, 3
¹¹⁷ Ramsay: 3.
¹¹⁸ Ibid.
become “oppressive” and deprive the colonists of Carolina “their just rights.”119 In 1707, South Carolina Quaker John Archdale drew on the rhetoric of tolerance and wrote a public appeal, warning that Anglicanism was “over-topping its power,” using Pennsylvania as an example of how Anglicans and non-Anglicans could live side-by-side, if Anglicans “allowed it.”120 In his widely-read history of South Carolina, David Ramsay reflected back upon the first thirty years of the Colony’s existence without an established church as proof positive that “an established church is not essential to civil government...the true mode of promoting the public interest and preserving peace among different sectaries, is for the constituted authorities to lean to neither.”121 Echoing that point, Reverend Isaac Watts, a New England clergyman said that he “wished at dissenters in England could.... send effective ministers among the Carolinians, but feared that the London non-conformists were hamstrung by theological liberalism.”122 Organizing and sending ministers smacked of Established Church practices to which dissenters were resistant. It violated many dissenters’ sense of what church government ought to be like.123 Their ministers were instead usually appointed by the parishes themselves, rather than by an external transatlantic body like the Church of England or the SPG.

119 Ibid: 5.
121 Ramsay, HSC2, 12.
123 The clearest examples of dissenter attitudes towards church governance come from the extensive scholarship on New England. See Richard S. Dunn, Puritans and Yankees, 13; Hall, A Reforming People, 28; “A Letter of Mr. John Cottons, Teacher of the Church in Boston, in New-England, to Mr. Williams, a Preacher There” (London:
Of further significance to Whitefield’s experiences in South Carolina was the installation of his future adversary, Commissary Alexander Garden, in Charles Town, as the Bishop of London’s representative in 1719. Garden’s installation occurred just as the Colony was transitioning from Proprietary to Royal Government, resulting in an increase in the sorts of formal government and church structures that Whitefield frequently clashed with. This transition period marked a build-up in forts and churches - especially Anglican - and the creation of formal colonial governance modeled after the British Constitution. By early 1734, Bishop Gibson understood that a growing Anglican population in the colony would require additional parishes.\textsuperscript{124} A dearth of ordained, licensed, Anglican ministers of “suitable moral character” to serve this growing Anglican population, however, sometimes led to fighting between Anglican parishes over the ministerial services of a single minister.\textsuperscript{125} It was therefore not surprising that when he visited the Colony during his first missionary tour, Whitefield reported the meeting as having gone well and wrote of being received “in a most Christian manner” by Garden and several others.\textsuperscript{126} Whitefield was not yet controversial enough to raise concerns of a commissary who was already worried about the paucity of Anglican ministers.

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\textsuperscript{124} Thomas Morrit to Bishop Gibson, Feb. 3, 1734/5, \textit{FP, Vol. X: General Correspondence, 1735-Undated: South Carolina}, ff. 3-4. LPL.

\textsuperscript{125} Correspondence: Wardens and Vestry of St. James’ Parish, Santee to Bishop Gibson, Apr. 17, 1735; Alexander Garden to Bishop Gibson, May 15, 1735; Wardens and Vestry of Prince Frederick’s Parish to Bishop Gibson, May 25, 1735; Thomas Morrit to Bishop Gibson, Sept. 18, 1735 and Alexander Garden to Bishop Gibson, May 4, 1739, Ibid: ff. 5-6, 7-10, 11-12, 15-16 and 54-55. LPL

\textsuperscript{126} Journal Entry, 28 Aug. 1738, in Davis, ed, \textit{GW}: 159.
Whitefield’s stay in Charles Town was also brief and marked the end of his first missionary tour in British America, which he declared “an excellent school to learn Christ in.”\textsuperscript{127} His first missionary visit would, however, be his last tour in the colonies that was not marked by controversy.

**Whitefield and Controversy in England**

Whitefield’s initial missionary work in Georgia, the first of seven trips to the colonies, lasted just three months. He sailed for England early in September 1738, reaching the coast of Ireland on the morning of November 16. He found Ireland humble and declared “if my parishioners at Georgia complain to me of hardships, I must tell them how the Irish live; for their habitations are far more despicable, and their living as hard, I believe.”\textsuperscript{128} Whitefield publically found favor with the conditions he found in Ireland, much as he had favored those in Oxford and the residence of his Orphan House. In Forthfargus, he described the Roman Catholics he met as “wild Irish,” describing them as “so very ignorant” with “erroneous principles.”\textsuperscript{129} Such anti-Irish and anti-Catholic sentiments were common among English clergymen in the eighteenth century. For an advocate of religious tolerance, the suggestions by their seventeenth-century predecessors that religious tolerance ought to extend to Catholics gave way to warnings about the dangers of idolatry and

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{128} Journal Entries, 16 Nov. and 17 Nov. 1738, in Ibid: 175.

\textsuperscript{129} Journal Entry, 17 Nov. 1738, in Ibid: 176. Further examples of Whitefield’s attitude toward Roman Catholics can be found in his journal entry of 21 Nov. 1738, while he was in Burrass and Ossory, Journal Entry, 21 Nov. 1738, in Ibid: 178.
popery.\textsuperscript{130} The next day, he declared his relief at finding that the people he met in Limerick were Protestants and castigated himself in his journal for not calling them to join in prayer.\textsuperscript{131} This report signaled to his audience, the idea of an interconnected Protestant community. He completed his mini-tour of Ireland, arriving in England on November 30 and, at last, in London on Friday, December 8, eleven months after his departure to Georgia.\textsuperscript{132}

In spite of the controversy that had erupted shortly before his departure back in January, Whitefield in his journal described his reception by the Bishop of London and the Archbishop of Canterbury on Saturday, December 9 as “favorable,” though he did not elaborate on the details of the meeting.\textsuperscript{133} Since Whitefield clearly wished to preserve his ties to the Anglican Church and avoid appearing to be at odds with the Church of England’s hierarchy, it is unlikely that he would have reported any tensions that may have occurred during their meeting in his journal. To reveal clashes with the Bishop of London would have undermined his credibility as an Anglican and might give credence to claims by his growing number of critics that he was a schismatic. Since he was very conscious and protective of his public image, mentioning clashes in a journal that he routinely made public would have been entirely counterproductive.


\textsuperscript{131} Journal Entry, 19 Nov. 1738, Davis, ed, *GWJ*, 176.

\textsuperscript{132} Journal Entry, 8 Dec. 1738, Ibid: 186.

\textsuperscript{133} Journal Entry, 9 Dec. 1738, Ibid.
He began publishing the journal in 1738, just after his return from Georgia. Altogether, there were seven journals, which were initially published separately between 1738 and 1741 and sold by subscription and through booksellers and printers throughout Britain and the colonies. Whitefield’s journals were an essential part of his public relations campaign, in which he chronicled his missionary labors. They were, as Harry Stout argues, a “persona” calculated to excite “the public imagination” and to “create a religious celebrity capable of creating a new market for religion.”\(^{134}\) They were a “potent configuration” that helped him “maintain his presence among reading audiences throughout England and abroad,” drawing the affection of his friends and the animosity of his opponents.\(^{135}\) They were an example of the development of his public image through an extensive commercial religious printing network that spanned the Anglo-American world. Whitefield wrote his journals with the intent that they would be published and read by potential followers in Great Britain and in its American colonies. Together with his two autobiographies, these journals projected an image of a pious, humble, and charitable crusader for religious tolerance. They enabled him to assert considerable influence over his public image and to counter criticisms.\(^{136}\) The success of his publicity campaign, though, meant that he encountered additional opponents.

\(^{134}\) Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, 64.

\(^{135}\) Ibid.

Following the meeting with Bishop Edmund Gibbons, Whitefield found that the controversy that erupted over his preaching, shortly before his voyage, had not dissipated. Many church pulpits were closed to him because of the Calvinist undertones of his sermons, unconventional style and preaching of the New Birth. On his second day back, he found that five London churches refused to permit him to preach and that “some of the clergy, if possible, would oblige [him] to depart out of these coasts.” Whitefield, however, took heart in his opposition, choosing to see the controversy that he and the Wesleys generated as a means to a more open and effective theological discussion about New Birth. Rather than evidence that he was inciting schism, as his critics so frequently charged, Whitefield saw these interactions as positive publicity for his message. Public discourse, in print and otherwise, brought further attention to himself and his work, even if he could not always control what was said as the result of this discourse.

Because fewer churches welcomed him, Whitefield began preaching to relatively modest audiences at alternative venues, such as at the Fetter Lane Society, which, until around 1740, enjoyed a close relationship with John Wesley and the Methodists, as well as at the Crooked Lane Society and the Crutched Friars’ Society in London. Around this time, Whitefield published a pamphlet on the subject of religious societies, which he compared to early meetings of “Primitive Christians”

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137 Journal Entry, 10 Dec. 1738, Ibid.
138 Ibid.
139 Lovejoy, Religious Enthusiasm in the New World, 165.
who had gathered secretively in such settlings to evade persecution.\textsuperscript{140} It was language commonly used by dissenters advocating religious tolerance. In 1696, Quaker William Penn, for example, wrote and published a pamphlet in which he described Quakerism, a group that was the target of considerable persecution in England, as a “revival” of Primitive Christianity, or Christianity in its purist form.\textsuperscript{141} In invoking the term “Primitive Christianity” Whitefield also sought to brand his religion as a pure form of Protestant religious practice, as well as to legitimize the practice of preaching outside of a church. In invoking himself again, as Christ-like, he projected himself as the \textit{ultimate} Primitive Christian. In this pamphlet, Whitefield also made the argument that, if a group of five or more could gather in a private vestry, then it was also “lawful” for a group of five or more to gather in a private home, thus asserting both Biblical and ecclesiastical legitimacy for these gatherings.\textsuperscript{142} Not for the first, or the last, time Whitefield publically suggested hypocrisy on the part of critics.

Sermons delivered in informal settings, like these societies, were critical to the development of Whitefield’s provincial community, both in Great Britain and in the colonies. Even so, Whitefield publicly defended these societies not only because it was expedient, but also because they shared his commitment to religious conduct,


\textsuperscript{141} William Penn, \textit{Primitive Christianity Revived in the Faith and Practice of the People Called Quakers} (Salem, MA: George F. Read, 1844).

social action and Christian brotherhood. Whitefield’s favorable attitude towards preaching to a religiously diverse (Protestant) audience was not entirely inconsistent with practices that occurred in the colonies. For matters of practicality, when an ordained minister of their denomination was not available, Protestants of other sects attended services in an Anglican parish. Great Britain, however, did not share the same dearth of ministers that the colonies did. Neither did every evangelical minister share Whitefield’s attitude towards preaching to trans-denominational audiences, including his friend and mentor, Charles Wesley. Though Whitefield described in his journal, his itinerancy as a response to finding an increased number of pulpits closed to him, he did not specifically claim superiority for itinerant preaching in his journal. Rather, it was a means to an end, reaching his audience. Even so, his practice of itinerancy distinguished Whitefield from other Anglican evangelicals; John Wesley, George Wesley and others did not embrace itinerant preaching.

Whitefield’s audience members included Anglicans, Methodists and Quakers. He still saw himself as an Anglican, but increasingly tended to ignore

144 For example, see Alexander Keith to Bishop Terrick, Dec. 30, 1766, FP. Vol. X: General Correspondence, 1735-undated: South Carolina. ff. 164-165. LPL.
denominational lines when preaching, even if he did not always wholly agree with
the ecclesiastical interpretations of his listeners.\textsuperscript{148} Indeed, while Whitefield “found
the Quakers’ foundation to be all wrong,” he admired the “purity of their spiritual
side.”\textsuperscript{149} This spirit of practicality influenced Whitefield’s attitude toward preaching
to interdenominational crowds, but some who heard him speak also blamed him for
inciting religious division in Great Britain. One reviewer noted that he:

was not a stranger to those causeless divisions among you, occasioned
by Mr. Whitefield’s doctrine... which have even drove some of you into
despair, and have caused others...to think their eternal happiness
forfeited, though a want of those feelings which he prescribes as the
necessary ingredient for a good Christian...\textsuperscript{150}

The anonymous anti-revivalist writer responded negatively both to Whitefield’s
Calvinism and to what he saw as the dangers of Whitefield’s emphasis on the
importance of the “New Birth,” or conversion experience for true grace. He believed
that Whitefield’s teachings could lead “really pious and well-meaning people,” good
Christians in his eyes, to doubt their faith and their hope for salvation after death.\textsuperscript{151}
He continued, “I shall leave it to you to think whether any doctrine, attended with
such melancholic and frightful consequences, can be a means of promotion the glory
of God and benefiting mankind. I doubt not but you will think in the negative.”\textsuperscript{152}
Statements like those of the anonymous writer illustrates criticisms of the New
Birth doctrine, and reveals it as one of the sources of tension in a deeply divided

\textsuperscript{148} Lovejoy, \textit{Religious Enthusiasm in the New World}, 186.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid: 149.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
trans-Atlantic provincial community. His followers saw him as a man whose message that they could relate to, even if they were of another denomination. His detractors saw him as inciting confusion in a world where there was no consensus about tolerance or what constituted “true religion.” Figures like Whitefield suggested to Britons that they had another choice than the Church of England. Nonetheless, as Whitefield’s dying Georgia parishioner illustrates, in a world where multiple denominations competed with each other for recognition and followers, many individuals found themselves bewildered as they determined their own religious paths. Where religion has a proclivity to incite deep passions among its followers, drawing attention in dramatic form, as Whitefield did, to multiple choices and the idea of a “true religion” easily broadened existing divisions.

Whitefield’s absence from the colonies did not mean that the colonies were far from his mind. References to his plans for the development of the Orphan House appeared frequently in his letters throughout his ministry. In one letter to a friend in England, he wrote of his successes he had, both in fundraising in support of the Orphan House and in converting its residents. He also spoke of it as a “Refuge from the Storm” for “his dear English Friends” if “Persecution should come upon them because of the World.”153 This letter appeared in the newspapers in the colonies, as part of his public image campaign.

Whitefield wrote in another letter from London to Massachusetts Governor Belcher that “Dear America is much upon my heart. Thanks be to God, Bethesda is

now put on a good and flourishing foundation,” though he also remarked at the challenges of raising funds.\textsuperscript{154} He also wrote to a ship’s captain friend, requesting that, the next time the Captain traveled to Savannah, he bring along some supplies for Bethesda.\textsuperscript{155} Many of his sermons were fundraisers for his charitable causes in the colonies, and particularly his proposed orphanage in Georgia. On January 10, 1738, he preached at Great St. Helen’s Church in London to collect money to help the Salzburgers to build a church.\textsuperscript{156} He also raised money for the planned Orphan House, remarking more than once at the unfortunate state of the colony.\textsuperscript{157} Whitefield was, from this point, always preoccupied with the state of the British American colonies – both the spiritual and economic welfare of its settlers. 

On January 14, 1739, having reached the canonical age, Whitefield was formally ordained by an unknown priest at Christ Church in Oxford. He preached twice that day: once at the Castle and once at St. Alban’s, reporting that his audience “stood attentive.”\textsuperscript{158} He also praised God for “enabling him to preach with the demonstration of the Spirit, and with power,” and wrote that God “quite took away


\textsuperscript{155} Whitefield to Captain G____, Dec. 20, 1752, in Ibid: 462-463; On another occasion, he wrote to an acquaintance asking him if he [Whitefield] “were detained in England this year, would he put [your] life in the Redeemer’s hands and go immediately?” To Mr. S__________, London, Jan. 9, 1753,” in Ibid: 473-474.


my hoarseness, so that I could lift my voice like a trumpet.”159 This emotional, extemporaneous style of preaching, together with his taste for extempore prayer, would contribute to the many, almost unrelenting charges of enthusiasm and sedition that Whitefield faced throughout his career.160 It was common to many evangelical preachers of the Great Awakening in America, such as the American-born Yale-trained Jonathan Edwards. Edwards (1703-1758), the grandson of eminent Connecticut Congregationalist preacher Solomon Stoddard, was arguably one of the most influential colonial-born revivalist preachers. He was dismissed from his parish in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1750, in part due to his support of the conversion experience, or New Birth, as a requirement for full church membership.161 Like Edwards, Whitefield understood that “colonial ministers of evangelical temperament appealed to the emotions of their people as the quickest way to conviction of sin and conversion” in an era where, as Andrew Delbanco notes, preoccupations with “God and sin” were giving way to the rationalism of the Enlightenment.162 Edwards and Whitefield were both “deeply conscious even as saved of a persisting sense of sin and guilt.”163 Edwards was also said to encourage

159 Ibid.
emotional outbursts as a sign of true conversion early in his evangelical career.\textsuperscript{164} Rather than condemning this enthusiasm, Whitefield, Edwards and other evangelists saw it as a “remarkable outpouring of God’s grace.”\textsuperscript{165} Whitefield’s growing propensity for preaching to gatherings outside established churches, which he documented extensively in his journal and were well publicized in the newspapers, quickly became problematic. The fact that private religious societies frequently played host to his sermons in England during this period was the source of at least one documented canonical complaint.\textsuperscript{166} The complaint labeled the meetings as secretive, seditious and contrary to the Church of England, a charge that Whitefield denied. He asserted quite adamantly that the gatherings were only intended as fellowship-building and were not schismatic.\textsuperscript{167} He chafed at what he saw as the hypocrisy of the clergy who “charge me carelessly with schism and being righteous overmuch,” and yet did not consider “that the Canon of our Church forbids our clergy to frequent taverns, to play at cards or dice, or any other unlawful games.”\textsuperscript{168} This was one of many occasions in which Whitefield challenged the authority of members of the Anglican clergy.\textsuperscript{169} Through these challenges, he made a public example of those who failed to live up to the pious model that he set in his autobiographies and his journal, particularly in

\textsuperscript{164} Butler, \textit{Awash in a Sea of Faith}, 178.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid: 179.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid: 196.
\textsuperscript{168} Journal Entry for 6 Mar. 1739. Ibid: 221.
\textsuperscript{169} Bonomi, \textit{Under the Cope of Heaven}, 162; Pestana, \textit{Protestant Empire}, 220 and Butler, \textit{Awash in a Sea of Faith}, 170-172.
contrast with the image he presented of himself as an indiscrete youth who had found “true religion” as an adult.\textsuperscript{170} These challenges also reinforced Whitefield’s determination to project himself as a pious Anglican who faced resistance from hypocritical critics as he tried to steer the Church of England in a more moral direction by example.

A few days after facing this charge, Whitefield and John Wesley met with two clergy members of the Church of England who were opposed to their New Birth doctrine. It was at that meeting that Whitefield first recognized that the New Birth had become a fundamental difference between him and his opponents, and not one that could readily be overcome. In spite of this theological difference over New Birth doctrine, Whitefield still saw himself as a loyal member of the Church of England’s clergy. He met with the Bishop of Gloucester on February 6, 1739, reporting in his journal that the Bishop warmly received both him and John Wesley and commended their missionary work in Georgia.\textsuperscript{171} And, on occasions when his Anglicanism was challenged, he took these challenges public on both sides of the Atlantic. For example, late in 1739, he received a letter from the Bishop of Gloucester, admonishing him to “preach to the congregation which was entrusted to his care.”\textsuperscript{172} The Bishop’s warning to Whitefield was intended to deter Whitefield’s itinerancy, but was also an indicator that his conduct had strayed considerably from

\textsuperscript{170} Stout, \textit{The Divine Dramatist}, 1-15.


\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
that sanctioned by the Church of England. He was, in all likelihood, fully aware of the fact that Whitefield found fewer respectable Anglican pulpits open to him, so the Bishop’s message was two fold: Whitefield could either start functioning as a respectable Anglican, or else desist from the ministry altogether. In response, Whitefield wrote a public letter to the Bishop, thanking him for his concern, but denying the charges that he violated church law and telling the Bishop that “he [the Bishop] equally offend[ed] when he preach[ed] outside his Diocese.”

As with most letters to the bishops, he signed the letter “from your Lordship’s obedient Son, and Obliged Servant.” In doing so, he was performing the part of the loyal Anglican clergyman, showing deference to Church hierarchy, although publication of the letter could hardly be seen as deferential. Whitefield would eventually grow so bold as to tell his adversaries of his intentions to publish their correspondence.

Even as he challenged members of the Church hierarchy – in Britain and in the Americas - Whitefield carefully projected himself to his followers as a loyal member, in good standing with the hierarchy of the Church of England. To order to avoid inciting a schism, it was important for him to demonstrate that disagreement was not the same as disloyalty. Projecting such an image of loyalty even while engaged in dialogue with the hierarchy gave his actions legitimacy and helped to deter some, if not all, charges of intent to create a schism. Taking these disputes

173 “From George Whitefield’s Journal,” Monday, November 19, 1739, BEP (No. 224): 1
174 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
176 Whitefield to the Archbishop, Tottenham Court, 12 Feb. 1768. SPG. Vol. XI: Correspondence: American Colonies, 1703-1803, f. 262-263. LPL.
public also exemplified the change in the nature of relationships between ministers and their flocks. His public image challenged the moral authority of many different religious and civil authorities, a behavior he would model many times over his missionary career, with increasing fervor. When he eventually began to publically assert the necessity of the conversion experience as the essential qualification of ministers, this challenge would have even more ramifications for undermining the conventional minister-parishioner relationship.

In the case of the letter to the Bishop of Gloucester, which appeared in The Boston Evening Post on November 19, 1739, in comparing the Bishop's actions, Whitefield not only (subtly) challenged the Bishop’s moral authority, but also underscored his argument that his actions should not be seen as radical.177 Similarly, in February, 1739, he wrote and made public a letter to the Bishop of Bristol, protesting the Chancellor of Bristol’s decision to bar him from preaching in a church to benefit the Orphan House. The Chancellor had characterized him as a Dissenter and a preacher of “false doctrine,” but Whitefield responded that:

though many are brought to the Church by my preaching, not one has been taken from it. The Chancellor is pleased to tell me my conduct is contrary to the Canons; but I told him those Canons which he produced were not intended against such meetings as mine are, where his Majesty is constantly prayed for, and everyone is free to see what is done.178

Whitefield signed his letter, “your Lordship’s dutiful son and servant,” but he did not record the Bishop’s response. Either he never received one, or the Bishop’s response was less than favorable to Whitefield’s claims that his preaching did not undermine the Church. In any case, he continued to preach in and around Bristol without further incident, though largely in societies and outside formal church venues, noting that he “now preach[ed] 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.” This demonstrates both the impact of Whitefield’s preaching and that he believed that the Church should take note of his success and join in it, rather than attempting to hamper it. Since Whitefield believed that he channeled God through his work, logically, he saw forces that worked at counter-purposes to him as evidence of the influence of the Devil. By April of 1739, he reported that his audiences numbered in the thousands; a month later, in the tens of thousands.

Whitefield’s popularity grew in proportion with the controversy and criticism that surrounded him. By May of 1739, when he was ready to depart on his second voyage to the American colonies, he was generating regular press coverage, both negative and positive, in British and colonial newspapers, elevating his celebrity status. His sermons in England were printed and advertised for sale in

the colonies.\textsuperscript{183} In his journal, Whitefield dismissed at least one negative report on himself in the news as “lies” and his critics as “self-righteous bigots.”\textsuperscript{184} Accusations of religious bigotry became one of the hallmarks of Whitefield’s response to critics.

In May of 1739, Whitefield began plans for a second trip to the colonies. He expected to sail to Pennsylvania aboard the Elizabeth and then preach his way southward, back to Georgia.\textsuperscript{185} Some British supporters, who had followed reports of him in the press, proposed to join him in Georgia. Among them was Joseph Periam, a mental patient in London’s Bethlehem Hospital, who had been confined there by his family for being “Methodically mad” after fasting, praying loudly in public, and giving his clothes to the poor.\textsuperscript{186} These were the same sorts of activities Whitefield had engaged in during his own “awakening” at Oxford. Whitefield, unsurprisingly, championed Periam’s request to follow him to Georgia, a request that was granted by Periam’s family and his doctors.\textsuperscript{187} Whitefield here offered encouragement to followers who met resistance from their families and also demonstrated to the readers of his journal how he took care of his “flock.”

During this period, Whitefield also corresponded with a number of field-preachers, with whom he clearly identified.\textsuperscript{188} He blamed the clergy who denied him the use their pulpits for his itinerant preaching: “I have no objection against, but

\textsuperscript{183} Advertisement, BNL, Issue 1863 (Nov. 30-Dec. 6, 1739): 2
\textsuperscript{184} Journal Entries for 11 Feb. and 13 May 1739. Davis, ed, GWJ, 205, 259.
\textsuperscript{185} Journal Entry for 12 May 1739. Ibid: 259.
\textsuperscript{186} Journal Entries for 9 and 19 May 1739. Ibid: 261-262, 265-266.
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{188} Journal Entries, 18 and 21 May 1739. Ibid: 261, 267.
highly approve of the excellent Liturgy of our Church, would ministers lend me their churches to use it in. If not, let them blame themselves, that I pray and preach in fields.”

Once again, Whitefield’s published journal modeled a public challenge to the clergy, contributing to his transformation into an archetype of religious liberty, which had already taken root in America. These clergymen having effectively forced his hand, he painted himself both as a victim of religious bigotry and one who was entirely reasonable and justified in his actions, rather than the dangerous radical that his critics made him out to be. These sorts of exchanges would only increase over the course of his career.

In early June 1739, Whitefield began formal preparations for his second missionary trip. He said goodbye to his London friends and began a short pre-voyage preaching tour of England en-route to Liverpool, where he was to meet his ship. He also preached charitable sermons to raise more money for his planned orphanage. Although Whitefield’s plans to set sail for the Americas were temporarily thwarted by embargoes due to the War of Jenkins’ Ear, his popularity in both the colonies and Great Britain was growing. After one sermon, he claimed to have received letters from congregants who “came to hear [him] out of bad motive, but were appended by the free grace of Jesus Christ.” This was a signal, both to Whitefield’s followers and to his opponents, of the power of “true grace” to

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190 Journal Entry, 8 June 1739. Ibid: 282.
overcome bigotry. To his opponents, and particularly those in the Church
hierarchies, Whitefield portrayed himself as a force that could not be stopped. To
his supporters he portrayed a rapidly expanding provincial community whose
power would to continue to grow while winning over critics. He also noted, with
pride, that John Wesley had begun to “follow him” in preaching in the open air in
Blackheath, Blendon, and London, allegedly to great success.\(^{193}\) And he again, one
historian has suggested, posited himself as a Christ-like figure, noting in his journal
in late June that “Wherever I go, people fly to the doctrine of Jesus Christ. ‘My
sheep,’ says our Lord, ‘hear My voice. A stranger will they not follow.’”\(^{194}\) About ten
days later, in Bristol, he noted bells ringing, which he took to be in homage of his
visit. “I was received as an angel of God,” he wrote. That night, he preached to a
group of about six or seven thousand.\(^{195}\)

Emboldened by his growing popularity, Whitefield began to challenge not
only the ecclesiastical authorities but also the civil authorities. In early July 1739,
the Gloucester town bailiff sent constables after Whitefield under orders of a local
judge, who thought to charge him as a vagrant. Channeling his “Christ-like”
persona, Whitefield asserted that the magistrates did not have the authority “to stop
[his] preaching, even in the streets, if [Whitefield] thought it proper.”\(^{196}\) In practice,
however, Whitefield’s bravado did have its limits. On the advice of Benjamin


\(^{196}\) Journal Entry, 3 July 1739. Ibid: 292.
Seward, his more cautious friend and supporter, Whitefield preached in Seward’s fields that evening, evading the jurisdiction of the local civil authorities.\footnote{197}

This experience in Gloucester was the first of many such conflicts with civil authorities. Later that month, he made public, via his journals, an exchange of letters with John Abbot, Mayor of Basingstoke. Abbot wrote Whitefield a letter warning him against preaching in the town and causing a disturbance. Whitefield challenged Abbot to find a law against his meetings and charged him with presupposing that Whitefield had sinister motives, rather than waiting to see if a problem arose. Abbot was unable to produce a specific law but voiced his objections to preaching on unconsecrated grounds. In the Anglican tradition, preachers typically confined their activities to a church and followed a protocol that included use of the Book of Common Prayer. Whitefield did not adhere to these expectations, preaching in a private field that night, against the advice of a friend and supporter. Fearing legal retribution, he cut short his evangelizing tour and returned to London to wait out the embargo on voyages to the colonies.\footnote{198} He would go on to have similar confrontations in the colonies, notably with Commissary William Vessey of New York and Commissary Garden in South Carolina, which will be discussed in the next chapter. He continued to generate controversy for the duration of his life, to be sure, but this facet of his transformation remained more or less constant after this point.

\footnote{197}{Ibid.}

\footnote{198}{Journal Entries, 19, 20 and 23 July 1739. Ibid: 303-307.}
On Tuesday, August 14, 1739, he boarded the ship *Elizabeth*, bound for Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{199} The first ten days of his voyage were marked by rough seas and intense winds, which rendered him sick and terrified, along with some of the other passengers. As he had over a year earlier during his first voyage, Whitefield preached and offered sacrament to the Captain and his fellow passengers.\textsuperscript{200} His account of his second voyage to the Americas in his journal was far less detailed than that of his first. *The Elizabeth* reached Philadelphia on Saturday November 3, 1739. On his second missionary expedition, which lasted through June of 1740, Whitefield would ignite a maelstrom in the colonies.\textsuperscript{201} Colonial newspapers were filled with advertisements of Whitefield’s latest journal publication and of his upcoming sermons. Announcements of his impending arrival in the colonies were circulated well in advance, and some colonial newspapers had been printing largely favorable accounts of his preaching in Great Britain for the better part of a year.\textsuperscript{202} These newspapers were also full of advertisements for copies of his sermons.\textsuperscript{203} His press in Great Britain, on the other hand, was considerably less positive where he was viewed by many as an unscrupulous nuisance.\textsuperscript{204} While the transformation

\textsuperscript{202} Wilson, 179.
\textsuperscript{204} Wilson, 178.
of his image took place on both sides of the Atlantic, his public image on two sides of the Atlantic.

As historian Chris Beneke rightly notes, “what irked contemporary critics almost as much as Whitefield's emotional brand of preaching was the mutability, as well as the multiplicity, of his attachments.”\(^\text{205}\) His willingness to “preach the Gospel to any Sect, Party, or Faction” prompted constant criticism.\(^\text{206}\) Itinerancy meant that his reputation and sermons were directed towards people he had never met, the result was that his influence expanded beyond that of a conventional minister. It also made him less orthodox in the eyes of the Anglican Church, where the hierarchy expected its clergy to restrict their preaching activities to sanctioned pulpits. His Anglican respectability was unraveling relatively quickly after his return from his first missionary tour.\(^\text{207}\)

Because the rhetoric of religious tolerance was so complex and evolving, there was much debate about whether Whitefield was a positive figure for religious tolerance. In the Colonies, there were some appeals, which included those of fellow revivalist preachers Jonathan Edwards and Gilbert Tennant, for Christian unity.\(^\text{208}\) In practice, there was no true freedom to practice one's faith without the public


\(^\text{206}\) Ibid: 55-56; *Mr. Whi_d's Soliloquy, or a Serious Debate with Himself what Course He Shall Take* (Boston, 1745), lines 69-77; Benjamin Prescott, *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Whitefield, An Itinerant Preacher* (Boston, 1745), 3; George Gillespie, *Remarks upon Mr. Whitefield, Proving Him a Man under Delusion* (Philadelphia, 1744), front matter


judgment of others, as anti-revivalists lamented.\textsuperscript{209} To dissenting anti-revivalists, the proclivity of Whitefield's visits to created division in communities undermined the spirit of religious tolerance. His image would continue to evolve through subsequent missionary tours.

\textsuperscript{209} Ibid: 63.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE WORLD IS MY CONGREGATION

In May 1738, George Whitefield formalized plans for the second of his missionary tours in the British American colonies, securing passage aboard the Elizabeth, along with an entourage of eleven friends and supporters. Because of the embargo imposed by the War of Jenkins’ Ear, his departure was delayed until August. He intended to land in Philadelphia and preach his way back to Georgia. He also planned to purchase more supplies for the Bethesda Orphan House. Later tours led him back not only to South Carolina and Georgia, but also to the middle colonies and New England. They brought greater popularity and more opportunities for trans-denominational encounters. His activities during these tours also escalated the controversy surrounding him and alienated him from key figures in the hierarchy of the Church of England. This in turn, made Whitefield’s desire to be seen as an Anglican increasingly problematic. The events of this second tour denoted not only the unraveling of his reputation as an Anglican, but also the continued rise of his public reputation, to the point where numerous members of the Anglican hierarchy felt compelled to respond to it.

When Whitefield arrived in the Americas for his second missionary tour, he brought aboard the Elizabeth boxes filed with copies of his own printed sermons,

1 Journal Entry, May 12, 1738, Davies, ed, GWJ, 259.
journals, letters and prayers, as well as other evangelical pamphlets, including hundreds of copies of William Law's *Treatise on Christian Perfection*, Isaac Watt’s *Divine Songs*, and Henry Scougal’s *Country Parson’s Advice to His Parishioners*. As Whitefield later noted in his first autobiography, two of these pamphlets had been particularly influential in Whitefield’s own conversion to what he considered true Christianity.² He was, as historian Frank Lambert notes, a skilled “pedlar of divinity,” as well as a masterful promoter of self and of his evangelical message.³ With his talent for advanced promotion, these tours heightened his popularity, and exposed him to even wider, more diverse audiences. Whitefield’s appeal crossed denominational (Protestant) lines and transcended national lines in an era when both religious and cultural squabbles abounded, as progressively more diverse peoples came to populate the New World.⁴

Whitefield’s first stop on the second tour was Pennsylvania. Originally founded as a Dutch colony in 1631, the future colony of Pennsylvania saw competing claims in 1636 by Swedish settlers and, more broadly, by the English in 1664, under a charter granted by James II to the Duke of York. It became an English colony in 1667, after the Peace of Breda temporarily ended Anglo-Dutch hostilities in favor of the English. English possession of Pennsylvania was solidified in 1674, following the third Anglo-Dutch War.

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² Lambert, ‘*Pedlar in Divinity,’* 11.
With English dominion established, William Penn was granted a land charter by English King Charles II in 1681 to settle a large debt owed to his father, Royal Navy Admiral Robert Penn. Penn, a Quaker, founded his new settlement on two key principles: county commission, and freedom, or liberty of conscience.\(^5\) In his *Discourse of the General Rule of Faith and Practice*, Penn wrote that “all Men have a belief of God, and some knowledge of Him, though not upon equal discovery must be granted from that account that...gives of mankind in matters of religion.”\(^6\) That is, while he did not consider all faiths to be equal – to Penn, Quakerism was “the true religion” - he believed that all men were entitled to their particular Christian beliefs. He also believed in the fallibility of men, which meant that their judgment of others was also fallible. Therefore, only God was fit to judge man’s faith and “the truth of person.”\(^7\) These early principles were still very much part of the Pennsylvania Colony’s culture when Whitefield arrived. The Pennsylvania Assembly had upheld them in a pronouncement earlier that year, in which it was declared that “Equality among religious Societies [sic], without distinguishing any one Sect with greater Privileges than another, is the most effectual Method to discourage Hypocrisy,

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\(^5\) County Commissions were a form of local governance that still exists in Pennsylvania today.


\(^7\) Ibid: 21-22.
promote the Practice of the moral Virtues, and prevent the Plagues and Mischiefs that always attend religious Squabbling.”

The religious climate in Pennsylvania also played a role in its government’s relationship with non-European populations. Being desirous to avoid war for religious reasons, William Penn had also negotiated a series of treaties between the Quakers and local Native American peoples. The Quakers enjoined an unrivaled peaceful co-existence with the Delaware and other local bands. The Pennsylvania Assembly recognized the importance of maintaining a good relationship with the local Native peoples into the eighteenth century.

By the time George Whitefield arrived in the colony in 1739, Pennsylvania was a crucible of Quakers, German Moravians, Scot-Irish Presbyterians and Pennsylvania Dutch. This amalgam of faiths and nationalities all lived under William Penn’s philosophy of liberty of conscience. The Quakers had a long history of persecution by the English and were keenly sensitive to anything suggestive of religious persecution. Penn pointed out the hypocrisy of those who separated from the Church of Rome, then imposed a national religion on others, calling it “unchristian and unnatural.” Drawing from the rhetoric of the English Civil War, he also argued that “God required us to serve him in, without endangering our

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undoubted birthright of English freedom." He saw religious liberty rooted not only in God’s law, but also in English law, though some in the colony complained of a Quaker hegemony. Anglican minister William Smith, for example, referred to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting as the Quakers’ “political cabal.”

Like Whitefield, Penn was intensely concerned with the religious morality of the colonies. Also like Whitefield, his proclivity toward religious freedom was limited to Protestantism; he harbored a staunch dislike of the Roman Catholic Church. Some of Penn’s aversion to the Catholic Church was rooted in the Inquisition and the Church’s “imputing all the blood of poor Protestants to some unwarrantable civil score,” effectively overstepping civil law. Penn’s ideology was no, doubt, shaped by his childhood during the reign of Oliver Cromwell, and being the son of a naval officer engaged in the quelling of Irish Catholic uprisings and the blockading of Irish ports. He believed that Catholic practice were “opposed to scripture” and particularly opposed with the notion that doctrine rested “upon the single edicts of the pope.” The power held by the Pope also ran against Penn’s belief in the fallibility of humankind. And, in an argument that was entirely

12 Bonomi: 169.
compatible with Whitefield’s goal of making religion accessible, he argued against the Roman Catholic Church’s practice of rendering mass and prayers entirely in Latin, which was largely “unknown to many millions of souls.”

As was the case in Georgia, where Whitefield launched his first missionary tour in the Colonies, much of the dislike for the Roman Catholic Church in Pennsylvania was colored by concerns over economic rivalry with Spain and France. While Pennsylvania did not share a frontier with Spain and was not involved, like Georgia and South Carolina, with the Spanish, it did have a considerable number of merchants, and the colony was intricately entangled the greater Atlantic World. Many were concerned about the impact of the War of Austrian Succession on their livelihoods. Privateering was a major concern through much of the eighteenth century as well.

Pennsylvania and the middle colonies were in a period of rapid population growth at the time of Whitefield’s arrival, estimated at a 530 percent collective gain among the white population between 1710 and 1760. Immigration added a large

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16 Ibid: 179.


18 See for example, James Logan to William Penn, 12 Oct 1705; James Logan to William Penn, 29 Nov. 1705; and William Penn to James Logan, 9 Dec. 1705 in Correspondence Between William Penn and James Logan, Vol. 2 (NY: AMS Press, 1872): 93, 97-99, 100-104.


20 Bonomi, Under the Cope of Heaven, 90.
number of Germans and Scots to the existing Swedish, Dutch and English
populations. 21 This was partly owing to philanthropic societies that supported the
bringing of indigent European immigrants from the Old World to the new. 22 As the
circumstances of the Colony's founding suggest, religion and politics were "more
closely intertwined in Pennsylvania than in any other colony." 23 They were so
intertwined, in fact, that when it came to organizing for the Colony's defense,
Governor Charles Gookin addressed the problem of improving security "without
engaging any Man against his religious Perswasion [sic]," an obvious reference to
the Colony's pacifist Quaker and Moravian populations. 24 Pennsylvania was
particularly known for its religious tolerance, and a 1709 Vote of the Assembly
signed by Scottish Quaker and future Philadelphia Mayor James Logan even
empowered religious societies, like the ones Whitefield had preached at in London,
to buy and hold land. 25 It was a qualified tolerance, which did not prevent anti-
Scottish sentiments and other longstanding prejudices from spilling from the old
world into the new. In spite of these limitations, the emphasis on religious tolerance
made it a particularly good arena for Whitefield's challenge to religious and civil

21 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Charles Gookin, Address to the Pennsylvania Assembly, July, 29, 1709 in Gertrude
of Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania, Oct. 14, 1707-Aug. 6, 1726, Vol. 2
(Philadelphia, 1931):
25 Votes of the Assembly, April 13, 1709 in Gertrude MacKinney, ed., Pennsylvania
Archives: 8th Series: Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the
authorities. In this environment, Whitefield could preach without fear of interference or persecution by the civil authorities. Given the tendency of Whitefield’s preaching to stir up considerable passion in his followers, however, Pennsylvania’s sensitivity to “religious squabbling” meant that his detractors still had clear grounds, rooted in the law of the colony, to criticize Whitefield.

Whitefield reached Philadelphia on Saturday, November 3, 1739. He reported being warmly received by Penn, the Commissary and other members of the colonial government.26 Prayer, and several disputes with local clergy about “justification by faith,” which, like the liberty of conscience, was another legacy of the English Civil War, occupied Whitefield’s first few days back in the colony.27 These meetings included Quakers, Presbyterians and Baptists. He dined with William Penn on the evening of November 7, and reported that he found “much liberty of spirit.”28 During this stopover in Philadelphia, he also made the acquaintance of Presbyterian Gilbert Tennent, a friend of James Erskine, whose writings Whitefield found inspirational.

26 Journal Entry, 3 November 1739, Davis, ed, GWJ, 337.


28 Journal Entry, 7 November 1739, Davis, ed, GWJ, 339.
Although Whitefield’s introduction to Tennent went well, he quipped that Tennent and his sons were “secretly despised by the generality of the Synod as Mr. Erskine and his brethren are hated by the judiciaries of Edinburgh, and, as the Methodist preachers are by their brethren in England.”

This, more than likely, was a reference to James Erskine’s quarrels with Lord Robert Walpole, and, more generally with the Erskine clan’s connections with the 1715 Jacobite Rebellion. Unlike his brother John, James Erskine was never tied to the Jacobites, but he was strongly suspected of harboring Jacobite sympathies.

The Tennents, with whom Whitefield aligned himself, were of course leaders of the New Siders, or New Lights. New Lights favored revivalism; Old Lights were suspicious of it. The schism occurred along both class lines and cultural lines, the Old Siders were typically born and educated in Scotland, while New Siders were typically younger, born in the colonies and tended to “chafe against the controls favored by their more conservative elders,” seeing them as “out of touch with New World ways.”

It is not surprising that Whitefield and the Tennents became evangelical allies in spite of their denominational differences. As has been noted, Whitefield wholly embraced religious diversity and trans-denominational cooperation with other religious leaders, provided that these leaders broadly shared his ideals and goals. His relationship with the Tennents was one of many “partnerships of mutual convenience” that Whitefield entered into during his travels in the Colonies, though it would come to cost his reputation with the Anglican clergy.

30 Bonomi, Under the Cope of Heaven, 146-147.
in the colonies.\textsuperscript{31} It is also unsurprising that the Tennents were welcoming to Whitefield, as Presbyterians in the colonies in this period tended toward interdenominational cooperation with a variety of other Protestant sects. As Lois Banner notes, until “denominationalism began to predominate” in the 1830s, the Board of Directors for the Presbyterian Church in British America frequently included members from other denominations – Methodist, Baptist, Quaker and Episcopalian.\textsuperscript{32} A well-known evangelical figure and proponent of the doctrine of the New Birth, Whitefield would have been seen as a vital ally by the Tennents.

Whitefield was pleased with his reception in Pennsylvania, and by the Tennents, and made no mention of any significant tensions. His initial perception of the colony was entirely positive. “Many have been quickened and awakened,” he wrote, “to see that religion does not consist in outward things, but in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.”\textsuperscript{33} In spite of his doctrinal disagreements with the Quakers, he saw their trembling in the course of prayer as a manifestation of their awakening and experience of true faith. The convergence of multiple denominations also clearly heartened him, but he began to speak openly about his concerns with the Anglican clergy in the colony, calling their principles “unchristian.”\textsuperscript{34} As in the past, his comments against the clergy with whom he disagreed were laced with anti-Catholic sentiments:

\textsuperscript{31} Hoffer, \textit{When Benjamin Franklin Met the Reverend George Whitefield}, 9-22.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid; and Sept. 19, 1740, Davis, ed, \textit{GWJ}, 458.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid: 342.
Were I to convert Papists, my business would be to shew [sic] that they were misguided by their priests; and if I want to convince Church of England Protestants, I must prove that the generality of their teachers do not preach or live up to the truth as it is in Jesus.\textsuperscript{35}

While his words were forceful, they were still not intended to be schismatic. Rather, they came from Whitefield’s conviction that his doctrinal interpretations were orthodox and true to scripture. He was increasingly quick to criticize the quality and character of the Anglican missionaries sent by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, frequently complaining directly to the Bishop of London, as will be detailed later this chapter.

Whitefield’s arrival in Philadelphia was announced in newspapers around the colonies.\textsuperscript{36} Public responses to Whitefield in the colony were mixed. One follower was moved to pen a poem in response to Whitefield’s preaching. The poem, appearing in publication more than once after Whitefield’s visit, described how he changed the church experience for his followers. Whitefield, the author wrote, “comes with Zeal divine...In whose strict Life the Christian Graces shine, In doctrine sound, in Faith and Virtue strong, With soft Persuasion dwelling on his Tongue.”\textsuperscript{37} The author suggested that Whitefield’s oft-questioned character and suggested that it was superior to that of previous ministers:

\begin{quote}
He comes by Heaven’s Command, to chase away,  
Those Mists and Clouds that long have hid the Day:  
to pull a long prevailing error down,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.


Which takes from off Emanuel’s Head the Crown:
To rouse with an awakening Trumpet, those,
Who sat supinely in a false Repose. 38

The anonymous writer clearly referenced what he believed to be his own conversion experience after hearing Whitefield. More significantly, in his use of “He comes by Heaven’s Command,” and references to “Emanuel’s Crown,” the writer mimicked Whitefield’s own language, in his journal and his autobiographical publications, in which he presented a gospel-like image for himself. As in Great Britain and in the other colonies, advertisements for new editions of Whitefield’s journals and other publications appeared regularly in the newspapers. 39 That Whitefield’s own language and carefully constructed public image was reproduced in the writing of his followers just how successful he was at promoting it.

One less-favorable response came by way of a letter from some Presbyterians, who challenged some of the doctrinal and scriptural interpretations that Whitefield had expounded both in print and in preaching. Whitefield responded, point-by-point, in a letter that he subsequently published. For example, they corrected his use of “That Adam was adorned with all the Perfections of the Deity.” 40 Whitefield countered that it was a “wrong Expression,” and that he would correct it as, “all the moral communicable Perfections of the Deity.” 41 His response to the letter was published in General Magazine. In it, he condescendingly suggested

38 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
that his critics were put up to their criticisms by their pastors and implied that, if such was the case, theirs was an act of cowardice. “They had better have spoken out,” he wrote, “I should as readily have answered them as you.”42 In his response to these critics, he repeatedly referred to his conversion experience, noting, “The Lord’s dealing with me was somewhat out of the common Way...Our Lord was pleased to enlighten me by Degrees.”43 While Whitefield was not yet embroiled in the controversy over the conversion experience of ministers, he was already asserting the authority of his own conversion as evidence of his expertise in “true Grace” and that his interpretation was the true religion. Whether parishioners or clergy, the critics were clearly “Old Lights.” Whitefield, of course, had arrived just as a schism developed among Pennsylvania’s Presbyterians, between Old Lights, who were suspicious of revivalism, and New Siders, who favored it. This letter was advertised for sale in The Pennsylvania Gazette in November 1740.44

Whitefield had been in Philadelphia for only a week when he left to accept the invitation of a Mr. Noble to bring his missionary tour to New Jersey. Permanent settlement in New Jersey had begun early in 1623, as part of the New Netherlands territory staked out by the Dutch West India Company. The New Sweden Company, a collaborative endeavor between Dutch and Swedish merchants formed under a charter by Sweden’s King Gustavus II, established a rival colony of New Sweden in

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 “Advertisement: Just Published,” PG (Nov. 13, 1740): 2.
1638. New Sweden expanded over the next seventeen years, in part on lands purchased from the Lenape, or Delaware people. The Dutch settlers, for their part, had a tumultuous relationship with the Lenape, culminating in warfare and a massacre of the Native American population between 1630 and 1643. The Dutch regained control of the area in 1655, putting an end to the expansion of New Sweden. There were some scattered English settlers earlier in the century, but the first permanent English settlement was established in the mid-1680s, about twenty years after a 1664 grant from King Charles II to his brother, James, Duke of York a close friend of William Penn. Settlement was delayed by warring between the English and the Dutch for control over the territory and confusion over the jurisdiction of the land between James and the Governor of New York, and over the boundary between colonies. After the area's re-conquest from the Dutch in 1673, East Jersey males were required to swear an oath to the English crown. Those who did not were not counted among the settlement's freeholders.

A precise accounting of the colony's population is difficult because of the lack of surviving vital records. Brunswick, the primary focus of Whitefield's visit, was located in Middlesex County, with the highest white European populations, which

48 Wacker, Land and People, 125.
49 Ibid: 129.
included Dutch, English and Scottish settlers.50 New Jersey also had a considerable Quaker population, though its growth had slowed by the time Whitefield arrived.51 A large chunk of East Jersey was purchased in 1682 from the estate of George Carteret, New Jersey’s first governor, by William Penn, and was settled by Scottish immigrants.

Early in the eighteenth century, the settlements of East and West Jersey merged, having come out from under its proprietary government in 1702. The period between approximately 1707 and Whitefield’s arrival was marked by a rising English influence, in agriculture, writing and even speaking habits. The Colony was also becoming more Anglican, as the Church of England increased its presence there through the efforts of the SPG. Dutch Reform, Scottish Presbyterians, and Congregationalists all railed against the rising influence of the Anglican Church.52 This controversy simmered at around the same time a pamphlet circulated in England titled *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted.*53 This pamphlet, based on a sermon preached by English deist writer Matthew Tindall, alarmed the Anglican clergy, because it argued that “the Church of England – as by law established – is a mere creature of the people and civil power, and the independent power of the clergy contrary to the ancient laws of the land even in Popish times.”54 In the

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51 Ibid: 179.

52 Ibid.


colonies, where the line between church and state was not entirely clear and the Church of England was attempting to establish spiritual authority, these ideologies were particularly threatening because they undercut the Church's authority (though they were potentially subversive to clergy in other sects as well). That Whitefield's teachings were already starting to emphasize the importance of the conversion experience for the achievement of true grace was significant. While he did not yet explicitly argue for the necessity of conversion among clergy, the popularity of his teachings still implied problems for ministers who did not favor the new birth. Since religious tolerance in places like Pennsylvania suggested that parishioners had the right to choose their religion without interference by ecclesiastical or civil authorities, it meant that these parishioners might either abandon their church in favor of a new Whitefieldian one, or replace their existing minister in favor of a new one. Tensions between the Anglican Church and other denominations led Congregationalists to join Philadelphia's Presbyterian Synod, which was dominated by the Tennents.\footnote{Ibid: 67.} Thus, it was to a very conflicted colony that Whitefield arrived in 1739.\footnote{Ibid: 69.}

William Tennent's son Gilbert, also a Presbyterian minister, joined Whitefield on most of his journey through the middle colonies. Before his departure from Pennsylvania, Whitefield read liturgy and preached at the junior Tennent's meetinghouse, derisively called "the Log College" by the Tennent's opponents. At the time, there was no established parish of the Church of England in Pennsylvania.
Whitefield then went on to New Jersey, arriving in Burlington on November 13, 1739 to preach to a mixed crowd. Whitefield was told that it was common, in these situations, for “dissenters and conformists” to “worship at different times, and in the same place.” Whitefield wrote in his journal, “Oh, that the partition-wall were broken down, and we all with one heart and one mind could glorify our common Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!” As part of the journals that appeared in excerpted form in the newspapers and were reprinted multiple times as volumes, Whitefield’s evocation of [Protestant] Christian unity can be understood as a public expression of his goal of creating a providential community, bound together by his religious vision.

Whitefield stopped in New Brunswick on his way to New York. En route, Whitefield first heard Gilbert Tennent, Jr., preach, and was moved, saying that “he convinced me more and more that we can preach the Gospel of Christ no further than we have experienced the power of it in our own hearts.” Whitefield believed that only those who were among “the converted” could legitimately preach the truth. Loosely interpreted, this idea privileged the conversion experience over other ministerial qualifications, potentially opening the door for unschooled, unordained and unlicensed preachers. Whitefield’s turn towards this belief, and his late public defense of Tennent’s assertions that the conversion experience was essential for ministerial effectiveness, played an important role in making critics of those who might otherwise have welcomed his message of religious tolerance, but

57 Journal Entry, 13 Nov. 1739, Davis, ed, GWJ, 343.
detested revivalism’s tendency (and Whitefield’s) to inspire untutored itinerants, as well as challenges by parishioners, to the teachers of their ministers.

After stops in New York, Whitefield’s tour continued to Elizabethtown, New Brunswick again, and then to Maidenhead, not far from the future site of New Light Presbyterian colossus, College of New Jersey (later Princeton University), on his return from New York to Philadelphia. Five months later, he returned to New Jersey, with stops in Greenwich, Gloucester and Amwell, to preach to large audiences.

News of both trips abounded in the colonial papers, with reports either “filled with admiration” or scathing in tone.\(^59\) Magnus Falconar, a supporter of Whitefield’s, published a letter to “the Inhabitants of New-York” in Philadelphia’s \textit{American Weekly Mercury}, to counter claims by Anglican clergyman Jonathan Arnold that Whitefield was a “deceiver” and preached “false Doctrine.”\(^60\) Falconar argued that Arnold was unable to “fix upon any one point of Doctrine” against Whitefield.\(^61\) He also responded to Arnold’s charge that Whitefield was “ignorant” by accusing Arnold of “the grossest of Ignorance....for there’s none so Ignorant as they who do not know it; and if the Blind lead the Blind, they’ll both fall into the Ditch.”\(^62\) Falconar was “hopeful” that “good Christians that heard [Whitefield] will be very far


\footnotesize\(^{60}\) “Mr. Arnold’s Letter against the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, Answer’d, by Magnus Falconar, Marriner. To the Inhabitants of New-York,” \textit{AWM}, Issue 1039 (Nov. 22-29, 1739): 1

\footnotesize\(^{61}\) Ibid.

\footnotesize\(^{62}\) Ibid.
from charging him with the least appearance of Deceit or false Doctrine.” Like other Whitefield supporters, Falconar imitated Whitefield’s language, painting a public image of Whitefield as more knowledgeable and doctrinally sound than his opponents.

Gilbert Tennent travelled with Whitefield each time. Whitefield’s collaboration on a preaching tour with evangelical ministers of other sects was an important development in Whitefield’s support for religious diversity in the British American colonies. Not long after, Whitefield’s association with an evangelical Presbyterian minister of radical repute would become a contributing factor in the demise of what had been a cordial relationship with South Carolina Commissary Alexander Garden.

The colonial Anglican clergy reported Whitefield’s activities on his tour back to the Bishop of London. Archibald Cummings, Commissary of Pennsylvania and Rector of Philadelphia’s Christ Church, told the Bishop that “for the sake of peace” he had permitted Whitefield to preach from his pulpit, but also described him as “enthusiastically mad.” In 1737, Cummings preached a pair of sermons about the “Danger of Breaking Christian Unity.” In one, he expressed his belief that toleration, as practiced in Philadelphia, had gone too far: “The Liberty of every Man’s serving God in his own way, being now stretch’d beyond due measure, will, ‘tis to be feared,

63 Ibid.
64 Lee, *New Jersey as a Colony and as a State*, 333.
ending not serving him at all, at least in public.”

Appended to this sermon was a letter to the Bishop in which Cummings expressed concerns about defiance by another preacher and about the preservation of Christian Unity. In it, he described an incident wherein a parishioner brought “some Gentleman” to his house and effectively asked about Cummings's sanction to preach in Philadelphia. The unnamed Gentleman said to Cummings, “You are not Rector of this Church. This is no Parish.” Cummings took this Gentleman’s comments as an “insinuation” that “the Statute” (meaning the Bishop’s authority to assign preachers) “did not extend to Philadelphia.” This rejection of the authority of the Bishop marked a tension between Anglican and dissenter communities, and a challenge that the Anglican Church faced in legitimizing its expansion in a predominately dissenter colony suspicious of strong external structures like the Church of England. The first letter pre-dates Whitefield’s arrival in the colonies. Nonetheless, Cummings’s letter about placating Whitefield’s followers and “keeping the peace” almost certainly meant that Cummings also saw Whitefield as a force subversive to Christian unity, as well as potentially schismatic. Philadelphia was still predominately a dissenter society at this time, so Cummings and his Anglican brethren had to tread carefully. Publicly opposing Whitefield was becoming an ill-considered tactic for Anglican clergy, as his supporters modeled his behavior and spoke out against his critics. In some cases, Whitefield’s supporters were able to influence the appointment of colonial clergy, so

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67 Postscript: Archibald Cummings to Bishop Gibson, July 18, 1737, Ibid: A3
it was imperative for these clergy not to alienate them. This development was important in understanding both Whitefield’s influence on the colonies and the unraveling of his reputation as an Anglican. Cummings and Bishop Gibson were particularly concerned that some of Whitefield’s followers had erected “a large building in Philadelphia for use by itinerant preachers of his school.” The exchange denotes Cummings’s and Gibson’s concerns that Whitefield inspired and supported unqualified itinerants who undermined the authority of the Church, and whose lack of proper training meant that they might do harm by spreading false religious messages. Alexander Howie, another member of Pennsylvania’s Anglican clergy, noted Whitefield’s popularity among the large Quaker population. The Anglican clergy in the colonies were doing their best to keep the Bishop of London apprised of Whitefield’s activities.

Early in the fall of 1739, Whitefield moved on to New York, another colony with a Dutch past. The West India Company established the Dutch Reformed Church in 1624, in order to “strengthen order and uphold religion.” Dissenter populations, which included Moravians, Quakers and Lutherans, were permitted to meet privately. The relationship between church and state in the Colony tightened under the administration of General Director Peter Stuyvesant, who was an elder of

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68 Alexander Malcolm to Bishop Gibson, Marblehead, July 6, 1747, FP, Vol. V: General Correspondence, Massachusetts, 1730-1750: ff. 305-306. LPL.
71 Bonomi, Under the Cope of Heaven, 24.
72 Ibid.
the Dutch Reformed Church. Stuyvesant was concerned about disorder in the Colony and saw instilling the hegemony of the Reformed Church as an antidote, much as the leadership of the SPG saw instilling Anglican hegemony in British American colonies as paramount. Earlier tolerance for dissenters quickly evaporated under Stuyvesant’s administration. He denied a group of German Lutherans a charter for their church and drove Quakers out of the Colony at any opportunity, in part by placing severe sanctions against them. The arrival of twenty-three Jews from Brazil created a particular problem. Although an anti-Semite, Stuyvesant did not want to appear unsympathetic to what they had experienced in Brazil at the hands of the Roman Catholic Portuguese. The conquest of Dutch Brazil in 1654 by an army of Portuguese Brazilians following a nine-year “war of liberation” had made the colony inhospitable to Jews; persecution led many of these Jews to flee, winding up in Dutch New York. Stuyvesant grudgingly admitted them, but denied them most of the rights that were afforded citizens.

In 1674, the Colony was transferred to English control. By the time of Whitefield’s visit, New York had a considerable English presence that was not only

73 Bonomi, Under the Cope of Heaven, 25.

74 Jews had been vital part of the lucrative sugar industry in Brazil since the fifteenth century, and they were instrumental in creating a lively trade network between Portugal, Brazil and the Netherlands late in the sixteenth century. Between 1630 and 1654, thousands of Jews immigrated to Dutch Brazil from Amsterdam. Because the Dutch permitted freedom of religion in the colony, they began living openly as Jews, though considerable tensions still remained between Jews and Christians. See Wim Klooster, “Communities of Port Jews and Their Contacts in the Dutch Atlantic World.” Jewish History, Vol. 20, No. 2, Port Jews of the Atlantic (2006): 129-145.


76 Bonomi, Under the Cope of Heaven, 25.
concerned with its relationship with the Dutch, but also constantly fretful about the colony’s relationship with the French and various Native peoples who were allied with the French. New York was, in many ways, a frontier, and its boundaries were ill defined.\textsuperscript{77}

The decade leading up to Whitefield’s arrival was marked by an effort by both English civil powers and the ecclesiastical authorities of the Anglican Church in New York to solidify their power in the colony. There were many dissenters, though not all considered their preaching to undermine the Church of England. As early as 1706, Presbyterian Reverend Francis Makemie had warned his parishioners and readers against “Pernicious Doctrine, and Principles; any thing to the disturbance of the Church of England or of the Government.”\textsuperscript{78} By the 1730s, prayers and reports of the activities of Trinity Church, the primary Anglican Church in New York, filled columns in the New York newspapers.\textsuperscript{79} As Charles Clark notes, newspapers were part of colonial community and served as an important means to disseminate ideas about religion, public morals, politics and manners.\textsuperscript{80} Much as Whitefield used newspapers to this end, churches used newspapers – though usually on a smaller scale than Whitefield - to promote themselves within the community. Eventually,

\textsuperscript{77} By the last decade of the seventeenth century, New York’s Minutes Council was occupied with the Colony’s defense against the threat of French invasion, as well as negotiating allegiances of their own with the Five Nations. See for example, 4\textsuperscript{th} Sept. 1693, 5\textsuperscript{th} Feb. 1693, 12\textsuperscript{th} June 1694, Minutes of Council in Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1870, Vol. 3 (NY: Printed for the Society, 1871): 128-129.

\textsuperscript{78} Francis Makemie, Sermon, Mar. 2, 1706, in Ibid: 413.

\textsuperscript{79} See, for example, Advertisements: \textit{NYJ}, January 14, 1733; \textit{NYG}, Dec. 6, 1747; Nov. 2, 1747 and November 6, 1749 in Ibid: 149-152.

\textsuperscript{80} Clark, The Public Prints, 170.
in 1750, Governor George Clinton ordered that prayers in all churches follow the Anglican order of service and make use of the Book of Common Prayer. Prayers were also to include one for the British Royal Family. Like neighboring New Jersey, the Colony of New York was undergoing a period of increased Anglican influence in the eighteenth century. Establishing the dominance of the Church of England was a central part of this process. Although an Anglican, the appearance of Whitefield at this juncture, with his mass interdenominational appeal and unorthodox preaching posed, a formidable competition for those who hoped to draw a majority membership to the Church of England.

**Whitefield Emboldened, Whitefield the Role Model**

Whitefield’s arrival in New York was reported in newspapers around the colonies. Given the Church’s desire for dominance and its insecurity about its own influence in the 1730s, it is wholly unsurprising that Whitefield’s reception by New York's Commissary Vessey contrasted sharply with his experiences in Philadelphia. Vessey had been instrumental in building and expanding Trinity Church, the first Anglican Church in the colony, as well as expanding the colony’s small Anglican population. Whitefield's report in his journal of this missionary voyage, which would appear in print in 1741, of meeting Vessey, said that “he seemed to be full of

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81 A Proclamation, 24 April 1750, in Ibid: 159-160.
anger and resentment.” Whitefield’s report of Vessey’s demeanor in his journal was calculated to demonstrate that Vessey was already against him. It also suggests that Vessey was well aware of Whitefield’s reputation and, no doubt, his extensive publications. For his part, Vessey preemptively denied Whitefield use of his pulpit because he saw Whitefield’s activities as undermining his work to expand Anglican influence. At their initial meeting, Commissary Vessey also requested Whitefield’s Letters of Orders, then his license. Whitefield told him that he had left his Letters behind in Philadelphia. Drawing on his experiences prior to his departure on his first voyage to Savannah, Whitefield challenged the Commissary’s authority, answering that

> He never heard that the Bishop of London gave any license to anyone who went to preach the Gospel in Georgia; but that I was presented to the living of Savannah by the trustees, and upon that presentation had letters Dismissory from my lord of London.

Whitefield thus not only challenged the Commissary, a direct appointee of the Bishop of London, but also by invoking his previous rapport with the Bishop of Gibson, asserted his legitimacy and reaffirmed his ties to the Church. To those reading his journal, this exchange was intended to reaffirm that Whitefield was a reformer, respected by the hierarchy of the Church of England in London, rather than a schismatic. It also painted Vessey as one not entirely familiar with Church policy and how the Church operated its missions in the colonies. This was a big problem for a church official who was appointed in part, to oversee Anglican

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85 Journal Entry, 15 Nov. 1739, in Davis, ed, GWJ, 344
missionary efforts in the colonies. It potentially undermined Vessey’s credibility and painted him as out-of-touch interloper, and it pandered to those among Whitefield’s followers who distrusted external structures in their church governance. As much as Whitefield sought to control the development of his own public image, he also created them for those with whom he interacted; especially when those interactions did not go well for Whitefield.

Whitefield further antagonized Vessey by calling him out as a hypocrite when the Commissary charged him with breaking his oath and breaking the Canon. He reminded the Commissary that his own frequenting of public houses violated the Canon. Once again, by reproducing this exchange in print, Whitefield painted himself as the true upholder of Church doctrine and morals. Vessey angrily accused Whitefield of “making a disturbance in Philadelphia,” a common charge made by Whitefield’s critics. They suggested that, rather than protecting religious morals, he sowed division wherever he went and was ultimately harmful to the religious culture of the colonies. Whitefield replied that his “end in preaching was not to sow divisions, but to propagate the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ.” Whitefield called Vessey a bigot, and told him that he, Whitefield, was “no respecter of persons; if a bishop committed a fault, I would tell him of it; if a common clergyman did not act aright, I would be free with him also, as well as with a layman.” Once again, he

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86 Ibid: 345.
87 Ibid.
88 Journal Entry, 15 Nov. 1739, Ibid.
played the propagator and upholder of true religion. The Commissary finally told Mr. Noble, the gentleman who had sent for Whitefield, to find him a pulpit. This version of events, described by Whitefield in his public journal, was intended to signify to his followers and detractors alike that Whitefield was both correct and victorious in his interaction with Vessey. The Commissary had no choice but to yield. That afternoon, Whitefield preached in the fields, followed by another sermon in the meetinghouse of Mr. Pemberton, a Presbyterian minister. This followed a denial of the use of the Dutch Calvinist Meetinghouse, which doubled as a place of worship for the local Anglicans. Two days later, Whitefield remarked that he saw his sermon on regeneration, or the new birth doctrine, first published in 1739, advertised in a New England paper. The publication of this sermon increased Whitefield’s notoriety, but having his name attached in print to a sermon on regeneration undermined his assertions of Anglicanness, where regeneration was not an accepted teaching of the Church in either Great Britain or the Colonies. This was particularly true given that the sermon’s publication came on the heels of a public quarrel with an important colonial leader of the Church of England. Its publication produced at least one response in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* by an unnamed letter writer, who asked Whitefield to clarify what this doctrine of the new birth, or regeneration, meant for religion. The writer was not caustic like other Whitefield critics but expressed concerns about its consistency, firstly with

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Whitefield’s message that “all mankind might enjoy equal blessing,” which tended to contract his otherwise Calvinistic doctrine.\(^2\) Secondly, the writer, who clearly had some humanist inclinations, asked Whitefield to explain how the new birth, or regeneration, was consistent with “the Natural Powers of the Understanding and Moral Agency.” He did not see regeneration as “sensible” or rational, demonstrating the tension between the old religious ideology of those concerned with evil and damnation, and the newer, more rational ideology shaped by the Enlightenment.\(^3\)

Whitefield’s tour with the junior Gilbert Tennent wound back through New Jersey to Philadelphia late in November, with preaching stops along the way. It concluded with Whitefield, Tennent and their like-minded brethren promising to “remember each other publicly” in prayers.\(^4\) This was significant, because Whitefield’s preaching emboldened Gilbert Tennent’s supporters in their growing rift within the Philadelphia Synod.\(^5\) At his return to Philadelphia Whitefield was met with disapproval by William Penn’s secretary. The Secretary was a former minister of the Church of England, who warned his listeners in a sermon against the “justification by faith” doctrine that Whitefield preached. Whitefield argued right back, asserting: “the Lord Christ was our Righteousness.”\(^6\) He had, once again, channeled God to assert his legitimacy. While his opponent was unimpressed with

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\(^{5}\) Butler, \textit{Awash in a Sea of Faith}, 143.

this argument, Whitefield came away from the dispute feeling victorious. He projected this victory to his followers and readers through his journal.

Whitefield went on to preach at German Town two days later, reporting that many in his audience of six thousand were moved to the point of tears. By his account, his audience included people from fifteen denominations, among them a Swiss minister and followers who had been “banished from Switzerland for preaching Christ.” Whitefield met many other European immigrants who reported similar experiences of exile, bonding both to him and to each other over his work and even translating it into other languages to bring it to a broader audience. This helped expand Whitefield’s influence even further across linguistic and ethnic lines. By this time, subscriptions for his volumes of Sermons and Journals had exceeded two hundred. Whitefield followers, who had the financial means, could pay to receive copies of these writings every time a new edition was printed.

While religious tolerance was not absolute in the colony, Whitefield saw Pennsylvania’s liberty of conscience as an important reason why it flourished spiritually. William Penn was a product of the political-ecclesiastical climate of the English Civil War, wherein the liberty of conscience was a central part of its rhetoric. He was also among dissenters who helped to moderate the movement toward English religious liberty. For Whitefield, the “liberty of conscience” in Pennsylvania afforded the means for persons of different Protestant sects to live

100 Ibid.
together and express their religiosity without suppression or persecution. More accurately, it was the sort of sometimes grudging tolerance described by Gary Remer.\footnote{Remer, \textit{Humanism and the Rhetoric of Tolerance}, 6.} It did not mean that each sect was equal, or that one had to offer moral approval or agreement to those of a different sect. In spite of these disagreements, individuals were permitted to chose their own church without interference.

Whitefield spent the first half of December traveling to the South. He preached his way through Delaware and Maryland, remarking in his journals on little aside from brief mentions of prayers at individual homes with proponents of the new birth.\footnote{Journal Entries, 29 Nov.-6 Dec. 1739, Davis, ed, \textit{GWJ}, 358-363.} At Upper Marlborough, Virginia, he commented on his fears about the spread of Deism in the Colony.\footnote{Journal Entry, 8 Dec. 1739, Ibid: 366.} Deism could either “profess to find God through the signs of order and contrivance in the physical universe,” or to “discover God through the moral nature of man.”\footnote{A. Owen Aldridge, “Natural Religion and Deism in America Before Ethan Allen and Thomas Paine.” \textit{WMQ}. Third Series, Vol. 54, No. 4 (Oct. 1997): 836.} In the British American colonies during the first half of the eighteenth century, Deism was, in part, a reaction against the high Calvinism espoused by Whitefield and others.\footnote{I Woodbridge Riley, “The Rise of Deism in Yale College,” \textit{AJT}, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Jul. 1905): 474.} As such, its spread, and more generally the rationalism of the Enlightenment, had the potential to undermine his message about the importance of Godliness and the dangers of sin and eternal
torment. A rise in its popularity could make Whitefield’s work at conversions harder.

Not every eighteenth-century minister saw deism, knowledge of God and natural philosophy, as being in conflict. Both John Wesley and Cotton Mather published tracts on natural theology. In doing so, Wesley and Mather, both of whom believed in Godliness and the dangers of sin, expanded, rather than contracted, their audiences in an age where revelation found itself in direct competition with reason. Whitefield did not embrace Enlightenment rationalism, but his pragmatism did lead him to an unlikely friendship with deist Benjamin Franklin. Franklin, a shrewd businessman, did not agree with Whitefield’s theological beliefs, but was so impressed with Whitefield’s ability to enrapture large crowds that he wound up printing and distributing many of his religious tracts. The friendship and partnership between the two men illustrated how shared support for religious liberty could bring together even those whose personal religious convictions were diametrically opposed.

Deism was one of two obstacles faced by Whitefield in Virginia. The second was that Virginia was the most Anglican of all of the colonies. The Virginia Charter

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106 Ibid: 179, 186; and Delbanco, The Death of Satan, 86-88.
110 Ibid.
instructed its founders “to settle ‘the true [church as] established within our realme of England,” and an Anglican chaplain was among the arrivals on the first ships.\footnote{Aldridge, “Natural Religion and Deism in America Before Ethan Allen and Thomas Paine,” 16.} Regular church attendance was compulsory; under English law, those who failed to attend were subject to fines of one shilling per absence and twenty pounds for a month’s absence, and those laws extended to colonial Virginia.\footnote{3 James I, c. 4. See also Arthur P. Scott, Criminal Law in Colonial Virginia (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1930): 243-244.} Parents who refused to baptize their children in “the orthodox, established religion” by “lawfull minister” were subject to a fine of 2,000 pounds of tobacco.\footnote{“Act III: Against Persons that Refuse to have their Children Baptised,” in William Waller Hening, ed., The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the First Legislature, in the Year 1619, Vol. 2 (NY: R \& W \& G Bartow, 1823): 165-166.}

Like many colonies, Virginia experienced a shortage of ordained Anglican ministers, and there were periods in which Anglican clergy in the colony bemoaned the lack of spiritual morality.\footnote{Bonomi, Under the Cope of Heaven, 17, 42, and 46.} Still, though plagued by a shortage of qualified clergy, a lack of support from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and frequent bickering among clergy, politicians, and members of the planter elite, the Anglican Church’s dominance in Virginia never faltered. Virginia’s colonial rulers were notoriously intolerant of dissenters, dissenters were few in the colony before the middle of the eighteenth century in part because the Assembly ordered all dissenters out of Virginia in 1642, which, if not removing them entirely, did silence
them. Local ecclesiastical authorities kept a close watch on the orders and licenses of clergy working to “restrain the irregularities of the Clergy without meddling with the Laity.” Upon a subsequent visit in 1741, Whitefield would note that there were “no dissenters from the Established Church, except a meeting or two of Quakers.” Virginia also re-enacted English laws imposed fining, imprisonments and civil disabilities on Roman Catholics who failed to take oaths of supremacy and allegiance to the English Crown and Church. Quakers fared even worse; their books were banned and their meetings sharply repressed after 1659 and fines of 100 pounds levied against those who entertained them or permitted their meetings. It was a theo-political environment entirely hostile to Whitefield’s goals of toleration.

In spite of Virginia’s deism and strong Anglican culture, Whitefield managed to make inroads in the Colony, but he also recognized his difficulties in being accepted as an Anglican minister. A few days into this first tour of Virginia, he remarked upon the backlash against his trans-denominational appeal: “If I talk of

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115 Ibid: 42-43, 46 50. As Bonomi notes, the SPG’s lack of support can be attributed to the fact that there Virginia had an established church (unlike Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, Rhode Island and much of New York) and dissenters were not a dominant threat, as they were in more religiously pluralist colonies like North and South Carolina.


118 Scott, *Criminal Law in Colonial Virginia*: 245-246.

119 Ibid: 246.
the Spirit, I am a Quaker; if I say grace at breakfast, and behave seriously, I am a Presbyterian. Alas! What must I do to be accounted a member of the Church of England?”

This spoke both to his pride in his ability to reach across Protestant sects and to his exasperation at not being recognized as a loyal Anglican. Whitefield clearly still saw himself as an Anglican, even though both his entanglements with Protestants of other sects and his doctrine made it increasingly difficult for him to be recognized as such in the eyes of others. Given the Colony’s staunch Anglican identity, it is perhaps unsurprising that he felt compelled to play up in his journal, his dinner with Virginia’s Commissary, saying that Commissary Blair “received him with joy and asked him to preach.”

That this comment, and his exasperation at being identified with other denominations, appeared in his journal underscore just how important it was to Whitefield to build a public image of himself as a loyal Anglican. He spent a total of eleven days in Virginia before heading further south to the Carolinas.

**Whitefield’s Apex of Insolence**

Whitefield and his party reached South Carolina on New Year’s Day, 1740. Four days later, they reached Charles Town to news that his preaching had “mightily [grown] the Word of God” in New York. Commissary Alexander Garden was out of town, so Whitefield was unable to seek permission to use a pulpit. Instead, he preached in a dissenting meetinghouse a day after his arrival in the city. He found

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the excesses in dress and behavior of those in his audience troubling: “I question whether the court-end of London could exceed them in affected finery, gaiety of dress, and a deportment ill-becoming persons who have such Divine judgments lately sent amongst them.”\textsuperscript{123} Whitefield chose their finery as the subject of his sermon, but his message was apparently not well received. He reported: “I seemed to them as one that mocked.”\textsuperscript{124} Whitefield’s decision to speak about the excessive display was consistent with his longstanding concerns about the corruption of wealth. It was also indicative of his failure to take into account that his audience was comprised of planter elites, who were unlikely to be terribly accepting of his criticisms of their style of light.

He preached to a more receptive audience at the French Huguenot church the next morning. The next day, he continued his journal south to Georgia, reaching Savannah the morning of January 9, 1740. Having seen more of the British American colonies, he remarked that

I cannot but give Pennsylvania the preference. To me it seems to be the garden of America. What is best of all, I believe they have the Lord for their God. This, I infer, from their having so many faithful ministers sent forth amongst them; and, except Northampton in New England, the work of conversion has not been carried on with so much power in any part of America.\textsuperscript{125}

It is clear that he was impressed with Penn's "liberty of conscience," even if Whitefield’s ideals did not share Penn’s clear humanist philosophical roots in the English Civil War's \textit{rights of Englishmen} rhetoric. Nonetheless, his association with

\textsuperscript{123} Journal Entry, 6 Jan. 1740, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
those who espoused a liberty of conscience and his admiration for their ideals, would not, and did not, sit well with the hierarchy of the established Church. Public expressions of admiration for those ideals, printed in his journal did not help Whitefield’s credibility as an Anglican clergyman. Moreover, he did not hesitate to challenge the authority of the Church of England, and, as historian Mark Noll has argued, his example greatly contributed to the democratization of religion in the colonies.¹²⁶ It was a form of religious practice with emphasis on justification of faith and on the conversion experience, rather than the erudition of a minister. For one who did not wish to be seen as a schismatic or subversive figure by the Church hierarchy, this was all problematic. His public image was rapidly becoming incompatible, as Boston Congregationalist minister Charles Chauncy would later note, with the tenets of the Church of England, which placed the authority to present texts in the hands of ordained ministers.¹²⁷

Whitefield’s allusion in his journal to Northampton, Massachusetts was an obvious reference to the evangelical work of Jonathan Edwards. He went on to make observations about the success of the Presbyterian and Quaker sects, commenting particularly of the ways in which he saw God working through them.¹²⁸ In contrast, he noted that the congregations of the Church of England were smaller and that “The Church of England is at a low ebb in the province in general, and in

¹²⁷ Chauncy, “A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Whitefield Publicly Calling Upon Him to Vindicate his Conduct, or Confess His Faults,” 2.
Philadelphia in particular.” But Whitefield expressed hope that his preaching would revive the popularity of the Church of England. He presented himself not only as an Anglican, but also as a potential savior of the Church.

Having returned to Georgia, Whitefield went to view a tract of approximately five hundred acres near Savannah, which he had purchased in the hopes that it would become the future site of his Orphan House. His friend James Habersham had already cleared part of the land and begun to develop the property, stocking it with cattle and poultry and building a hut. In addition to providing religious instruction, the Orphan House’s was designed to teach children skills so that they could support themselves in the future. After he formally took possession of his lot on January 24, 1740, Whitefield named the Orphan House “Bethesda,” or “House of Mercy.”

As befitting Whitefield’s pluralist sentiments, the Bethesda Orphan House took in children of all backgrounds from all over the Colony. Three German orphans were among its first tenants. In total, the Orphanage included twenty rooms. Skills taught to the orphans included farming, spinning and carding cotton. In addition to providing for the orphans, the Orphanage, or “plantation” as he called it, employed approximately thirty settlers, in the hopes that the means to earn a wage would dissuade the settlers from leaving Georgia. Bethesda did not yet have slaves because slavery was still illegal in Georgia, though Whitefield came to believe that they were necessary to properly cultivate and develop the property. The

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131 Ibid: 392-393.
132 Ibid: 393.
Orphanage, as previously noted, would become an essential part of Whitefield’s public image.\textsuperscript{133}

Whitefield spent about six weeks in Georgia before he went back to Charles Town. His reception by Commissary Garden was, however, not cordial, as it had been in 1738. Garden’s change in demeanor toward Whitefield was, in part, due to his association with Tennent and the Philadelphia Synod of the Presbyterian Church. The previous summer, Garden had attempted to attain Anglican orders and an SPG missionary appointment for Robert Moir, a former member of the clergy of the Church of Scotland. His efforts were met with considerable opposition, and Garden blamed the local Presbyterians for “exciting prejudice” against Moir.\textsuperscript{134} Whitefield’s sermons in Pennsylvania and New Jersey had helped to bolster the Presbyterian insurgents, as well as many revivalists in these two colonies. The issue of itinerant preaching, by those whom Whitefield had helped to inspire, came to the surface.\textsuperscript{135}

Whitefield’s caustic criticism of southern planters also figured into Garden’s change in deportment. In 1740, Whitefield published a letter in the \textit{South Carolina Gazette} in which he castigated planters for their treatment of their slaves, and identified it as a cause for the Stono Rebellion of that year.\textsuperscript{136} He saw God’s judgment in Stono and a number of other recent misfortunes to plague the colony:


\textsuperscript{134} Alexander Garden to Bishop Gibson, June 12, 1739, \textit{FP}, Vol. X: General Correspondence: South Carolina, 1735-Undated, ff. 56-57. LPL.

\textsuperscript{135} Bonomi, \textit{Under the Cope of Heaven}, 143.

\textsuperscript{136} George Whitefield, “Letter to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, Concerning Their Negroes” (Philadelphia, 1740).
“their houses have been depopulated with the Small Pox and Feaver [sic], and their own Slaves have rose up in arms against them.”\textsuperscript{137} As historian Fred Witzig notes, this proved to be politically catastrophic for Whitefield, and demonstrated just how little the frequently absent preacher understood southern colonial planter culture. Garden, who had married into Charles Town’s politically powerful and slave owning Guerard Family, counted many other prominent and influential planter families from among his congregation. When Whitefield’s letter was published, Garden criticized it sharply, calling it “dangerous to Publck safety.”\textsuperscript{138} It not surprising that Garden took Whitefield’s remarks personally and dedicated much time over the next decade to the destruction of Whitefield’s character and credibility.

When the two men met in 1740, the Commissary charged Whitefield with “enthusiasm and pride” and with “speaking against the generality of the clergy.”\textsuperscript{139} Garden referred not only to Whitefield’s letter to the planters, but also to the myriad of letters, newspaper articles, pamphlets and sermons in which he had criticized the conduct of various clergymen who spoke out against him. Further inflaming matters was the fact that only months earlier, Hugh Bryan, a follower of Whitefield’s, published a letter in the \textit{South Carolina Gazette} that accused South Carolina’s

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{138} \textit{Biographical Dictionary}, 297-298; Alexander Garden, “Six Letters to the Rev Mr. George Whitefield” (Charleston, SC: Peter Timothy, 1740; reprinted, Boston: T. Fleet, 1740), text-fiche, 52; See also Fred Witzig, “Coining Dupes...,” 3-4, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{139} Journal Entry, 14 Mar. 1740, Davis, ed, \textit{GWJ}, 397.
\end{itemize}
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Anglican clergy of “violating their Canons daily.” Evangelical Christian Hugh Bryan was a wealthy planter, former assemblyman, former vestryman and a member of South Carolina’s colonial elite. Bryan’s letter “urged all to repentance, but singled out especially the ecclesiastical and civil authorities – even the king – and enjoined them to all ‘humble themselves.’” Whitefield helped Bryan edit this letter prior to its publication. As a result, the two men faced charges, though Whitefield made bail and his attorney was allowed to represent him in court, in absentia. Given the letter’s mention of both clergy and king, it is hardly surprising that they were labeled “enthusiasts.”

Because of its association with the Roundheads of the English Civil War, enthusiasm was an even more serious charge than being a schismatic, as it suggested sedition on the part of the accused. Though no sentence was recorded, Garden saw the Bryan letter as “the latest Whitefieldian blast at the establishment” and “denounced it as a ‘scurrilous Libel.’” Whitefield denied Garden’s charges of enthusiasm and asserted his modesty, citing, as an example, a letter he sent to the Bishop of Gloucester, but Garden scoffed. Whitefield then tried to assert his legitimacy by virtue of his Letters Dismissory from the Bishop of London. This only infuriated the Commissary, who forbade Whitefield to speak in any pulpit.

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Whitefield arrogantly replied that he “should regard that as much as I would a Pope’s bull,” but then asked Garden, “But, Sir...why should you be offended at my speaking against the generality of the clergy; for I always spoke well of you!” In essence, Whitefield believed that if Garden did not see himself as guilty of Whitefield’s complaints about the Anglican clergy, he should not take offense to Whitefield’s comments. Whitefield inflamed matters further by asking the Commissary: “Have you delivered your soul by exclaiming against the assemblies and balls here?” When the Commissary declined, furious at Whitefield for catechizing him, Whitefield replied: “I shall think it my duty to exclaim against you.”

This exchange was a crucial development in the controversy over whether Whitefield was, in fact, Anglican. As with other exchanges, its appearance in Whitefield’s journal denotes just how much he wanted to be perceived as the bearer of a truer and more orthodox Anglicanism. His argument with Garden was the latest of many instances where Whitefield portrayed his opponents as hypocrites or bigots who failed to live up to the religious standards of the Anglican church leaders. While his insistence that his criticisms were not directed against Garden was rather disingenuous, it was advantageous for Whitefield to portray Garden as jealous and insecure. Doing so had the potential to undermine Garden’s character in the eyes of Whitefield’s followers and potential followers. In his depictions of his dispute with

144 Journal Entry, 14 Mar. 1740, Davis, ed, GWJ, 398.
145 Ibid.
Commissary Garden, Whitefield was performing as a proverbial David, standing up to Goliath.

The Whitefield-Garden quarrel played out in grand, theatrical form on both sides of the Atlantic, both in the colonial newspapers and through a furious exchange of letters between Commissary Garden and the Bishop of London, as the Commissary brought charges of enthusiasm against Whitefield and expended considerable time and energy trying to annihilate Whitefield’s respectability. Garden’s considerable campaign to discredit Whitefield, conducted through letters and articles in various newspapers, was an effort to unravel the pious, humble, Anglican public image that Whitefield constructed for himself through the commercial press. It was also an effort by Garden to establish himself, as the true representation of Anglicanism. In October 1740, for example, Garden published a series of six letters against Whitefield that, among other points, criticized Whitefield’s doctrinal interpretations and referenced the insulting letter that Whitefield had written about Archbishop Tillotson’s comprehension of true Christianity.146 Referring to his “rather railing Accusation against the Clergy of the Church of England in general, and the present Bishop of London in particular, of their teaching false Doctrine,” Garden noted apparent contradictions in Whitefield’s own preaching.147 For example, Whitefield insisted that “Justification by Faith” alone was necessary for true grace. This came from a theological idea originating

147 Alexander Garden, Letter One to the Reverend Mr. Whitefield, July 30, 1740 (Boston, 1740): 5
with Martin Luther and his meditations on the Book of Romans: "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” Garden instead, believed that Good Works, a theological idea which considers a person's external acts to be significant in their candidacy for salvation. In his open letter, Garden noted that Whitefield had referenced Good Works in one of his own sermons and called upon Whitefield to explain his inconsistencies. In a subsequent letter, Garden also accused Whitefield of slandering clergy in his claim that they did not preach the true doctrine, and asked Whitefield, “What Evidence have you therein brought to support your charge?” Garden's letters were published together with Whitefield's response to the first letter, wherein he did not directly address any of Garden's charges, denied that there were any inconsistencies, and called him “angry overmuch.” The publication of this collection of letters brought the two men's quarrels into the court of public opinion, a court in which Whitefield believed that he was to be victorious: “if there be any Thing contrary to sound Doctrine, or the Articles of the Church of England, be pleased to let the Publick know it from the


149 Letter One to the Reverend Mr. Whitefield, March 17, 1739, in Mr. Commissary Garden's Six Letters to the Rev. Mr. Whitefield (Boston, 1740): 5

150 Letter Three to the Reverend Mr. Whitefield, April 8, 1740 in Ibid: 8.

151 Mr. Whitefield’s Answer to the Reverend Mr. Garden, March 18, 1739, in Ibid: 6. Note: This only responds to Garden’s first letter.
Press. And then let the World judge, whether you or my Brethren the Clergy have been rashly slandered.”152

It should also be noted that Whitefield’s derisive comment, comparing the orders of Garden not to preach in the colonies to a “Pope’s bull,” reflected his own anti-Catholicism.153 The imperial rivalry between Anglican Great Britain and Catholic Spain and, on a local level, between the colonies of South Carolina and Spanish Florida, made Whitefield’s insult all the more calculated and politically reckless, especially since it came just months after the failure of an expedition against Spain had dampened morale in the colony.154 The unceremonious ejection of Whitefield from the Commissary’s home that followed his anti-papist slur was not surprising. In his responses, the Commissary invoked the character of the Pharisee in his charges against Whitefield, suggesting that Whitefield felt that he was above God.155 In one of a series of public letters that Garden wrote to Whitefield, he asserted that, “For sure I am, that Paul may plant, and Apollos may water, but God alone can give the Encrease [sic]. Man may teach true Christianity, but no Man can MAKE a true Christian.”156 Both the quality of the two men’s characters and the purity of their brand of faith figured prominently into the battle. Garden sought to

153 Ibid.
154 Alexander Garden to Bishop Gibson, January 28, 1740, FP, General Correspondence: South Carolina, 1735-Undated, ff: 67-68. LPL.
156 Alexander Garden, Letter Six to the Reverend Mr. Whitefield, July 30, 1740 (Boston, 1740): 53.
undermine Whitefield’s public portrayal of himself as a humble messenger and, instead, show him to be ignorant, arrogant and over-zealous.

Garden’s first move was to write to the Bishop of London with a litany of concerns over Whitefield’s character and his missionary activities and their departure from the teachings of the Church. Garden described himself as “wholly imploy’d [sic] in guarding the People of my charge against the fascinating gibberish of young George Whitefield.”¹⁵⁷ He acknowledged the mass appeal of Whitefield’s public image, but he dismissed Whitefield as a legitimate propagator of Anglicanism, *the* true religion that Garden was duty-bound to “protect.” Garden took a condescending and fatherly tone, positing Whitefield to the Bishop as a “disassembled youth, greatly altered in his principles and conduct,” who had once “behaved in a very regular and modest manner.”¹⁵⁸ In so doing, Garden effectively evaded questions about why he had once welcomed the young minister, as well as any appearance – to the Bishop – that he took personally Whitefield’s castigation of southern planters. The Bishop would have been acutely aware of Garden’s family situation, as well as of his recalcitrance in encouraging slave owners to catechize their slaves. Writing to the Bishop after he had once embraced Whitefield was a potentially risky proposition for Garden, but it was also a serious blow to Whitefield’s public identity as an Anglican.

Garden’s letters drew in part on what Garden witnessed, as well as what he learned from others about Whitefield’s missionary activities through the press and

¹⁵⁷ Alexander Garden to the Bishop of London, *FP*, Vol. 10: General Correspondence: 1735-undated, South Carolina: f. 74, LPL.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.
his network of gossip in the colonies, including his recent visit to Philadelphia. He described Whitefield as a divisive and subversive character who arrogantly represented himself as the carrier of the Church’s true message. In another letter to the Bishop of London, Garden called Whitefield an “imposter,” “pretending himself a Church of England minister.”159 He mocked Whitefield’s claims that he was ordained by the Bishop of Lincoln while (like Whitefield) portraying himself as loyal to the Church and the Bishop, telling him that he informed him of Whitefield’s activities “less he should apply to your Lordship for orders.”160 In corresponding with the Bishop, Garden’s aim was not merely to destroy Whitefield’s public image, but also his reputation within the Church of England’s hierarchy.

Given Whitefield’s popularity, it is doubtful that any refusal of Anglican orders would have irretrievably damaged, his ability to minister in the colonies. Any refusal of orders by the Anglican hierarchy would, no doubt, have been portrayed by Whitefield, in his journal and other places, as evidence of bigotry by the established Church. This would only increase his support among those who saw him as a champion of religious liberty. Denying him orders or license to preach in Anglican pulpits was also unlikely to have much of an impact at this point. Most of his preaching took place either outside of sanctioned pulpits, or in the pulpits of sympathetic dissenter ministers. Garden, nonetheless, hoped that in attacking his character, he could sufficiently undermine Whitefield’s reputation that it would hamper at least some of Whitefield’s activities, such as his ability to fundraise. Most

160 Ibid.
of Garden’s letters to the Bishop detailed what he was doing to quash Whitefield’s missionary work, including his activities in support of the Bethesda Orphan House.\footnote{For analysis of the criticisms of the Bethesda Orphan House by Garden and his allies, see Fred Witzig, “Coining Dupes...,” 6-7.} In one letter, Garden complained of “the effects of Whitefield’s licentious example,” wherein itinerant followers were “pretending themselves in the Church of England Orders” while preaching in the colonies.\footnote{Alexander Garden to Bishop Gibson, Charleston, July 30, 1741. *FP X: General Correspondence*: 1735-undated, South Carolina: ff. 86-87. LPL.} The letter also reiterated Garden’s plans for prosecuting Whitefield, but expressed frustration that: “The time limited for Whitefield’s prosecuting his appeal is now expired, and no jurisdiction will stop my proceedings.”\footnote{Ibid.} Garden continued to discuss his proceedings against Whitefield but also complained that he received not “the least Direction from your Lordship about it.”\footnote{Ibid.} He repeatedly appealed to the Bishop to take action against Whitefield, who, however, appeared to evade all efforts by Garden and his allies to quash Whitefield’s “subversive” activities.\footnote{Ibid.}

Garden also followed Whitefield’s example by airing his criticisms in newspapers. He also published a sermon, in which he scrutinized Whitefield’s journals, demonstrating that Garden understood just how vital these journals were to Whitefield’s public image and credibility. Whitefield, in Garden’s mind, was an icon of revivalism, a danger to religious life that needed to be stopped. He noted,

\footnote{Alexander Garden to Bishop Gibson, Charlestown, August 1740 and Garden to Bishop Gibson, Charlestown, Jan. 7, 1743 [Extract], *FP*, Vol. 10: General Correspondence: 1735-undated, South Carolina: ff. 106-107. LPL.
“the reader will easily observe, that the plain and professed Scope of the censured Part of the Discourse was, to call my Hearers to their Guard, against that Bane of true Religion, Enthusiasm.”166 He continued, “By pointing out, and cautioning them against the first Causes, Springs, and beginnings of it.”167 He also called Whitefield a "upstart Enthusiast, just entered on the Race" and full of “wild and fanatic Notions and run into someone wicked and immoral,” bent on Disturbance of the Church’s Peace, Disobedience to Superiors, Slander and Abuse.”168 He repeatedly accused Whitefield of “censuring” their “discourse,” including that exchange that resulted in Whitefield’s unceremonious ejection from the Commissary’s home.169 Garden’s campaign against Whitefield provoked a range of responses, which also appeared in publication, though much of it came from other members of the clergy. One newspaper advertisement, appearing in the Boston Evening-Post on June 21, 1742, referenced a string of exchanges between Garden and A. Groton, who identified himself only as “of New England.” The newspaper announcement advertised Groton’s response to Garden’s response to Groton’s initial response to Garden’s three public letters castigating Whitefield’s character.170

166 Alexander Garden, Take Heed of How Ye Year: a Sermon Preached in the Parish Church of St. Philip Charles-Town, in South Carolina on Sunday the 13th of July, 1740: A Preface, Containing Some Remarks on Mr. Whitefield’s Journals (Charles Town: Peter Timothy, 1740): 5
167 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
170 Advertisement, BEP, Issue 359 (June 21, 1742): 2
Garden’s zealous campaign lasted for more than a decade. Ten years into that campaign, even after he was no longer Commissary of South Carolina, Garden was writing to the Bishop claiming that it remained his duty to suppress “Methodists” and “Irregulars” on “Plantations in the Americas.”\(^{171}\) Garden’s letter-writing was so effective that, after only a short span of time, Whitefield felt compelled to respond to the criticisms leveled against him in his own letter-writing campaign to the Bishop, to try to preserve his relationship with the Church of England. In one of the letters, written as he sailed from Charles Town to Boston in September of 1740, he directly aspersions on the Commissary’s motives. He avowed his loyalty to the Bishop and asked the Bishop to confirm, in writing, whether the Commissary had authority over clergy outside of his jurisdiction.\(^{172}\) In other letters, he cast doubts on the character and motives of both missionaries in the colonies and those in Great Britain who had brought charges against him. In one letter, written in June 1741, Whitefield claimed that he firmly supported the mission of the SGP and told Bishop Gibson that he was “misinformed of some particulars.”\(^{173}\) Whitefield told the Bishop that because he had been “lately been in America,” he was “better able to judge of some things than those who live in England.”\(^{174}\) With the exception of a single reference to Garden, he did not write about the character of

\(^{171}\) Alexander Garden to Bishop Gibson, Charleston, July 12, 1750, \textit{FP}, Vol. 10L General Correspondence: South Carolina, 1735-Undated: ff. 134-5, LPL.

\(^{172}\) Whitefield to Bishop Gibson, On Board the Savannah Bound from Charlestown to Boston, Sept. 8, 1740, \textit{FP}, Vol. 10: General Correspondence: 1735-undated, South Carolina: ff. 63-64, LPL.

\(^{173}\) Whitefield to Bishop Gibson, June 9, 1741, MS Film 773, MS 1123/Item 26, LPL.

\(^{174}\) Ibid.
particular individuals, but rather responded to a sermon that the Bishop recently
delivered on missionary work in America. In writing to the Bishop, Whitefield
continued his practice of straddling the line between questioning authority, and
modeling loyalty to the Church of England.

In a second letter to the Bishop of London, about a week after the first, he
questioned the character of the “missionaries in America,” but asked the Bishop to
keep his letters a private matter between them.\(^\text{175}\) He wrote out of “concern for the
welfare of his [the Bishop’s] Church,” asserting that his desire was “not to Expose
but Reform.”\(^\text{176}\) He wanted to himself as an Anglican to his public, even as he faced
growing criticism from members of the Anglican Communion. Even while
Whitefield had begun to criticize individual ministers and leaders publicly, he was
still very clearly desirous of being seen as a loyal Anglican. Nonetheless, events
during his second missionary tour in the colonies would make that an increasingly
unreachable goal. A 1742 letter from W. Sharpe of the Council Office to the Bishop
discussed Whitefield’s contact with him regarding confusion over some pending
complaints against Whitefield, in which Whitefield appeared ready to appeal
directly to the Archbishop of Canterbury.\(^\text{177}\) As the spiritual head of the Church of
England, the Archbishop would have final say on any matters concerning the
censure of clergy. That Whitefield was considering taking his battle to the
Archbishop is indicative both of just how much Whitefield valued his affiliation with

\(^{175}\) Ibid.

\(^{176}\) Ibid.

10: General Correspondence: 1735-undated, South Carolina: ff. 104-5, LPL.
the Anglican Church, and his confidence that the Archbishop would side with him. Success in attaining the Archbishop’s favor, would sanction Whitefield’s actions and ultimately make it much more difficult for Garden and other clergymen to continue their public campaigns against him. Unfortunately for Whitefield, there is no evidence that the Archbishop ever considered intervening on his behalf.

As Garden’s litany of complaints suggests, Whitefield continued to preach at dissenting congregations in South Carolina in the days following his dispute with the Commissary. Nevertheless, criticism of Whitefield came from many quarters, aside from Garden. Arminins, an ardent and anonymous critic of Whitefield’s, frequently wrote derisive letters about Whitefield to the *South Carolina Gazette.* He described Whitefield’s followers as “looking up to him as something more than human.” He described Whitefield’s followers as “looking up to him as something more than human.” This was an obvious jab at Whitefield’s tendency to legitimize his activities by projecting himself in Christ’s image. He wanted to undercut Whitefield’s deified public self-image and instead, rebrand him as a flawed cleric who did not fully understand the doctrine he preached.

Arminins also accused Whitefield of “enthusiasm,” associating it with human "Weakness, Ignorance and Rashness." While his true identity is unknown, his pen name was an obvious reference to the Latinized name of sixteenth-century Dutch Reform theologian Jacobus Arminius, born Jakob Hermanszoon in Utrecht in 1560. More importantly for Whitefield’s time, Arminius was a reference to the Arminian-

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179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
Calvinist schism that developed within the Methodist movement over the nature of salvation. Calvinists believed that God’s sovereignty was absolute. Followers, who were to achieve salvation, were pre-selected by Him. Followers of Arminianism did not believe in pre-determination. Achievement of salvation, instead, came through a man’s decision to seek faith and atone for his sins. Indeed, 1740 also marks the year in which Whitefield and John Wesley parted ways over this very theological issue, though his schism with the Wesleys did nothing to curtail his detractors’ tendencies to associate him with the Methodists.

On March 21, 1740, Whitefield boarded a ship in Charles Town to return to Georgia, where he went straight back to his Bethesda Orphan House. He remained there for three weeks, overseeing its construction. In mid-April, he returned to the middle colonies. He preached several times at Newcastle, Delaware, where Charles Tennent brought a large portion of his congregation to hear Whitefield. His return trip to Pennsylvania was largely uneventful, although the Commissary of Pennsylvania could no longer permit Whitefield to borrow his pulpit, saying that Whitefield “had not treated the Bishop of London well” in his answer to his Pastoral Letter, and because “he had misquoted and misrepresented Archbishop Tillotson, in a letter published in last week’s Gazette.”181 On March 23, 1740, a letter had appeared in the Pennsylvania Gazette wherein Whitefield informed a friend in London that the Archbishop “knew no more of true Christianity than Mahomet”

181 Journal Entry, 15 Apr. 1740, Davis, ed, GWJ, 404.
Whitefield was unrepentant and asked the Commissary to demonstrate that he had wronged the Archbishop, but the Commissary replied that the “printers would not publish anything for them,” implying that Whitefield had prejudiced the local printers against representatives of the Church of England, which Whitefield sharply denied. Given the volume of pamphlets and other writings of Whitefield’s that sold in this period, the printer who was a savvy businessman would certainly want his business and be reluctant to alienate him. While there is no evidence that Whitefield manipulated printers, it is also not surprising that the Commissary was concerned that he might not be able to find a printer to publish his critique of Whitefield’s response to Tillotson.

In March 1741, Whitefield boarded the ship Minerva to return to England. His journal ended after this departure, as his publishing efforts transitioned towards publishing his sermons, but it is a fitting metaphor for the solidification of his transformation into a symbol of religious liberty. His friend and travelling companion Gilbert Tennent summed it up most aptly in his 1743 pamphlet, The Examiner Examined, which was largely a defense of Whitefield against a litany of charges brought against him by the Congregationalist New England clergy. In it, Tennent railed about “Tyranny” and the “abuse of Christian Liberty” and the “enslavement of High Church bigots.” Tennent imitated Whitefield’s confrontational behavior and borrowed from Whitefield’s language. He castigated

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183 Journal Entry, 15 Apr. 1740, Davis, ed, GWJ, 404.
ministers who “pretend disorders in Conduct, and Errors in Principle.” He then asked, “if so, why don’t they exert their Zeal against such Evil, as well as Impieties of the grossest Kind, which are flagrant in the Practice of some of their Brethren? No, such Things, because of the Relation subsisting between them, are past over with silence and negligence.” He called opposition against Whitefield “unfounded” and blamed “contempt among the Ungodly,” a taunt directed at the clergy who had leveled charges against him. There were ebbs and flows in the level of controversy Whitefield generated, as well as his clashes with various colonial Anglican officials, though few of them had the ferocity or staying power of Whitefield’s quarrel with Alexander Garden.

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185 Ibid: 5.
CHAPTER FIVE

DEFENDING SLAVERY

The next phase of Whitefield’s transformation came through his defense of slavery. As we shall see, Whitefield’s celebrity meant that his image was, on occasion, co-opted and used in ways that he never intended. Whitefield channeled his own public image into slavery’s defense, inserting himself into the campaign to legalize slavery in Georgia. Given his past criticisms of slavery and of the excesses of slave-holding society, Whitefield became a symbol of the hypocrisies that his opponents saw in revivalism, and Whitefield particularly. This is especially significant, given the frequency with which Whitefield accused his opponents of hypocrisy. Ironically, while Whitefield publically defended slavery, his image was co-opted by antislavery activists who sought to abolish slavery on ecumenical, Christian grounds.

Whitefield’s defense of slavery came as he became increasingly involved in the socio-economic development of Georgia. As this chapter will show, Whitefield personally involved himself in the campaign to legalize slavery in Georgia, where it had been banned. In doing so, he invoked many of the arguments used by settlers for years beforehand, to try to convince the Trustees of the colony to overturn their prohibition. And in fact, African slavery was legalized in early January 1751, just over two years after Whitefield involved himself in the legalization campaign.
In spite of Whitefield’s apparent success in the campaign, it did not transform him into an insider, either of the Church of England, or, of polite Anglican society in the colonies. Their response shows how much he had transformed away from Anglican respectability, and demonstrates just how far his Anglican-ness had previously eroded. In fact, Alexander Garden and others used Whitefield’s defense of slavery as yet another means to challenge his character and integrity and to paint him as an outsider, both to the Anglican Communion and to polite colonial society.

Whitefield’s earlier views on slavery were not entirely radical, even if there were some places where he diverged from the Church’s views. A number of the Anglican clergy thought that slaveholders should “honor their Christian duties with more consistency,” where slaveholders typically preferred that clergy “leave slaves alone.”¹ By the time of Whitefield’s arrival in 1738, there was an uneasy peace between the two parties, with Anglican clergy recognizing that they had little choice but to assent to the interests of the slaveholders. After all, their work was largely dependent on the beneficence and forbearance of colonial authorities, in South Carolina, all of whom were slaveholders. Because the Anglican clergy limited their proselytizing amongst the slaves, slaveholders generally did not see their activities as a threat.² By the time of Whitefield’s missionary voyages in the colonies, the SPG and the hierarchy of the Church of England in London were encouraging the conversion of slaves, but they still balanced this goal with their desire not to alienate planters.

² Ibid: 68.
Whitefield’s emphatic pursuit of the catechism of slaves, as well as his harsh public criticisms of slaveholders for their treatment of their slaves, violated this unspoken agreement between Anglican missionaries and colonial slaveholders. In particular, it added fuel to the flames of his dispute with Alexander Garden and Garden’s many allies in Charles Town’s wealthy southern planter society. Even though Whitefield had always encouraged obedience of slaves to their masters, his defense of slavery in the late 1740s did little to rehabilitate his image in Anglican society.

Whitefield’s criticisms of slavery and his encouragement of converting slaves had historical precedent among a very small group of Anglican missionaries.3 Missionaries like Morgan Godwyn, who supported catechism of slaves, did so in part because they “accurately forecasted” that dissenters would use Anglicans’ “inattention to blacks” to criticize the Church and to call into question, their consistency.4 Godwyn, an ordained Anglican minister from a family of clergymen, staunchly advocated the conversion of slaves and Native Americans. He produced four influential, but controversial, tracts advocating church membership for African slaves, Native Americans and other “infidels” in the 1680s. The two most influential were The Negros and Indians Advocate, Suing for their Admission into the Church

3 Glasson, Mastering Christianity, 47-55.

(1680) and *A Supplement to the Negros and Indians Advocate* (1681).\(^5\) In listing the reasons why converting slaves was in the slaveholders’ best interests, Godwyn “inadvertently introduced a powerful proslavery argument.”\(^6\) Among Godwyn’s arguments was the fact that the ruling in the 1667 South Carolina statute, which was based on Roman code, established compulsory life service for African slaves.\(^7\) He also noted that Anglican instruction “would make enslaved men and women more efficient and less insubordinate: ‘So that this Authority of the Master is so far from being hereby diminished,’ he insisted, ‘that it is rather confirmed, and a stricter observance for that cause charged upon the Servants Conscience.’”\(^8\) Indeed, Godwyn did little or nothing to challenge the master-slave relationship. After running afoul of colonial slaveholders in Virginia for attempting to catechize slaves, he adjusted his message and tried to engage with slaveholders on their plane.\(^9\) As a result, his colonial British American audience ignored the tone of Godwyn’s critiques, paying more attention to his “concessions to slaveholders than his criticisms of slavery,” and they were not interpreted as a threat.\(^10\) Godwyn exemplified what Christopher Brown called “antislavery without abolition,” with

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\(^8\) Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 29.


\(^10\) Ibid.
religion as a de facto form of social control for slaves (and others).\textsuperscript{11} It was a mentality that evangelical proponents of slavery would capitalize upon, in the furthering of their spiritual mission, their economic gains, or both.

Initially, Whitefield was conflicted about slavery and publically raised questions about slaves’ treatment. Later, these instances were used by his anti-revivalist opponents to demonstrate inconsistencies in his position. Whitefield’s position on slavery differed notably from that of many of his fellow Anglican missionaries, who tended to defend it, but he was not alone in his concerns over the treatment of slaves or the circumstances under which slaves were attained.\textsuperscript{12} As noted in the previous chapter, his criticisms of planters played a pivotal role in alienating Alexander Garden and much of Charles Town’s elite, Anglican planter society. His shift to a defense of slavery was one way Whitefield could become more palatable to Anglicans, even as other actions made it more difficult for him to win acknowledgement as an Anglican from his fellow clergymen. This glimmer of respectability ultimately failed when his catechism of slaves led several of them to embrace abolitionism, much as Anglican plantation masters feared it would. Olaudah Equiano and several slaves who admired Whitefield’s teachings became staunch supporters and prolific writers in the antislavery movement that swept the Atlantic World in the last decades of the eighteenth century.

When Whitefield began to openly embrace slavery, he did so on both paternalistic and economic grounds. As will be demonstrated, his shift to a pro-

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid: 33-101.

slavery stance late in the 1740s can attributed to his experiences in Georgia and South Carolina. In 1747, his pro-slavery convictions had become so strong that he actively campaigned for the legalization of slavery in the colony of Georgia.

**Whitefield's Paternalism**

The paternalism espoused by Whitefield was a central ideology in slaveholding society, though it was, of course, not a paternalism from which the slaves themselves particularly benefited. Rather, it grew from a sense on the part of some slave owners and defenders of the institution that there were inherent problems – legally and otherwise – in slavery, as it was practiced. Masters with this mentality acknowledged and embraced, the economic benefits of slavery, but raised some criticisms about the way the African slave trade was conducted and the way slaves were treated. Usually, though, paternalists rejected freeing their own slaves or calling for abolition. Instead, they sought laws and modeled slave-owning practices that were more “safe” and “humane.” They also emphasized their own humane treatment of their slaves. Whitefield definitely fits this mode of paternalism. Other slaveholders of the period, including Henry Laurens, of South Carolina, embraced this state of mind as well. For Laurens particularly, this mindset was exemplary of what historian Gregory Massey identifies as an ambiguity of

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eighteenth-century slavery: “slaves were antagonists who could never be fully trusted, yet also humans who merited humane treatment.”

There were also apparent inconsistencies, not only between the humanist rhetoric of the eighteenth century and slavery, but also between slavery and religious morals. David Brion Davis has identified as a shift in moral consciousness in the eighteenth century that made it increasingly difficult to accommodate either humanitarianism or Christianity into “master-slave relationship,” and to the political, legal and theological mechanisms that were used to justify the buying, selling and owning of slaves. Whitefield died before the humanist element of this shift began in earnest. Even so, his shift to a defense of slavery can still be understood as his own process of accommodation to slavery. As an evangelical Christian who lived through the American Revolution, Laurens himself reacted to both the revolutionary humanist and Christian rhetoric that informed the proslavery versus antislavery debate. As Massey notes, his accommodations came in part, in the form of reinforcing his role as a benevolent master and of shifting the blame for slavery onto the British. Both Laurens and Whitefield believed that slaves were “human Creatures,” but creatures “in a state of subordination. Shared humanity did not confer equality.” This stance confirmed, or accommodated,

slavery’s Aristotelian philosophical roots: “from the hour of their birth, some men are marked out for subjection, others for rule.”

Whitefield’s tendency toward paternalism predated his proslavery stance, and was not exclusive to slaves. As suggested in previous chapters, much of his life was a performance, of sorts, in which he modeled himself as a divine, Christ-like paternal figure. Whitefield’s conscious efforts to project himself in Christ’s image included his autobiographical insinuations that the circumstances of his birth at his parents’ inn, paralleled those of Christ’s. Also paternalistic were his references to congregants as sheep, who “will not follow” strangers. Playing on common Biblical themes of Christ as the Shepherd and his followers as sheep, or lambs, the children of God. In Mark 6:34, Jesus is ascribed as having compassion toward “sheep without a shepherd.” In Hebrews 13:20, Jesus is described as “that great shepherd of the sheep.” Shepherds also frequently appear in the Bible as a positive moral influence. Abel, the good brother, was a shepherd, while his

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20 Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 39
murderous brother Cain tilled the ground. In several places in the *Book of Genesis*, Abel and Abraham, both loyal followers of God herd sheep.

There are a number of other instances of Whitefield’s paternalism towards prospective congregants. One occurred during his first voyage to the Colonies, when Whitefield asked the colonel of the garrison at Gibraltar and its Governor to order soldiers to come to Whitefield’s church in Georgia, to receive instruction from him on “what they were to project.” Whitefield intended was to establish himself as the conduit for the spiritual and moral paternalistic guidance that he felt was necessary for the soldiers.

In another example, in 1739, Whitefield had intervened in the case of Joseph Periam, a young man who was hospitalized for being “methodically mad.” Periam’s behaviors paralleled much of what Whitefield experienced during his own awakening. Whitefield clearly saw Periam as a kindred spirit, persecuted for his beliefs. He intervened to convince the young man’s parents and doctors to release him and took him under his spiritual care, eventually bringing him to the colonies.

A third example is Whitefield’s purchase of a tract of five thousand acres of land on the forks of the Delaware, to build houses for some of the Colony’s growing population of people of African descent. Whitefield frequently sought to take care of those who, he felt, were incapable of providing for themselves. But there are also

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racial undertones to his purchase of land specifically for adults of African descent, especially where there is no record of him having done so for white adults.

Paternalism towards a congregation or audience by a preacher is hardly unique to Whitefield, the British American colonies, or even to the eighteenth century. In many ways, a preacher’s relationship to his flock was necessarily paternal. Aside from embracing slavery as a key to Georgia’s economic success, he also modeled the benign, humane master, asserting his own humane treatment of his prospective slaves as well as his ability to look after their spiritual well being.

**Slavery in Georgia and South Carolina**

Since Whitefield’s comparative experiences in Georgia and Carolina were central to his embrace of slavery, it is necessary to provide some context to the development of slavery in these two colonies. Carolina was first established as an English colony by a proprietary government, which imagined it as a commercial endeavor. The first permanent settlers were largely planters from Barbados, who also brought their slaves. White European indentured servants were also part of the Colony’s early labor force. Even before the Colony was settled in 1670, the Proprietors and white Barbadian planters with interests in Carolina saw the importation of African slaves as an economic necessity. On September 29, 1666, John Yeamans, Jr., third Governor of Carolina and a Barbadian planter, wrote: “these Setlements [sic] have beeene [sic] made and upheld by Negroes and without constant

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30 Ibid: 16-17
supplies of them cannot subsist.” Carolina’s Fundamental Constitutions of 1669 outlined the social and political hierarchy of the colony and confirmed the legality of slavery. It granted religious toleration to slaves, but made clear that Christian conversion would not lead to manumission. Much as Inter Caetera had clarified the nature of the relationship between African slaves and Catholic powers 176 years earlier, so to, did the Fundamental Constitutions codified the nature of the relationship between slave and English master in Carolina.

African slaves bound for permanent settlement in the Carolinas arrived in 1670, with the family of Capt. Nathaniel Sayle from Bermuda. John Yeamans, the first governor, decided to return to Barbados and named Sayle as his replacement, but reclaimed the Governorship after a brief power struggle with Joseph West, who had succeeded the elderly Sayle as Governor when Sayle died in March of 1671.

Yeaman brought with him a number of slaves from the West Indies. Additional slaves followed over the next year, bringing the total black population in Carolina in 1671 to approximately 300.

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31 Salley, Narratives, p. 67; Craven, Southern Colonies, p. 330, as quoted in Wood, Black Majority, 17.


33 Wood, Black Majority, 21.


35 Ibid: 25. As Wood notes, there is a disparity between eyewitness accounts – Spanish soldier Antonio Camunas reported 100 blacks in the colony. Irish settler Brian Fitzpatrick reported that the population was closer to 300. Each man had obvious motivations for inflating, or deflating their numbers.
The introduction of rice in the 1690s helped to drive up demand for slave labor. In the early years, the agricultural labor force included a number of indentured servants and Native Americans, who sought English trade goods – particularly wool and firearms – in exchange for their labor. Negotiating for labor with local Native American peoples was attractive to the English because it was still inexpensive and it avoided “importation costs.”\textsuperscript{36} They were also not obligated to feed and clothe their Native American servants, as they were their European indentured servants. While involuntary servitude of Native peoples happened, it was, as historian Peter Wood notes, a “risky” proposition in the Colony’s early years. As the Colony gained security, settlers grew bolder and white traders encouraged intertribal conflicts, knowing that captives were likely to be sold to the colonists. Even so, because they were familiar with the lands, the Native American slaves were a higher risk for escape than their African counterparts.\textsuperscript{37} And so, “seasoned” African slaves were brought from the West Indies. These slaves had lower importation costs than those brought from Africa; many had already obtained skills useful for plantation work and they were also seen as more trustworthy and reliable than the newly enslaved.\textsuperscript{38}

Charles Town became the largest port of entry for slaves in British North America as well as the funnel for news from England into the rest of the colony.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid: 38.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid: 4.
Charles Town’s population in 1720 was comprised of 1,390 black slaves and 1,415 whites. By that time direct imports from Africa were increasing. Twelve percent of the Lowcountry black population lived in town. 1739’s Stono Rebellion was blamed on the “barbarous and savage disposition of recent African imports” and an act was passed in 1740 to reduce the number of slaves imported into the colony to “better insure the safety of the colony’s white inhabitants.” This led to a temporary slowing on the importation of slaves.

There was a dip in the influx of slaves between 1740 and 1750, partly due to a ban on the importation of slaves after the Stono Rebellion, and partly due to an embargo related to the War of Jenkins Ear. The importation for that decade was only about 1,950. After 1750, importation picked up once again, with about 16,500 new slaves arriving between 1750 and 1760, in spite of the ongoing Seven Years War. In 1760, Charles Town’s population was comprised of 4,451 black slaves, twenty-three free blacks and 4,124 whites. That climbed to 5,833 black slaves, 24


42 Philip D. Morgan, Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998): 59 Note: This is compared to the 12,000 new slaves imported into Virginia between 1730-1740.

43 Ibid; Ballach: 5.
free blacks and 5,030 whites.\textsuperscript{44} A total of 22,000 slaves were imported in the five years before the American Revolution.\textsuperscript{45}

By the time Whitefield arrived in South Carolina, the colony had transitioned from Proprietary to Royal Government. The Carolina backcountry remained a desolate place, but South Carolina was among the wealthiest settlements in the British North American colonies.\textsuperscript{46} In the 1730s, an increase in cash crops like indigo, rice and sugar, as well as timber and fur led to growing refinement.\textsuperscript{47} South Carolina was “one of the fastest-growing regional economies in British North America.”\textsuperscript{48} Perhaps no one exemplified this more than John Guerard, an eminent planter, merchant and slave trader of French Huguenot descent whose holdings at the time of his death included several Charles Town properties and 16,000 rural acres.\textsuperscript{49} He was also the patriarch of the family into which South Carolina Commissary Alexander Garden married.

As noted in the previous chapter, Whitefield had been disturbed in 1738 by what he saw as gratuitous displays of wealth by the planters. He was also troubled by the way these planters treated their slaves. In an open letter to the planters of South Carolina, Virginia and Maryland, published in 1740, Whitefield castigated the

\textsuperscript{44} Morgan, “Black Life in Charles Town,” 188.

\textsuperscript{45} Ballach: 5.


\textsuperscript{47} Ibid: 16-23.


\textsuperscript{49} Ibid: 9-12.
planters for their treatment of their slaves. “I think God has a Quarrel with you for your Abuse of and Cruelty to the poor Negroes,” he wrote.\footnote{A Letter from the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina,} 50 He also wondered at the “Numbers have been given up to the inhumane Usage of cruel Task-Masters, who by their unrelenting Scourges have ploughed upon their Backs, and made long Furrows, and at length brot them even to Death itself.” While Whitefield saw the treatment and abuse of slaves as horrific, he was even more concerned with the failure of many planters to properly catechize and convert their slaves.\footnote{Stephen J. Stein, “George Whitefield on Slavery: Some New Evidence.” CH, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Jun. 1973): 244.} When Whitefield later came to embrace and defend slavery, these early critiques of slave masters and of the failure of SPG clergy to catechize slaves came back to haunt him and frustrated his desires to be accepted as a member of clergy of the Church of England.

In a sharp contrast to its northern neighbor, Georgia initially prohibited African slavery. This was not because of opposition to the institution of slavery on the part of its leadership. James Oglethorpe, for example, was a member of the Royal African Company and owned several slaves on a South Carolina plantation.\footnote{Ralph Betts Flanders, Plantation Slavery in Georgia (Cos Cob, CT: John E. Edwards Publisher, 1967): 15.} Rather, Oglethorpe and Georgia’s Trustees firmly believed that forbidding slavery would foster a good work ethic among the poorest colonists, who came to the colony

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\footnote{A Letter from the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina," PG, Issue 592 (April 17, 1940): 1. Note: This letter was original written on January 23, 1739. It is not insignificant that this letter was reproduced in several colonial papers in the spring of 1740.}


\footnote{Ralph Betts Flanders, Plantation Slavery in Georgia (Cos Cob, CT: John E. Edwards Publisher, 1967): 15.}
as charity cases.\textsuperscript{53} A reliance on slave labor might make the settlers were less motivated to work hard to cultivate the fledgling colony. There was a clear class distinction between the wealthy, well-connected denizens of South Carolina planter society, who heavily relied on slave labor, and the frequently indigent settlers of Georgia who were expected to demonstrate their worthiness of the charity that brought them to the Americas. There was also a sense by Georgia’s leadership that the drive to acquire slaves by settlers in precarious financial circumstances would only lead to further financial difficulties.

The prohibition on African slaves was also because the colony was founded in part to serve as a buffer between Spanish Florida and its wealthy neighbor, South Carolina. Its trustees saw the inclusion of slaves in the Colony as a potential danger to both Georgia and South Carolina. They believed that Georgia’s proximity to Spanish Florida would lead the Spanish, militantly Catholic, would encourage the slaves to revolt. This fear gained more ground in 1738, when the Governor of Spanish Florida passed an edict that guaranteed freedom to English slaves who escaped to St. Augustine and accepted Catholicism.\textsuperscript{54} The Stono Rebellion, twenty miles from Charles Town in 1739 further reinforced British fears about Spanish militancy inciting disorder amongst the slaves. British settlers throughout the colonies blamed the rebellion on Spanish instigators.

African slavery was not legal, but this did not mean that there was no slavery in Georgia. Even prior to the settlement, the enslavement of Native Americans of

\textsuperscript{53} Julie Anne Sweet, \textit{Negotiating for Georgia}, 99

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid: 246-247.
one group by another – Upper and Lower Creek, Choctaw, Yamamasee, Chickasaw and Choctaw – was a regular occurrence. The Creeks, who were well supplied with English weapons and resented the Spanish-backed Apalachees’ trade demands, were particularly active in raids that frequently produced slaves. The Upper Creek also raided against the Choctaws settlements, resulting in the regular appearance of Choctaws on the auction blocks of the Charles Town slave market.\textsuperscript{55}

Slave raiding, both by Europeans and by rival Native American bands, exploded during Queen Anne’s War (1702-1713) throughout South Carolina and what would become colonial Georgia. The Creeks, already at war with the Apalachee and Spain, sided with their English allies against the Spanish and the French, who had allied with their Apalachee and Choctaw enemies respectively. Native American bands assaulted each other, including a 1704 raid between English soldiers under Colonel James Moore and collaborated with Creek warriors. The result was the death, enslavement or forced relocation of 4,000 Apalachees.\textsuperscript{56}

By the time of Whitefield’s arrival thirty-two years later, aboriginal slavery was discouraged as undermining trade relations with local bands and inviting raids on settlements.\textsuperscript{57} The raids that procured Native American slaves (typically women and children) frequently resulted in retaliatory attacks. Resentment on the part of the Yamasees at having their populations so depleted by raids, along with other


\textsuperscript{56} Kathryn E. Holland Braund, \textit{Deerskins and Duffles: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685-1815} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008): 32

\textsuperscript{57} Alexander Hewatt, \textit{An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia, Vol. 2} (London, 1779): 23.
resentments over trade practices, led to the outbreak of the Yamasee War in 1715. Spurred on by the French, the Lower Creek, who also harbored resentment at English trading practices, joined the Yamasee against the British. Within a year, the Creek and English concluded that it was in their mutual best interests to conclude their fighting, and a peace was negotiated late in 1717. The end of the war reopened Carolina-Creek trade but also spelled the official end of the Native American slave trade. Although some of Georgia’s early settlers did seize slaves, there was considerable pressure on local colonial officials to prevent the practice. It threatened the colony’s safety, and it also threatened its powerful northern neighbor’s uneasy peace and lucrative trade relations with the Creek. South Carolina’s colonial government was therefore quick to protest when it saw a lackluster effort toward prevention of Indian slavery in Georgia.  

Even while African slavery was officially prohibited in Georgia, African slaves were used on occasion for specific projects. Early in the Colony’s founding, Benjamin Martyn, the Secretary of the Trustees, wrote to Governor Robert Johnson of South Carolina, requesting to borrow twenty “Negro Labourers” to help clear the new settlement. Occasions like these, where slaves were brought in on a temporary basis from South Carolina came prior to the arrival of any significant,

58 Cockran: 69; and Kathryn E. Holland Braund: 34-35; For further analysis of the Yamasee War, see William L. Ramsey, The Yamasee War: a Study of Culture, Economy and Conflict in the Colonial South (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010) and Steven J. Oatis, A Colonial Complex: South Carolina’s Frontiers in the Era of the Yamasee War, 1680-1730 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

viable European work force. Because there was no significant settlement yet, because only small numbers of slaves were used on a temporary basis, and because this activity primarily occurred years before the Stono Rebellion, or the Governor of Florida’s 1738 Edict guaranteeing freedom to English slaves, the risk was considered minimal.\(^60\)

Whitefield was certainly not the first to broach the subject of legalizing African slavery in Georgia. Georgia remained a poor colony, struggling to thrive, its settlers frustrated by sandy and barren soil, an unfavorable climate and an insufficient workforce.\(^61\) The poverty, the chronic lack of supplies, and the sporadic success of agricultural ventures all led to threats by many settlers to leave the colony for more favorable environs.\(^62\) Its settlers eyed its wealthy northern neighbor with envy. Resentfully, they saw themselves as being deprived of “common privileges of all colonists,” in spite of the fact that they had “voluntarily risked their lives, and spent their substance on the public faith, to effect a settlement in the most dangerous frontiers of the British Empire.”\(^63\) The prohibition against slavery was one of many grievances of colonists against the Trustees. A number of them left for Carolina, believing that the Trustees of Georgia had deceived them about the opportunities they might find.

\(^60\) Stein, “George Whitefield on Slavery,” 246-247.

\(^61\) Hewatt, An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina, 150-151.

\(^62\) Ralph Betts Flanders, Plantation Slavery in Georgia (Cos Cob, CT: John E. Edwards Publisher, 1967): 12.

\(^63\) Hewatt, An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina, 150.
Early in the colony’s founding, several settlers wrote to its Trustees, to demand that slavery be legalized. On one occasion, the Trustees noted their preference for German servants, rather than African slaves. There were obvious ethnic prejudices regarding the Germans on the part of the Trustees. More significant, however, was Benjamin Martyn’s characterization of Germans as “a sober, strong, laborious People,” with the implication that African slaves were not. Martyn also noted fiscal advantages to European servants over slaves. It cost “at least £20 sterling” for “the worst Negro labouring Man,” and “£5 pays the passage of a White Man.” That was a better investment in the long run, because one who had the “wherewithal to pay the passage of White Men,” could hire more indentured servants than he could purchase slaves. Finally, Martyn suggested that, because they had the prospects of becoming free and contributing members of society once their period of indenture ended, German servants were more virtuous than slaves.

The recipient of this letter was Samuel Eveleigh, of Charles Town, who also criticized the Trustees’ decision to bar slavery in Georgia. Eveleigh’s argument echoed a common one from advocates of slavery – that the population of white laborers was insufficient to tend to crops, and that whites were ill-suited to handle the summer heat. Slaves, he argued, were much more suited to the climate, which

65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
compared to that he had experienced in Jamaica, where slaves tended to the crops. In some cases, indentured servants were simply unwilling to do the hard labor required for completion of these tasks.

In spite of these protests, James Oglethorpe and the Trustees clung firmly to their belief that slavery was unnecessary, if not detrimental to the colony’s development. Oglethorpe characterized the settlers’ clamors to legalize slavery as “petulancy” and lobbied the settlement to support the law. In the spring of 1733, he wrote to the Trustees that his campaign to persuade settlers to give up their desire for slaves was successful. He characterized the complaints about the barring of slaves and rum as characteristic of people “impatient of Labour and Discipline.” His confidence that he had turned around public opinion, however, was premature.

In spite of Oglethorpe, various settlers continued to appeal to the Trustees to change their minds and allow slavery in Georgia. Benjamin Martyn soundly scolded one man who petitioned in support of slavery for the way he conducted his settlement and financial affairs, so Martyn’s response was at least partly colored by perceptions about the petitioner’s character. Nonetheless, Martyn’s answer was much the same as in his earlier letter. He reiterated the Trustees’ support for

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investing in white indentured servants over slaves, but also suggested that those who favored the legalization of African slavery were selfish and put their own wants ahead of the economic and social good of the colony.\textsuperscript{71} The colonists who supported slavery were not convinced, noting that the production of timber, one of the sole industries before sufficient land was cleared for farming, cost twice as much as it did in slave-holding colonies. They also noted that the influx of white indentured servants was not sufficient to meet labor demands, a sentiment that Whitefield came to share. One unsuccessful petition to the Trustees to legalize slavery was signed by 121 men.\textsuperscript{72}

Not every colonist clamored for slaves. Some, mainly Scots, expressed reservations about the introduction of slaves, arguing that the expense of procuring and caring for slaves and employing sufficient security against the threats of invasion or uprising, outweighed any benefits from slave labor. They instead petitioned for more colonists from Scotland to be brought over to add to the labor force. Some colonists, like the Salzburger Germans, echoed the Trustees’ sentiments that the presence of slaves would “ruin the white laborers through a lowering of the dignity of labor” and virulently disagreed with the notion that white workers were incapable of performing the difficult work required for clearing and cultivating the


\textsuperscript{72} Temple and Coleman, \textit{Georgia Journeys}, 110.
land. Some colonists also raised objections to the very idea of perpetual slavery, even for non-whites.

Still, the demands for slaves continued. In response to the increasing clamors from the colonists, and, in some cases, the outright defiance of the law, the Trustees became even more assertive about barring slavery as a permanent settlement formed. In September 1735, the Common Council of the Trustees ordered the constables of the Town of Savannah to seize of “all and every Black or Negro which shall at any time be found in said Province of Georgia.” The Order emphasized that settlers were required to cooperate with the constables, and any violation of the law would cause the offender to “answer the contrary at their Perils.” The order did not mention free blacks, implying that any black found in the Province was presumed an illicit slave. A Town Court was created at Frederica just two days after the order went into effect. While the order creating the court did not specifically mention illicit slaves, the implication was clear that the Trustees fully intended to create legal order in the colony.

In another example of the Trustees’ crackdown on African slavery, Harman Verelst wrote to Magistrate Thomas Causton, in 1737 to remind him of his duty to prosecute those who violated the rule against slavery, in particular one Captain

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74 Ibid.

MacKays.76 Verelst wrote, “no one is to be spared that will not obey Law, nor any one indulged in their Endeavours to evade the Law.”77

The Trustees remained firm on the subject, despite several petitions, including one by Thomas Stephens, a “brash young colonist,” who claimed that bad servants, and inconvenient ends to periods of indenture, led to half-planted and half-harvested crops. South Carolina Governor John Bull’s urgent advice to James Oglethorpe to “double his vigilance in Georgia, and seize all straggling Spaniards and negroes” following the Stono Rebellion only strengthened the resolve of Oglethorpe and the Trustees not to yield to the settlers’ demands.78 Salzburger settler Johann Martin Boltzius reported that the Stono Rebellion strengthened the resolve of the Trustees not to permit slavery. “In answer to the request of the inhabitants of Savannah to use Moorish slaves for their work, the Lord Trustees have given the simple negative answer that they will never permit a single Black to com into the country,” he wrote.79 The Edict against slavery remained in place for more than a decade, as the Trustees continued to insist that indentured servants were better for the Colony and reiterated their concern that any blacks permitted into the Colony would inevitably desert to St. Augustine and pose a safety threat.80 The Edict was

76 Ibid.
78 Hewatt, An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia, Vol. 2, 74.
79 Detailed Reports on the Salzburger Emigrants Who Sailed in America... as quoted in Mark M. Smith, ed., Stono, 10.
80 Temple and Coleman, Georgia Journeys, 196-197.
fully supported by Georgia Trustee secretary William Stephens in July 1742, when the Trustees asked Stephens “whether he agreed with ‘some Gentlemen of Eminence in Trade,’” who argued that slavery should be permitted “under proper Limitations and Restriction.”81 Stephens replied that slavery was too dangerous while England and Spain were at war and that he did not believe that even Oglethorpe could prevent black runaways from reaching St. Augustine.82 The legalization of slavery came only as Georgia turned from under the stewardship of Trustees to a Royal Colony, in 1752.

Whitefield’s experiences in Georgia and his exposure to its many challenges played an important role in his decision to defend slavery, though it was a decision that fermented for several years. The first evidence of Whitefield’s wavering views came in December 1737, even before he arrived in the colonies. Whitefield saw Georgia’s prohibition of slaves as well intended but impossible to enforce. He also believed that the restrictions hampered Georgia economically, yet, as his letter where he castigated the southern planters shows, he still had reservations about the slave trade and the way slaves were treated. His views were in line with those of his friend James Habersham, who shared Whitefield’s reservations about the lawfulness of slavery prior to his arrival in Georgia.83

In 1743, an anonymous slavery-apologist pamphlet appeared, which addressed recently Christianized slaves. Scholars have attributed the pamphlet to

81 Wood, Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 74.
82 Ibid.
83 Flanders, Plantation Slavery in Georgia, 16.
Whitefield. In it, Whitefield praised the fact that converted slaves became “Fellow-Citizens with the Saints, and of the Household of God.” Whitefield had long supported the conversion of slaves, believing in equality before God, even if not in political or legal equality for slaves. That he championed the notion of an equal relationship with God is entirely consistent with his previous writings.

In this pamphlet, he also reinforced the notion that slaves should be obedient to their masters: “Oh, watch against Disobedience, against Sin, that abominable thing which God hates?” He continued, “Sin will dishonour God, and provoke his fatherly Anger.” He encouraged slaves to be “good Soldiers of Jesus Christ,” and to “live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World.” In essence, a slave who accepted his condition without complaint during his life could expect to be rewarded after death. Whitefield also appealed to the slaves to help disprove the still-common fear among planters that conversion would spoil:

...the Love of Christ will make it so easy, that it will not hurt your necks; and by your cheerful and constant obedience, put to Silence the Ignorance of foolish Men, of your nominal Christian Masters...That if you, their poor Slaves, were brought to Christianity, you would be no more servants to them.

These instructions to slaves supported both his paternalistic attitude towards them and his promotion of protestant Christianity as a means of social control. In calling

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85 A Letter to the Negroes, Lately Converted to Christ in America... (London, 1743): 2.
86 Ibid: 17.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid: 19.
into question their “nominal” Christianity, it also illustrated his contemptuous attitude toward planters who rejected religious instruction for their slaves, a group that included South Carolina Commissary Garden and many members of elite southern planter society. In his 1739 *Letter to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina*, his language was similar. He wrote, “Blacks are just as much, and no more, conceived and born into Sin, as White men are. Both, if born and bred up here, I am persuaded, are naturally capable of the same Improvement.”⁹⁰ “Most of you are without any teaching Priests,” he continued, “And whatever Quantity of Rum there may be, yet I fear but very few Bibles are annually imported into your different Provinces. – God has already begun to visit for this as well as other wicket Things.”⁹¹ Whitefield blamed recent disasters, such as the Stono Rebellion, on the planters’ refusal to permit the conversion of their slaves to Christianity and to their mistreatment of slaves. Whitefield’s choice of words concerning “blacks” who were “born and bred up here” demonstrate a qualification, wherein this instruction was more suited to slaves born in the Americas, than to those newly-transported from Africa.⁹² Nonetheless, in writing of the existence of rum in inverse proportion to importations of Bibles, he called into question the Christianity of these plantation masters. This passage also spoke to his attitude toward commerce, wherein commerce most rightfully existed within a religious

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⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.
paradigm, as modeled by his own use of branding and commerce to propagate revivalism.  

This pamphlet is one of numerous examples where Whitefield advocated obedience and loyalty of slaves toward their masters, even as he struggled with the legality of the institution. In one instance, he sent a slave woman, who appealed to accompany him on his missionary exploits, back to her master. This marked a departure from Joseph Periam’s case, when Whitefield supported his request to be freed from committal by his parents to follow Whitefield to the New World. In another example, Whitefield composed a prayer for slaves, including the passage:

Let me never be tempted to rebel against my master or mistress; and enable me to be obedient not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward... Bless my master and mistress, and my labours for their sake. Bless the Governor, and all that bear rule in this province, and grant that we may live under them in all godliness and honesty.

Whitefield’s prayer reinforced the paternalistic nature of the slave-master relationship, asking God to bless labor done for the master’s sake. It also of course reinforced the established social and political authority of whites.

The prayer is undated, so it is not clear whether Whitefield wrote it before his public embrace of slavery, or, after. It is, however, consistent with paternalistic

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attitude toward African Americans. It shows that he remained consistent in his views that slaves were not equals, even if he recognized their humanity and he was convinced that they possessed immortal souls, and believed them capable of receiving religious instruction. His beliefs were in line with those embraced by evangelical Methodists, who believed that “all levels of society, including slaves, potentially share in salvation.” 96 The idea of spiritual freedom in the afterlife was solace for those for whom physical freedom was impossible. 97

Whitefield, in short, was most definitely a believer in deference to the social and political hierarchy of the colony when it came to the slaves, even if it was not a deference that he practiced himself. Slaves out from the immediate control of masters made Whitefield anxious. An incident that occurred during his travels in the colonies, not long after the Stono Rebellion, serves as a clear example. As they travelled southward through Carolina, toward Georgia, Whitefield’s party encountered a hut with some slaves. When the slaves were unable to tell Whitefield’s two travelling companions anything about the gentleman’s house to which they were headed, his friend “inferr’d, that these Negroes might be some of those who lately had made an Insurrection in the Providence, and were run away from their Masters.” 98 Whitefield continued that, when his friend “return’d we were

97 Ibid.
98 Journal Entry, Wednesday, 2 Jan. 1740, George Whitefield, A Continuation of Mr. Whitefield’s Journal, from his Embarking after the Embargo... (London: 1740): 78.
all of his Mind and therefore though it best to mend our Pace."\textsuperscript{99} The travelers encountered another large fire and observed some slaves “dancing around the fire” under the moon.\textsuperscript{100} Frightened, they took great pains to go around these encampments, expecting that they were “in great Perils of (their) lives” at every turn.\textsuperscript{101} Finally, they reached a plantation, where they took “great comfort” in learning from its master to whom the slaves belonged and what they were celebrating out along the road.\textsuperscript{102}

Whitefield was not immune from the fears about slave conspiracies held by many colonists. Within the safe confines of the dress balls of Charles Town, or when paid as entertainment for their white masters, dancing and music among slaves was welcome.\textsuperscript{103} Outside of these controlled circumstances, it was another story. The fear evident in his depiction of slaves dancing around a fire, away from immediate supervision of their master, helps to explain Whitefield’s paternalist attitude, as well as the convoluted nature of his views on race. These slaves appeared to Whitefield and his party to be out from under the control of their master, just after a major slave rebellion, when the black population of South Carolina was growing more rapidly than the white.\textsuperscript{104} Because of the previously mentioned edict of the royal governor of Spanish Florida guaranting freedom to

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid: 78.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid: 79.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{103} Morgan, \emph{Slave Counterpoint}, 408, 418.
\textsuperscript{104} Stein, “George Whitefield on Slavery,” 246.
English slaves who escaped to St. Augustine, unsupervised slaves also prompted widespread “fears of revolt and mass exodus.”105 South Carolina trader Robert Pringle wrote to a business associate that, “I hope our Government will order Effectual methods for the taking of St. Augustine from the Spaniards which is now become a great Detriment to this Province by the Encouragement & Protection given by them to our Negroes that Run away there.”106 Johann Martin Boltzius reported news in late September that “the Negroes or Moorish slaves are not yet pacified but are roaming around in gangs in the Carolina forests.”107

The civil authorities in many colonies, including those in the Carolinas, responded by enacting legislation designed to better regulate or “order” slaves. Carolina’s 1740 Slave Code reinforced the rights of owners over their slaves, and it clearly laid the burden of proof on the plaintiff in cases where slaves attempted to use the courts to challenge their enslaved status. It also established stiff penalties for harboring or enabling runaways.108

The dance Whitefield and his companions observed could have been social in nature, but the image of slaves dancing around a fire under the moon also suggests African, or syncretic religious practices or rituals. Without knowing where these slaves came from, it is not possible to identify precisely the rituals the slaves may

107 Detailed Reports on the Salzburger Emigrants Who Settled in America..., as quoted in Ibid: 10
have been enacting. Since many slaves in the Carolinas were imported from the British West Indies, it is possible that Whitefield witnessed an Obeah ritual. In any case, given Whitefield’s pre-occupation with the propagation of Christianity and his fearfulness, he and his companions clearly interpreted the dance they observed as denoting something more “sinister,” than social.

Whitefield’s racial attitudes, as well as his motivations for converting slaves, were similar to those of other members of the clergy, even if he was more enthusiastic than some about converting slaves. For many devout British colonists in this period, including Whitefield and his nemesis, Alexander Garden, Christianity was a form of (paternalistic) benevolent social control; a “civilizing” influence for slaves. Slaves who practiced traditional religious rituals thus undermined not only civil control, but also undermined an important form of non-secular control. As will be noted later in this chapter, one of Whitefield’s justifications for owning slaves was to catechize them, bringing them under his legal, social and moral control. This encounter, then, serves as another example of how Whitefield’s paternalistic attitude pre-dated his pro-slavery writings. The ideological underpinnings for his change of heart were there, even if that change did not come for another eight years.

*Whitefield and Proslavery Evangelicalism*

In becoming directly involved with the campaign to legalize slavery in Georgia, Whitefield followed precedent set by previous Anglican missionaries.

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Slavery, of course, was not exclusive to Anglican missionaries. Settlers of many sects embraced it, including the Moravians, with whom Whitefield shared a cordial relationship.\textsuperscript{111} The Moravians embraced pragmatism in business, and that pragmatism encouraged them to “make use of the particular market advantages they had at hand.”\textsuperscript{112} To many defenders of slavery in the Atlantic World, including Whitefield slave owning was just such a market advantage.

The first clear involvement of Whitefield in the campaign to legalize slavery in Georgia came in a letter to a friend on October 25, 1747. He related that, “all is well there, and at my new plantation,” Whitefield wrote his letter from a South Carolina property that he had acquired in that colony in 1746.\textsuperscript{113} This was a dramatic change for him. Though a critic of southern plantation owners, he himself had become one, even if he was never really accepted into their ranks. It is therefore not surprising that he also soon joined the clamor for slaves.

Whitefield’s appeal to the Trustees of Georgia in London and his lending support to the legalization of slavery echoed the appeals Anglican missionaries in the Colonies had made in the 1720s, when the controversy over baptism hampered their efforts. The 1729 Yorke-Talbot Opinion largely settled the matter, arguing that


\textsuperscript{112} Ibid: 118.

\textsuperscript{113} A Letter to Mr. B., South Carolina, October 25, 1747, George Whitefield, \textit{The Works, Vol. 2}, 141.
“baptism doth not bestow freedom” of slaves.\textsuperscript{114} While the Yorke-Talbot Opinion was merely an advisory opinion, rather than an act of law, Whitefield too sought a change in policy that would prove beneficial to both his spiritual mission and his economic goals for Georgia.

By 1747, the same year he wrote to his friend about his new plantation, Whitefield consistently tied Georgia’s low economic state to the lack of slaves. He wrote later that year to an acquaintance in Charles Town, that, “It is true the constitution of that colony [Georgia] is very bad, and it is impossible for the inhabitants to subsist themselves without the use of slaves.”\textsuperscript{115} At about the same time, he publically joined the campaign to legalize slavery in Georgia, writing to the Trustees and other influential figures.

A letter to the Trustees on December 6, 1748 laid out his arguments. He claimed that he wrote, not out of his own self-interest, but out of concern about the state of the colony. “I need not inform you, honoured gentlemen, how the colony of Georgia has been declining for these many years last past, and at what great disadvantages I have maintained a large family in that wilderness,” he wrote.\textsuperscript{116} Echoing the comments of Thomas Stephens, on socio-economic conditions in the colony:

\textsuperscript{114} See NAUK. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/rights/slave_free.htm> [Accessed 17 February 2012]


\textsuperscript{116} To the Honourable Trustees in Georgia, Gloucester, December 6, 1748, in, Ibid: 208.
Upwards of five thousand pounds have been expended...yet, very little proficiency made in the cultivation of my tract of land, and that entirely owing the necessity I lay under of making use of what hands. Had a Negroe been allowed, I should now have had a sufficiency to support a great many orphans, without expending about half the sum which hath been laid out.\textsuperscript{117}

He went on to discuss how “these considerations” led him, two years prior, “to purchase a plantation in South-Carolina, where negroes are allowed.”\textsuperscript{118} Whitefield marveled at the productivity of that plantation in comparison to his ventures in Georgia, informing the trustees that his experience “confirms me in the opinion...that Georgia never can or will be a flourishing province without negroes.”\textsuperscript{119} While promising the Trustees that he would not bring any of his slaves into the Colony illegally, he also made it quite clear that he would continue to campaign to legalize slavery. “I am as willing as ever to do all I can for Georgia and the Orphan-house, if either a limited use of negroes is approved of, or some more indented servants sent over,” he informed them.\textsuperscript{120} He concluded by prophesying a failure of his ventures in Georgia without the use of slaves. Given his favorable comparison of his plantation in South Carolina and the fact that settlers had, for years, been abandoning Georgia for its wealthier neighbor, this comment served as a veiled threat that Whitefield too, might depart if he did not get his way.

He regularly reported his progress to various acquaintances and allies. In 1748, he wrote to his patron, the Countess of Huntingdon, reporting that the

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid: 209.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
campaign seemed to at last be having some impact. He told her that "News also was brought me last night, that the negroes are allowed by the trustees for Georgia. If so, that province, under God, will flourish. Blessed be god, I am more hearty than I have been for a long season." Whitefield saw the legalization of slavery as part personal victory and part divine will. It as God's will for Georgia to prosper, and apparently God also approved slavery. For most of his adult life, Whitefield interpreted events that were favorable to him as occurring by divine will.

When slavery did come to Georgia, in 1751, the Trustees determined that they were satisfied that slavery was "consistent with the 'safety' of Georgia," and that slavery would "conduce to the [colony's] Prosperity." The legalization of slavery came with some stipulations, although these were not inconsistent with those proposed by Georgians. These stipulations included an imposed maximum ratios between "adult male slaves and white men between sixteen and sixty-five of four to one," and the majority of slaves restricted to plantation work outside the city limits of Savannah. Even with the incorporation of a census mechanism into the Trustees' slave code, enforcement was no simple matter. Of particular significance to Whitefield, the Trustees' slave code forbade blacks from working on Sundays and required their owners to provide religious instruction. The Code "emphasized the religious duty of the Christian master toward his bondsman,"

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122 Wood, Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 83.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
which was fully consistent with Whitefield’s vision of the benevolent Christian master. 126

Whitefield was elated, though his previous comments, critical of slavery, came back to haunt him. He sought to reconcile his newfound embrace of slavery with the moral ambiguities with respect to Christianity and slavery. In 1751, he still disagreed with the manner in which slaves were brought from Africa, but his experiences in the colonies had eroded his reservations toward slavery. Responding to Mr. B. Bristol, an acquaintance in London, he wrote, “had Mr. Henry been in America, I believe he would have seen the lawfulness and necessity of having negroes [sic]” in America. 127 His 1751 assertions that he “had no doubt of the lawfulness of slavery” marked a distinct change from his position eleven years earlier, where he wrote “whether it be lawful for christians [sic] to buy slaves, and thereby encourage the nations from whence they are brought to be at perpetual war with each other, I shall not take upon me to determine.” 128

Another letter from 1751 suggested that he might curry God’s favor by “purchasing slaves, making them comfortable and raising a foundation for breeding up their posterity in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” 129 Thus, he embraced religion as a means of social control and positioned himself as a paternal guardian of their spiritual welfare. For his part, Alexander Garden saw Whitefield, with his

126 Ibid: 85.
127 Letter To Mr. B., Bristol, March 22, 1751 in Ibid: 404-405.
129 Whitefield to Mr. B., Bristol, March 22, 1751 in Ibid.
power over his public, as undermining social order. During their infamous exchange in 1740, Garden had “compared Whitefield to ‘Oliverians, Ranters, Quakers, and French Prophets,” religious sects considered dangerous threats to order. For Garden, Whitefield’s embrace of slavery and his role in the campaign to legalize slavery in Georgia might expand his influence expand further still, in a way that might encourage slaves’ disobedience toward their masters.

Whitefield’s advocacy of slavery and concern for Georgia’s economy was, of course self-interested, something not lost on his critics. Slaves were to work in several of Whitefield’s ventures, including improvements on the land where he built Bethesda Orphan House. No doubt, since Whitefield saw Bethesda as a charitable operation, he would have indignantly rejected any suggestion that he stood to benefit economically from slavery. Nonetheless, his frequent criticisms of “the material excesses which allowed the clergy to lead a comfortable existence, and which deterred people from Christ, were blamed upon slavery.” Whitefield once asked:

Is it not the highest ingratitude, as well as cruelty, not to let your poor slaves enjoy some fruits of their labour? When passing along,... I have viewed your plantations cleared and cultivated, many spacious houses built, and the owners of them faring sumptuously...

These words were flung back at him as he began to utilize slaves in his own endeavors. As historian Fred Witzig demonstrates, Whitefield’s critics, and

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130 Jackson, “Hugh Bryan and the Evangelical Movement in Colonial South Carolina,” 600.
Commissary Alexander Garden particularly, challenged the spiritual and economic integrity of Bethesda and scorned the idea that Whitefield did not benefit economically from the project. One anonymous critic observed in the *South Carolina Gazette*: "did not [Whitefield] appear as much like a Prigg as a Parson as any ever did," wearing "the best Purnelle and finest Hollands with Wiggs [sic] of Five Guineas a Piece?" Whitefield responded to these criticisms with an aggressive public relations campaign throughout the British colonial newspaper and magazine networks. The aforementioned publishing of Bethesda Orphan House’s account books in various colonial newspapers comprised one response. Similarly, in 1741, Whitefield placed a chronicle of the children’s daily lives at the Orphan House in Philadelphia’s *General Magazine*. Not surprisingly, this overview of daily life places heavy emphasis on frequent church attendance and religious instruction by Whitefield. The first two hours of their day, which started at 5 am, were reportedly devoted to a combination of private, individual prayers, morning prayers at the local church, and additional religious education by Whitefield and the Orphan House’s staff. The children and their families were then sent off to work at a suitable task, such as sewing or picking cotton. After two hours of work, the children stopped work to attend school, which included four hours of religious instruction among other subjects. At four in the afternoon, they left school to work for two additional

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135 “The Manner of the Children’s Spending their Time at the Orphan House in Georgia,” *G. Mag.* (February 1, 1741): 132.
hours. The day concluded for the families with further church attendance and prayer.\textsuperscript{136}

Whitefield’s purpose in placing a public schedule in a well-read publication was three fold. The public airing of his activities were first calculated to demonstrate his honesty and to combat any sense that he was profiting off of the families that he took in. Here, he was working to protect the public image he had built of himself as a humble figure, opposed to material excesses. Second, the schedule served to demonstrate Whitefield’s personal investment in and involvement in Georgia. One of the tactics his critics took was to paint him as an outsider, which, in many senses, he was. A positive demonstration of his involvement was crucial if he wanted to appear part of the community, rather than as an outsider who occasionally visited. Third, Whitefield obviously hoped to impress the public with the Orphan House’s religious mission. In essence, he was trying to counter anti-revivalist critics like Commissary Garden.

Ultimately, Whitefield’s public relations campaigns, both in making public his Orphan House activities, and more generally, to paint himself as a respectable member of the community, failed. Overall, if Whitefield’s defense of slavery appeared to bring him into line with the Anglican Church, it was wholly insufficient to overcome his lengthy record of castigating polite Anglican society and policy in the Colonies. It also could not make up for his frequent criticisms of the Church of England for its failure in the southern colonies to convert slaves.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid: 133.
There is no evidence that Whitefield consciously thought that his pro-slavery campaign would help him re-capture his Anglican identity within the Anglican Church. By this time, his public image had evolved so far past its Anglican roots that an act so completely in line with colonial Anglican culture, became rather a source of skepticism and derision for his detractors. The political damage from Whitefield’s earlier scathing criticisms of slaveholders, along with his criticisms of Anglican clergymen for not doing enough to convert slaves, was insurmountable. Instead, Alexander Garden and his group of transatlantic Anglicans tried to counter Whitefield’s influence, in part by setting up a Charles Town school designed to catechize slaves, which was overseen by Garden and funded by the SPG.\(^{137}\) It was the Anglican counterpart to Whitefield’s revivalist Bethesda Orphan House.

As a highly visible icon of revivalism, Whitefield was, in some ways, a convenient target for Anglican who saw revivalism as a danger and hoped to establish Anglicanism as the true religion. Garden’s school was one of a number of efforts undertaken by the transatlantic Anglican Church to counter revivalism, and particularly the influence of Whitefield and his fellow revivalists amongst the enslaved. Revivalism had a remarkable impact in the conversion of African slaves to Christianity.\(^{138}\) It provided the means for a “reconfiguration” of their “(religious) cultural heritages,” that allowed Africans to “re-tool them for service in new


circumstances.”\textsuperscript{139} Many times, these expressions of faith were “buoyed in secret meetings in brush arbors, barns, sugar cane fields, and sheds:” informal, but also secretive arenas.\textsuperscript{140} Whitefield’s follower Hugh Bryan and his brother Jonathan were among the evangelicals – at Whitefield’s urging - who held gatherings to provide religious instruction not only to their own slaves, but also those from other plantations. These assemblies resulted in a 1742 indictment against the brothers for “Pretence of religious Worship and “enthusiastick [sic] Prophecies.”\textsuperscript{141} As many masters feared, evangelical Protestantism’s ideas of spiritual equality and universal fellowship undermined the master-slave relationship and suggested that equality might exist on other plains.\textsuperscript{142} As historians Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood note, “One missionary noticed that ‘those slaves who enjoyed the greatest freedom and had to face the fewest obstacles were also the least likely to become converts.’” In other acts of “defiance,” some newly-converted slave women invoked religion as a “defense against the lust of white masters.”\textsuperscript{143} Ultimately, in any case, both the Anglican “ethnic theological exegesis” and Whitefield’s ultimately provided intellectual support to slavery.\textsuperscript{144}


\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{141} Jackson, “Hugh Bryan and the Evangelical Movement in Colonial South Carolina,” 594.

\textsuperscript{142} Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood, \textit{Come Shouting to Zion}, 82, 84.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid: 84.

\textsuperscript{144} Glasson, \textit{Mastering Slavery}, 111-138.
In spite of his “outsider-ness,” Whitefield had plenty of ideological company among southern evangelical planters. Among them was Henry Laurens, the patriarch of a prominent South Carolina family. Laurens was born into a prominent slaveholding family in Charles Town in 1724. Like Whitefield, he was a devout Anglican and often self-righteous in his views. As merchant, slave trader, planter and politician, Laurens was deeply entrenched in eighteenth-century Charles Town society. His daughter Martha married physician and author David Ramsey, from Philadelphia, and his daughter Eleanor married planter and political leader Charles Pickney.145

Laurens embraced slavery on both paternalist and capitalist grounds. As the years drew on, his public attitude toward slavery fluctuated sometimes he criticized other masters and the slave trade, but he never fully committed to the manumission of his own slaves. Both Laurens’ religious sensibilities and his embrace of revolutionary rhetoric meant that he was troubled by it, although, as noted above, he evolved into a pro-slavery apologist.

By 1768, Laurens was raising questions about both the morality and legality of slavery. In a letter to Philadelphia merchant William Fisher, he wrote that he had become, “largely concerned in the African Trade” and “quitted the Profits arising from that gainful branch principally because of many acts from the Masters and

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others concerned.” Yet, Laurens was not yet ready to concede that the slave trade needed to end. He wrote to Andrew Turnbull, a financier and founder of the most successful British settlement in Florida: “Are your new Settlers reconciled to their Situation and become more tractable, or do you begin to be convinced that Negroes are the most useful Servants in these Southern Climes?” This comment refers to the debate over whether British American colonies could flourish with indentured European servants.

The American Revolution marked an increase in Laurens’ criticism of the slave trade, though he continued to make apologies for it. In a 1776 letter to his son, he said that he “abhorred it,” though he made arguments that the abolition of slavery was out of his hands. He continued, “I found the Christian religion and slavery growing under the same cultivation. I nevertheless disliked it.” He also echoed Whitefield’s self-portrayal as a benign master and father figure to his slaves. In an effort to portray himself as a good master and assuage his guilt,

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Laurens claimed that his slaves stayed loyal to him, even as other planters’ slaves deserted them: “Many hundreds of that colour have been stolen and decoyed by the servants of King George the Third.”  He also noted that many masters (including himself) took pains to keep slaves together with their families, at expense to themselves. In one 1783 letter, Laurens took a tone of self-martyrdom, “I had rather lose a large annual profit by keeping my Negroes comfortably together in families than avail myself of Gain by violent Separations of Man and Wife, parents and children....” Laurens projected himself very much as the benign father figure to his slaves.

Laurens went on to blame the British for slavery. He told his son, “I am not the man who enslaved them; they are indebted to Englishmen for that favour.” He noted the quandary of his position: “Great powers oppose me – the laws and customs of my country, my own and the avarice of my countrymen.” And finally, he noted the problem raised by many who considered ending slavery, but who still saw it as depriving planters of property: “What will my children say if I deprive

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154 Ibid.
them of so much estate?”155 In spite of all the obstacles he raised about abolition, Laurens did not see surmounting the “problems” of ending slavery as impossible.156

Laurens continued to waiver on slavery, but by the American Revolution, some evangelical Christians had become antislavery. Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharpe, William Wilberforce and other evangelicals headed the Clapham Sect, a group of prominent Anglican British abolitionists who opposed slavery on religious grounds, though most of their antislavery activities occurred after Whitefield’s death. The members of the Clapham Sect, as well as evangelicals of other Protestant denominations, like John Wesley, saw slavery as incompatible with Christian principles. A number of them, including Wesley, studied the slave trade and, following the 1772 Somerset Case, decided that “no material considerations” could “justify the injustice and cruelty of the slave-system.”157

The Somerset Case, arguably the most significant development in Anglo-American slave law since the Yorke-Talbot decision, evolved when James Somerset, a slave, was brought from Virginia to England by his master, Charles Steuart, a merchant and slave trader. Somerset ran away and was re-captured. In response, Steuart decided to sell Somerset in Jamaica. Abolitionist Granville Sharpe, a devout Anglican, learned through his network of ecumenical abolitionists of Somerset’s plight. He successfully sought a writ of habeas corpus from Lord Mansfield, Chief

155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
Justice of the Court of King’s Bench.\textsuperscript{158} The writ argued that Somerset’s imprisonment was illegal. While some scholars have argued that Mansfield did not intend to eradicate slavery, his ultimate ruling in Somerset’s favor was nonetheless, a significant legal strike against slavery.\textsuperscript{159}

Like Sharpe, the deeply pious Franco-American Quaker abolitionist Anthony Benezet also opposed slavery on religious grounds. Approximately three and a half years after Whitefield’s death, Benezet appealed to Whitefield’s executrix, Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, to support abolition. In his letter, he invoked Whitefield’s 1740 \textit{Letter to the Inhabitants of Maryland and Virginia and the Carolinas}: “the encouragement which is thereby given to the nations from whom the Negroes are bought, to be at perpetual with each other.”\textsuperscript{160} He continued:

\begin{quote}
I am persuaded if thou art rightly informed of the situation of slaves in that [Georgia] as well the other South Colonies, thou wilt be engaged to give such direction with respect to their managers there, making any further purchase of slaves, as well as their treatment of those already under their care, as will be agreeable to best wisdom, and thou wilt be willing to grant thy assistance in furthering the good designs of putting an end to this mighty destroyer, “The Slave Trade.”\textsuperscript{161}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{161} Ibid: 228.
The Countess did not share the humanitarian impulses of Benezet or his fellow evangelical abolitionists. She rebuffed Benezet and to him wrote: "God alone, by His Almighty power, who can and will be His own times bring outward, as well as spiritual deliverance to his afflicted and oppressed creatures."^{162} Instead, she took a tactic similar to that of Laurens. She acknowledged some problems in slavery, but found religious accommodation for it by placing its abolition in God’s hands, not of her own. Rather than freeing the slaves, she followed Whitefield’s designs for his estate, which included bequeathing his slaves to his friend, James Habersham.^{163}

Benezet recognized just how powerful a symbol Whitefield was; that is precisely why he invoked Whitefield in his abolitionist campaign. Unfortunately for Benezet, Whitefield’s public defense of slavery on religious grounds frustrated his efforts to harness Whitefield’s image. He “chided the late George Whitefield” for embracing a biblical defense of slavery and noted that as long as individuals continued to use Christianity to defend the institution, there was little hope for its end.^{164}

**The Accidental Abolitionist**

Antislavery sentiments were not uncommon in the British Atlantic World by the 1780s, but Whitefield died before the abolition movement began in earnest. Somewhat ironically, given Whitefield’s pro-slavery sentiments in the last decades of his life, his preaching struck a chord with African Americans. To them, the idea of

^{162} Editorial Note in Ibid: 229.


^{164} Editorial Note in Ibid: 229.
equality in the eyes of God suggested that that freedom should extend to their earthly lives. His flamboyant style of preaching was also likely appealing because it was similar to the energy found in many indigenous African religious practices.\footnote{Carretta, \textit{Phillis Wheatley}, 29.} While Whitefield was never an abolitionist, his message was co-opted into the antislavery rhetoric, after his death. He unwittingly helped to inspire a number of black evangelicals whom in turn, used his preaching to argue against slavery.

Olaudah Equiano, who became a Methodist, was an African abolitionist strongly influenced by Whitefield. Equiano converted to Christianity sometime in 1774, fervently embracing the teachings of the “new birth.”\footnote{Olaudah Equiano, \textit{The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself}, Vol. 2 (London, 1794): 272-290.} He had observed Whitefield preach in Philadelphia eight years earlier. Equiano was awestruck at what he saw: a “church crowded with people; the church-yard was full likewise, and a number of people were even mounted on ladders.”\footnote{Ibid, 4. Refers to electronic version available through the \textit{University of North Carolina’s Documenting the American South} \url{<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/equiano2/equiano2.html>} Accessed 22 Nov. 2011.} Told that Whitefield was preaching, Equiano noted that he “had often heard of this gentleman, and wished to see and hear him” but had “never before had an opportunity.”\footnote{Ibid: 5.} He pushed eagerly into the Church, and saw “this pious man exhorting people with the greatest fervour and earnestness, and sweating as much as I ever did while in slavery on Monserrat beach.”\footnote{Ibid.} Whitefield’s energy resonated with Equiano, who wrote, “I thought it
strange I had never seen divines exert themselves in this manner before, and I was no longer at a loss to account for the thin congregations.”\textsuperscript{170} Christianity, which would come to underscore Equiano’s abolitionist convictions, resonated like it had not before.

Phillis Wheatley’s antislavery impulses, too, were born of her religious beliefs. Wheatley, a devout Methodist, captured in her elegy to Whitefield, both his trans-denominational appeal and the “emotional appeal” of his preaching with words like “Glow’d,” “inflamed” and “captivate.”\textsuperscript{171} Wheatley’s elegy catapulted the young writer to a level of fame unprecedented for an African-American. Like Equiano would with his 1789 slave narrative, Wheatley helped force eighteenth-century society to confront the humanity of slaves, in the midst of an ongoing debate amongst eighteenth-century philosophers like Francis Bacon, David Hume and Immanuel Kant about “what kind of creatures Africans truly were.”\textsuperscript{172} In fact, efforts to publish her first book in 1772 failed because its publishers were unable to attract a sufficient number of subscribers from Bostonians who believed that a slave could have written the poem without assistance.\textsuperscript{173} Nonetheless, Wheatley continued to rise in fame through her elegy. Ultimately, though, she rejected the role Whitefield suggested for African Americans in his “Negroe who prays, ‘Lord, keep the door of

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid

\textsuperscript{171} Carretta, \textit{Phillis Wheatley}, 73.


\textsuperscript{173} Ibid: 22.
my lips, that I may not offend with my tongue.”¹⁷⁴ Instead, her transatlantic fame, eloquence with words and keen sense of politics transformed her into an important figure in the abolitionist world.

Wheatley, of course, continued to write and to publish. Three years after she wrote her elegy to Whitefield, she published a series of poems and other writings, which included her thoughts on slavery. Appended to the publication’s introduction was an attestation signed by Massachusetts governor Thomas Hutchinson, Charles Chauncy, Ed Pemberton, and a host of other influential religious and civil leaders of colonial Massachusetts, that Wheatley had, indeed, written these words herself, without help from her mistress or other white person.¹⁷⁵ Her topics included slavery. One poem called it a “mercy brought me from my Pagan land,” but advised her readers to “Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain, May be refin’d, and join the’ angelic train.”¹⁷⁶ This illustrates Wheatley’s belief in Christianity as an equalizer, but also saw converted Africans as higher in status than those who still followed indigenous African spiritual practices. As historian Stephanie Smallwood’s work has shown, slaves had their own hierarchies, particularly those that privileged Christianized slaves who had been brought over some time ago.¹⁷⁷ In his abolitionist narrative, Equiano also echoed this sentiment, comparing himself

¹⁷⁴ Ibid: 75.
¹⁷⁵ Intro, Phillis Wheatley, Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral (London, 1773)
favorably to a scarified African.\textsuperscript{178} Even among Africans, religion was a factor in the determination of race and status.

Wheatley addressed the possibility of freedom in another verse, addressed to the Earl of Dartmouth. “Fair Freedom rose New-England to adorn...Elate with hope her race no longer mourns; Each soul expands, each grateful bosom burns,” she wrote.\textsuperscript{179} The poem contains repeated references to “her” race, as well as to her “dread” of “the iron chain.”\textsuperscript{180} She wrote,

\begin{quote}
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate...  
Was snatch’d from Afric’s fancy’d happy seat:  
What pangs excruciating must molest,  
What sorrows labour in my parent’s breast?  
Steel’d was that soul and by no misery mov’d  
That from a father seiz’d his babe belov’d.\textsuperscript{181}
\end{quote}

Remembering her capture and sale into slavery in 1761, and mourning the separation of families inflicted by slavery. Like her other work, reminds its readers of the humanity of slaves.

The African-American preacher John Marrant, too, was influenced by an early encounter with George Whitefield. According to his narrative, which chronicles his conversion to evangelical Christianity. He was en-route to play his French horn for someone in Charles Town when he was about thirteen years old, when he passed a meetinghouse overflowing with people. When he inquired about what was taking


\textsuperscript{179} “To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth,” in Carretta, \textit{Phillis Wheatley}, 73.

\textsuperscript{180} Ibid: 74.

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
place, he was told that, “a crazy man was halloing [sic] there.” Marrant contended that his conversion experience took place as he first heard Whitefield speak. The preacher appeared to look and point directly at him and uttered “Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.” Marrant was overcome and passed out. After hearing of young Marrant’s conversion experience after his sermon, Whitefield entered the vestry, where Marrant had been taken to recover. He told Marrant, “Jesus Christ has got thee at last.” This episode has marked the beginning of Marrant’s religious life.

Marrant was not a slave like Wheatley or Equiano, but his narrative was of similar importance because it helped to humanize African-Americans. He became, like Whitefield, an itinerant minister who ministered both to black communities in the Americas and to Native Americans. The publication of his narrative in 1785 coincided with his ordination. Perhaps not coincidentally, it contained a number of themes similar to Whitefield’s autobiography, such as a lack of support from Marrant’s family over his religious conversion. His formal religious training and ordination took place under the tutelage of the Connexion of Whitefield’s patron, Selina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon. The Connexion was a small society of evangelical Methodist churches that the Countess founded in 1783. Marrant’s writings had the same message of equality in the eyes of God that inspired

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184 Ibid.
185 Ibid: 10-11.
187 Ibid: 12.
ecumenical abolition. In one passage, he observed, "black nations may be white in the blood of the Lamb; that vast multitudes of hard tongues, and of a strange speech, may learn the language of Canaan, and sing the song of Moses."\textsuperscript{188} It was this sort of thought that inspired Equiano and other black evangelical abolitionists.

Marrant and Equiano, in turn, inspired other black abolitionist writers and preachers, including Quobna Ottobah Cugoano. Cugoano, a former slave from Ghana and friend of Equiano, authored two important abolitionist works. The first was \textit{Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species} (1787). That same year, he also published a narrative of his enslavement, \textit{Narrative of the Enslavement of OTTOBAH CUGOANO, a Native of Africa; Published by Himself, in the Year 1787}. Cugoano's narrative contains religious themes similar to those of Wheatley and Equiano. Of his eventually release from slavery, he wrote, "This Lord of Hosts, in his great providence, and in great mercy to me, made a way for my deliverance from Grenada."\textsuperscript{189} He described inhumane conditions of slaves, " beholding the most dreadful scenes of misery and cruelty, and seeing my miserable companions often cruelly lashed, and, as it were, cut to pieces, for the most trifling faults.\textsuperscript{190}

His \textit{Thoughts and Sentiments} contains much more direct ecumenical challenges to slavery. His language was much stronger, but like Whitefield and John

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid: 39.

\textsuperscript{189} "Narrative of the Enslavement of Ottobah Cugoano, a Native of Africa; Published by Himself in the Year 1787," in Thomas Fischer, \textit{The Negro's Memorial; or, Abolitionist's Catechism; by an Abolitionist, 1781?-1836} (London: Printed for the Author and Sold by Hatchard and Co., 1825): 125.

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid: 125-126.
Wesley, he too raised questions about whether Christian nations ought to be involved in the “insidious piracy of procuring and holding slaves.”191 He also asked, “can the slave-holders think that the Universal Father and Sovereign of Mankind will be well pleased with them, for the brutal transgression of his law, in bowing down the necks of those to the yoke of their cruel bondage?”192 Cugoano used the language of equality under the eyes of God to assert that slavery was “contrary to all the genuine principles of Christianity.”193 He denounced the use by proslavery writers of *The Curse of Ham*, a biblical story from the Book of Genesis, wherein Noah’s son, Ham was cursed for witnessing his father’s drunkenness.194 *The Curse of Ham* was an important piece of rhetoric for Christian pro-slavery apologists who argued that Africans were Ham’s descendants.195

Whitefield shares credit with many preachers for evangelizing African Americans, and, for the impact of his message of “liberation and equality” at Evangelical Christianity’s “core,” or religious African Americans.196 As Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood observe, evangelical Protestantism had a “powerful integrating ideology and an ethos whose emphasis on spirituality had the potential for creating

193 Ibid.
195 Carretta, ed, *Quobna Ottobah Cugoano*, xxiii, 33-34.
the first distinctive African values in relation to Protestant Christianity.”

Evangelical Protestantism's “message of universal fellowship had a compelling power to undermine established notions of racial inferiority.”

In sum, Whitefield's preaching had a powerful impact on several key antislavery figures, and this influence became part of his legacy. His role in stirring up antislavery sentiments – however unintentional - also helped to cement the tendency of his contemporaries to associate him with a provocative, pluralist brand of evangelical Protestantism, an association that would further erode his identification with the Church of England. The final straw came with his death and entombment in the Colonies.

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197 Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 82.
198 Ibid: 84.
CHAPTER SIX

NEW ENGLAND

Whitefield’s first visit to New England occurred during his third missionary
tour, in 1740. Most of his visits to the region took place during a period where New
England’s “religious and ecclesiastical life” was “increasingly disordered by schism,
separations, and the rise of new religious denominations.”¹ It is therefore, hardly
surprising that the fiery and emotional preaching from revivalist preachers met
with mixed reception from New England clergy. Much about revivalism
undermined the “established character of New England,” and Whitefield was, in
many ways, a lightening rod for those concerned with revivalism’s impact on New
England religious life.²

This trip was the first of several visits that Whitefield made to New England.
His tours through New England were, as this chapter will show, a source of
increased fractiousness among the already-divided New England clergy as well as
the general population. These visits also marked a further erosion of his Anglican
image. Some New Englanders welcomed him, as a figure that could potentially
restore piety to the region. Some detested the impact he had on New England and

¹ J.M. Bumsted, “Revivalism and Separatism in New England: The First Society of
Norwich, Connecticut as a Case Study.” WMQ, Third Series, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Oct.,
² Ibid.
blamed him, and his message emphasizing the conversion experience, for turning the people against the clergy. There were also a number of clergy who specifically questioned whether his conduct and preaching were consistent with what was expected of an Anglican clergyman. Indeed, a 1744 pamphlet by Isaac Watts noted the difficulty of conclusively identifying Whitefield’s denomination in the colonies. Watts, an English non-conformist observed of Whitefield, “He continues to preach here...not amongst the Church of England, nor has he made any Proposal of joining with the dissenters.” Watts, a revivalist, favored Whitefield’s preaching, but his observations note how Whitefield’s tendency to preach to a diverse audience confused his ministerial identity. Other clergymen also noted inconsistencies between Whitefield’s behavior and the expectations of the Church of England for their clergy.

Whitefield visited each of the New England colonies, but most of his time in New England was spent in Massachusetts, with a few days here and there spent in other New England colonies. He was quite keen to see the home of the Puritan forefathers and particularly excited to travel to Boston, even if Puritanism had lost its grip on New England by then. Ultimately, Whitefield was entombed in Massachusetts. As such, Whitefield’s activities in Massachusetts will be the primary geographic focus of this chapter.

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Religious Topography of New England

Whitefield had a complicated relationship with New England and its staunch, but fractious religious community. A number of the English settlements in New England were not terribly tolerant of religious diversity. Its settlers were a people with definitive (if not unified) ideas about religion. They were particularly concerned with anything that smacked of “popery.” The religious topography of New England included Christians of various denominations, including French Catholics, Dutch Reformed, Quakers, Anglicans and Congregationalists,” but Congregationalism dominated.

The New England to which Whitefield arrived in 1740 retained some vestiges of its Puritan heritage, but it had undergone dramatic economic, social and political changes since the first band of English settlers arrived in Plimouth in 1620. Importantly for Whitefield, New England still had in place a rich religious print culture, one had that existed since the seventeenth century. Puritan leaders John Cotton, John Winthrop and a host of others all published and sold, their sermons and other religious tracts, all of which promoted New England as a “convenanted social order.” Benjamin Colman, the Congregationalist minister who first encouraged

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4 Pestana, Protestant Empire, 66.
5 Ibid, 73.
6 Ibid, 122.
Whitefield to visit Boston, was one of the latest in a long series of New England clergyman whose publications shaped religious life.\(^8\)

New England’s religious culture had undergone a number of changes since the arrival of the early Puritans. It was still largely comprised of dissenters, although the Church of England had made inroads into the region. And, while the churches were frequently still the center of many New England communities, the theological focus of a number of the more influential clergy underwent a change, beginning early in the eighteenth century. Eminent Boston Congregationalist preacher Cotton Mather, as Mark Valeri notes, set the “precedent for new understandings of providence.”\(^9\) His writing marked a departure from Puritan writers like his father, Increase, in that he “de-emphasized extraordinary events.”\(^10\) Instead, Mather’s fascination with Isaac Newton, Dutch mathematician Christiaan Huygens, and Dutch scientist Antonie van Leeuwenhoek led him to focus on “natural wonders” rather than the supernatural.\(^11\) During New England’s small pox outbreak in the early 1720s, this interest in science and “natural wonders” also led him to support the inoculation of New Englanders.\(^12\) Colman’s writings similarly emphasized natural laws as explanations for events like earth quakes and comets.\(^13\)


\(^11\) Ibid.

\(^12\) Cotton Mather and Zebidiah Boylston, *Some Account of What is Said of Inoculating or Transplanting the Small Pox. By the Learned Dr. Emanuel Timonius, and Jacobus Pylarinus* (Boston, 1721).
Revivalism’s emotional preaching and rabid emphasis on the threat of sin and hell were very much the antithesis of this new “natural religion” of post-Puritan New England and its rational, educated and well-read clergy.\textsuperscript{14}

Some things in New England remained at least nominally the same from the Puritan past. As was the case in the Puritan culture of the seventeenth century, the New England clergy of the 1740s still expected a considerable deference from their congregants, rather than the challenge that Whitefield modeled.\textsuperscript{15} Many of the prominent and influential clergy in this period, including Nathaniel and Cotton Mather and John Cotton III, were the Harvard-educated scions of illustrious ministerial families.\textsuperscript{16} This “third generation” of clergy lived in a New England that was increasingly connected to a “larger Anglo-American world,” enjoying its “benefits” without “sacrificing their commitment to the covenant,” or community.\textsuperscript{17} This meant that the clergy, and New England in general, was increasingly more connected to a growing, more commercialized Anglo-American world than their seventeenth-century counterparts had been. Nonetheless, their position in New England society and their relationships with their congregants remained largely unchanged. In spite of New England’s growing, more Atlantic tenor, its clergy “could (still) expect more deference to their opinions than in most other parts of the British

\textsuperscript{13} Valeri, \textit{Heavenly Merchandize}, 211.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid: 210, 234; and Delbanco, \textit{The Death of Satan} (NY: Noonday, 1994).
\textsuperscript{15} Ruttenburg, “George Whitefield,” 429.
\textsuperscript{16} Stout, \textit{The New England Soul}, 127.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
World.” After Whitefield visited, challenges to the authority of the clergy were frequently blamed on his influence.

In spite of the Puritans’ collective quarrels with the Church of England, hierarchies were central to Puritan society and remained important in post-Puritan New England. As David Hall notes, “hierarchy was inscribed in culture, politics, religion, and society; obedience or submission was normative.” While he embraced Calvinism, Whitefield’s brash, outspoken style of engagement, as well as his fiery extemporaneous manner of preaching, were in many ways the antithesis of John Cotton’s “New England Way,” wherein he had once called Arminianism and Enthusiasm (of which Whitefield was commonly accused) “grosse [sic] and damnable,” arguing that “the countenance God is upon his people when they feare [sic] him, not when they presume of their owne strength.” New England’s religious and civil landscapes were long plagued by “constant but manageable confrontations and conflicts.” “George Whitefield,” Harry Stout notes, was a “trigger” that ultimately “exploded and splintered” New England’s “decentralized and inherently unstable institutions.” The frequent charges of enthusiasm leveled against Whitefield and other revivalists denoted the blame that the New England

18 Marsden, Jonathan Edwards: a Life, 3
19 Hall, A Reforming People, 10.
22 Ibid.
clergy placed on Whitefield for upsetting the fragile Christian unity that had survived in New England for so long.

Almost one hundred years after the first wave of Puritans arrived on New England’s shore, its clergy still detested anything resembling enthusiasm and looked down upon “New Light” ministers who tended toward the new, emotional style of preaching. New Haven minister Isaac Stiles castigated the New Lights and declared that revivalism, “loudly threatens a subversion to all peaceable Order in a government,” and shed “barefa’d Contempt...upon Authority both Civil and Ecclesiastical.”23 Whitefield’s “powerful, dramatic preaching,” and the considerable number of itinerant preachers who followed his example in New England were a source of polarization. In New England, it produced church schisms as well as “the growth of the Separate Congregational and Baptist movements.”24 “Most New Englanders,” Christopher Grasso observes, “remained within tax-supported Congregational churches and continued to think of them as their primary religious communities and institutions.”25 As Grasso also observes, much about the colonial clergy’s response to revivalist ministers like Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, “demonstrate how a (clerical) speaking aristocracy tried to control public discourse even as it helped to transform it.”26

26 Ibid.
Even if some New England clergy were intrigued with revivalism’s potential for renewing piety in New England, they hoped that it would revive commitment to the existing churches, rather than looking outside them. Even Connecticut minister Jonathan Parsons, who became a staunch Whitefield supporter and the first pastor of the Old South Presbyterian Church were Whitefield was entombed, initially expressed reservations about the impact of the revivalist preachers. In March of 1741, Parsons took matters in his own hands and sounded "an alarm’ to his own ‘drowsy, carless people,’” hoping to channel and to use this religious “awakening” for himself, rather than leaving it to outsiders.  

The co-existence of multiple churches in a particular city or town was dependent on a number of factors. The first was the size of a given town or settlement, as well as whether the financial resources in that town could support additional churches. The building and establishment of an Anglican church by the middle of the eighteenth century, for example, could cost upwards of £1,000, and that amount did not factor in the cost of maintaining a minister. In periods of fiscal hardship, it was not unusual for established churches to try to pressure seceders to return to the church in order to increase its potential for voluntary contributions. Among other things, the division of a church meant that part of the town could be left without a minister, and also had fewer fiscal resources to

27 Ibid: 90.
29 Ibid: 97.
compete for a new minister in a colony that was “chronically short of them.” Ugly interpersonal rivalries also ensued as a result of these divisions. Local merchants refused to supply necessary goods like nails and timber to religious rivals, and sometimes these rivalries escalated to the point of vandalism of rival ministers’ homes or the burning of rival churches.

The religious diversity of a locality also depended on how amenable to toleration local laws were. In Rhode Island, for instance, the law “explicitly provided for the separation of church and state,” though these laws did not prevent a move by the Colony to disenfranchise Catholics and bar Jews from office around 1729. About this same time, largely owing to the inroads the Church of England in the colonies, the British government forced Massachusetts to admit male property owners to freemanship and to exempt Baptists, Quakers and Anglicans from paying taxes to support the Congregational Church. As a colony, Massachusetts became more open after King Charles II revoked its original charter in 1684 and was forced to accept one that guaranteed liberty of conscience to Protestants.

Even after Puritanism declined, New England was so much identified with its Puritan roots that revivalists who wrote about New England life in the eighteenth-century and into the nineteenth century tended to discuss the region’s religious

31 Ibid: 98.
33 Ibid.
identity in idealistic terms. "What did our fathers come into this wilderness for?"
asked nineteenth-century revivalist Joseph Belcher.35  “Not to gain estates as men do
now, but for religion, and that they might have their children in a hopeful way of
being truly religious," he continued.36

Belcher referred to a sense of religious decay that was felt by ministers
across the denominations in Colonial British America, as the Calvinism espoused by
Puritan New England gave “new men” the “internalized values necessary to flourish
in commercialized society.”37 Much of this was part of the process that Richard
Bushman describes as a transition from Puritan to Yankee. The end of the
seventeenth century saw also an increase in trade and other economic
opportunities.38 The decline of the authority of the clergy, and particularly of
Congregationalism, was part of this transition.39 As Bushman notes, the “issues the
Awakening raised were not new,” but rather, an “extension of the earlier contests
between piety and order.”40 The new “experimental” forms of religion spoke to the
spirit of individualism that was a common thread amongst all the facets of the
transition from Puritan to Yankee.41

35 Belcher, George Whitefield, 149.
36 Ibid.
37 Michael J. Crawford, “Origins of the Eighteenth-Century Evangelical Revival:
38 Richard L. Bushman, From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid: 196.
41 Ibid.
As Puritans became Yankees, it meant that individuals (especially men) were “capable of living in the competitive society of Yankee America” and had an “increased willingness to oppose traditional authority.”\textsuperscript{42} There were social, economic and religious ramifications of this social shift. Among other things, these changes produced a disintegration of household authority, a central part of Puritan life.\textsuperscript{43} Fewer young men were willing to labor “to work for other men’s wives and children without any recompense.”\textsuperscript{44} As Michael Crawford notes, there were “Widened markets and increased opportunity for the investment in frontier lands and in waterborne trade,” and a rise in “interpersonal economic relationships, greater social distance between people, clashes between people” in politics and the marketplace.\textsuperscript{45} In short, New England became a “more open society in which the community’s hold on the individual was reduced.”\textsuperscript{46} These changes eroded the Puritan emphasis on authority, including responsiveness to the Puritan Church. The reduction of the community’s hold on the individual created an ideal climate for cultivating revivalism, with its emphasis on individualism.

Even before the start of the eighteenth century, Puritanism had started to lose its grip on New England, in part due to refinement and an increased emphasis


\textsuperscript{44} Ibid: 116.


\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
on self and in part due to the introduction of competing churches. In the first decades of the century, the Church of England tried to make inroads into New England, but faced considerable resistance from local dissenting clergy. Timothy Cutler, a Boston-born Anglican minister who was also rector of Yale College, repeatedly wrote to the Bishop of London, complaining of resistance from local authorities. On February 4, 1730, he wrote to report fears about what Jonathan Belcher’s appointment as Governor of Massachusetts would mean for the Church of England. Belcher was a staunch dissenter who reportedly refused to allow his daughter to marry a young suitor unless he renounced the Establishment Church.47

That year, the overseers of Harvard College also refused to grant a petition by Cutler to be cited to the meetings of its board, as well as for “copies of records as may be necessary for a fair statement of the request.”48 The appeals went on for weeks, without obvious resolution, a sign of the friction between dissenter clergy, who wished to retain religious dominance in the Colony, and SPG missionaries who hoped to increase the influence of the Church of England.

Governor Belcher, for his part, proved to be more welcoming of the Church of England clergy than Cutler prophesized. In December of 1730, he wrote to Bishop Gibson, supporting a request for the wardens and vestry of Christ Church to receive a gift of communion plate and other furnishings from the King. Belcher noted that,

47 Timothy Cutler to Bishop Gibson, Boston, Feb. 4, 1730, FP, Volume V: General Correspondence, 1730-1750, ff. 1-2. LPL.

48 Timothy Cutler to Overseers of Harvard College, Boston, June 11, 1730; Minutes of Overseers, June 16, 1730; Summary of the Case by Cutler; Minutes of Meeting of Overseers, June 22, 1730; and Timothy Cutler to Bishop Gibson, Boston, June 25, 1730 in Ibid, ff. 3, 5, 6-12. LPL.
“though born in New England and brought up dissenter, he has a Christian Catholick Charity for the Church of England, and can say amen to the excellent 39 Articles.”

Nonetheless, the SPG’s efforts to establish parishes in New England were anything but smooth. Repeated quarrels broke out between Anglican clergy and local dissenter clergy and civil authorities. Belcher, for instance, wrote to Bishop Gibson again in 1731 to complain that Roger Price, the rector of the Anglican Christ Church, was “rude to him” over a misunderstanding about the Church calendar. Belcher also wrote to the Bishop near the end of that year, asserting that the Church of England “is as much established as any in Massachusetts.” To Belcher, the Bishop did not understand the local religious culture of Massachusetts, which, in spite of the disintegration of Puritanism by this time, still tended to resist established churches. Belcher attempted to convey this to the Bishop, explaining that all that was required for the establishment of a church was for a majority in a given town to vote to call a minister of the desired denomination. This letter served to reassure the Bishop that the Church of England had as much of an opportunity to establish churches as any other Protestant sect, but it also reminded him that the establishment of churches was largely subject to the will of the local people, and that churches could not simply be foisted upon them.

49 J. Belcher to Bishop Gibson, Boston, June 25, 1730 in Ibid: ff. 25-28. LPL.

50 J. Belcher to Bishop Gibson, Boston, July 24, 1731 in Ibid: ff. 44-45. LPL; Further references to the fall out appear in affidavits by Timothy Cutler and Thomas Harward, Dec. 23, 1731 in Ibid: ff. 67-68. LPL.

51 Ibid.

52 J. Belcher to Bishop Gibson, Boston, Dec. 4, 1731, in Ibid: ff. 56-59. LPL.
Revivalism was yet another cog in Puritanism’s dismantling, as a renewed popular form of piety that “retained many Puritan elements, but no longer proceeded under the Puritan canopy.”

It replaced the Puritans’ old Augustinian strain of piety in favor of a more popular, eighteenth-century form that was “more extravagant, and less scholastical.” It ran counter to the reasoned, natural religion preached by prominent and erudite New England clergymen like Cotton Mather and Benjamin Colman. Indeed, revivalism’s tendency to emphasize the conversion experience as important for the effectiveness of a minister above all else was among the many aspects of the Great Awakening that chafed at the schooled members of the old New England religious order.

Revivalism thus played a significant role in the disintegration of the “Puritan Canopy” over New England. Jonathan Edwards was one of the most important revivalist figures to help undermine Puritanism, even before Whitefield’s arrival. He challenged such ideas as “covenant privileges” as well as the whole notion of “New England as a covenanted people.” Edwards remained “Puritan” in the sense that he believed that “God, self, church and society were intimately interconnected.” Even so, invoking the language of dissent, Edwards’ critics accused him of collusion

53 Mark A. Noll, America’s God, 44.
55 Valeri, Heavenly Merchandise, 210-211.
56 Miller, The New England Mind, 44.
57 Ibid: 46, 47.
58 Ibid: 47.
with the Church of England to undermine the civil and religious liberties of New England.\textsuperscript{59}

In many ways, revivalism was more threatening to those who desired to preserve the old religious order in New England than the incursion of the Church of England. The Great Awakening had the effect of further “weakening the position of the authority,” and engendering a “growing disrespect for all forms of authority in the colonies.”\textsuperscript{60} As noted above, churches in New England towns were established by common consent. Revivalism’s popularity meant that revivalist churches, which were also dissenting, rather than establishment, had a far greater chance of success in New England than the Church of England. This meant that Whitefield faced a double-edged sword. On the one hand, he might face hostility as an Anglican clergyman, even if perceptions of him as an Anglican were greatly diminished by the time he first visited New England. On the other hand, he also carried the “taint” of revivalism, which made him unpalatable to a number of dissenter clergy. Most of his critics from among the New England clergy responded to his revivalism, rather than his status as an ordained Anglican minister.

The decision to invite Whitefield to New England was a difficult one for its clergy. A number of clergymen disliked the emphasis on the New Birth by Whitefield, Edwards and other revivalists. They also feared “enthusiasm” as well as the tendency of revivalists to blame the ministers themselves for “spiritual

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{60} Cooper, \textit{Tenacious of Their Liberties}, 197.
apathy.”61 And ultimately, the revivalists’ insistence, and Whitefield’s particularly, on the necessity that ministers be converted had the potential to undermine the credibility of ministers with their congregants and even challenge their legitimacy as Christians.

While some of the clergy welcomed the renewed interest revivalism brought to religious life, the potential repercussions of revivalism for New England clergy made it a complex and incredibly divisive issue. This was in spite of the revivalist tendency to idealize the Puritan past. Some New England ministers recognized revivalists like Whitefield as kindred spirits, in that they shared their historic goals for religious tolerance. Jonathan Edwards, for instance, saw Whitefield as a figure of hope: an Anglican minister with whom those of dissenting protestant sects could work toward a common goal of religious tolerance.62

Some New England clergy took a pragmatic view of revivalists like Whitefield, even if they did not always agree with his doctrinal interpretations. They recognized that his flamboyant style helped to renew interest in a spiritual life, as many denominations faced challenges raised by a growing refinement in material life, as well as the rationality of the Enlightenment.63 Among these ministers taking a pragmatic attitude toward Whitefield was Benjamin Colman, minister of the Brattle Street Church in Boston. Colman advocated a separation between Anglicans and Congregationalists, but nonetheless “maintained a sympathetic and mutually

62 Marsden, Jonathan Edwards: a Life, 201-213
63 Delbanco, The Death of Satan, 86-88.
supportive relationship with the Church of England.”⁶⁴ An Anglican revivalist like Whitefield, therefore, would have had a particular appeal to him.

Colman corresponded with a number of revivalists, including Jonathan Edwards. In at least one letter, which Edwards wrote in response to one from Colman, Edwards refers to the mutual concern the two ministers had about the state of religion in New England. He wrote that he had a “particular concern at Deerfield,” more than at Northampton, and that “something of it seems to be beginning in some other of the neighboring towns.”⁶⁵ Edwards did not elaborate more specifically about what this concern was, but the letter’s overall tenor suggests that he was especially concerned with the decline of religious life in Connecticut, and that the two clergymen had discussed places where they had seen evidence of religious apathy. Whether the letters were between Colman and Edwards or Colman and Whitefield, or others, they also demonstrate that in spite of doctrinal differences and the “cautious optimism” that frequently characterized the attitude of the more convivial non-revivalist dissenting ministers toward revivalists, there was clearly a dialog between the two camps about the state of religion in the region.

As a fellow protestant, Whitefield was, for some dissenter clergymen like Colman, a counterpoint to “Popish Darkness, Superstition and Idolatry.”⁶⁶ Colman, in fact, reinforced Whitefield’s own view of himself as emulating the divine, once

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⁶⁵ Jonathan Edwards to Benjamin Colman, March 9, 1740, *Papers of Benjamin Colman*, MHS.

writing “God would cause him always to triumph in Christ.” Whitefield was, in Colman’s estimation, an “Instrument to bring back many wandering Sheep to the Shepherd and Bishop of their Souls.” The rise in church attendance that followed Whitefield’s visits to the British American colonies supports Colman’s theory that revivalism could help boost religion. In 1729, there were approximately 35,000 Congregationalists and Presbyterians in the British American colonies. By 1745, seven years into Whitefield’s missionary work, there were at least 75,000.

Not every New England clergyman shared Colman’s optimism that revivalism could reverse religious apathy. And some felt that revivalism was damaging to religious life and Christian unity. This was particularly true of the more authoritarian clergy, who had little tolerance for anything that challenged their own theological beliefs and social authority. While Puritanism’s influence had certainly waned by 1740, New England clergyman clung steadfastly to old ideals. To these eighteenth-century clergyman who resisted revivalism, revivalism was most certainly a threat to the foundation of Christian Religion.

By the time of Whitefield’s initial arrival in New England, clerical power and influence over civil matters had already experienced a considerable decline. Even in 1700, colonial courts were far more concerned with property and debt cases and enforcing than with punishing moral transgressions. Religious heterogeneity was

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67 Ibid: vi.

68 Ibid.

69 Belcher, *George Whitefield*, 266.

on the rise and the influence of local clergy over governors and legislatures had “shrank considerably.”

Revivalism represented yet another force eroding the influence of traditional New England religious life. Whitefield arrived fifteen to twenty years after the start of an active press campaign on the part of New England clergy to “restore their prestige and to counteract anticlericalism.” New England churches also turned to voluntary institutions for “prayer and pious consultation.” The result was that, by the time of Whitefield’s missionary tours in the Americas, many churches had to change if they wanted to compete for adherents.

Authoritarian clergymen also took to heart a seventeenth-century New England mentality, once law, that required that the establishment, or gathering of new churches required the consent of (and deference to) existing Churches in the same county. Each town or parish, by law of the General Court, was required to have an “able, learned, and orthodox minister.” Whitefield was certainly “learned,” but many of his actions were inconsistent with this decree, and he was far from deferential to New England clergy with whom he disagreed. That Whitefield also stirred up passions amongst the populace and encouraged them to challenge their clergy, rather than deferring to their wisdom, was simply unacceptable to these

\[\text{\footnotesize \text{71 Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize \text{72 Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize \text{73 Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize \text{74 Ibid, 378.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize \text{75 Cotton, The New England Way, 5.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize \text{76 Bumsted, “Orthodoxy in Massachusetts,” 274.}}\]
clergymen. As a revivalist minister, he was seen as a negative and corrupting influence with the potential to undermine their moral society.

As in other colonies, Whitefield and his fellow revivalists also reached out to slaves, free blacks and other outsiders. Their controversial visits to Yale inspired David Brainerd and his brother, John, a pair of Presbyterian missionaries who ministered among Native Americans throughout the colonies. Though David Brainerd was gravely ill at the time Whitefield visited Connecticut in 1740, he wrote in his memoir that, “my soul was refreshed and seemed knit to him.”77 His friend, Jonathan Edwards, who helped Brainerd write his memoir, attempted to edit this line out of the memoir. Edwards hoped to create an alliance that was calculated to quash the influence of Arminianism in New England.78 Since Whitefield’s visit to Yale stirred up considerable controversy, Edwards was afraid that Brainerd’s expression of admiration for the Grand Itinerant, along with Brainerd’s own reputation for zeal, might prove problematic for Edwards’s plan to use Brainerd to help convince New Englanders to eschew Arminianism.79

Revivalism also inspired Connecticut-born Mohegan preacher, Samson Occom. Occom studied for his ministry at the Connecticut Indian Charity School of Yale-educated Eleazar Wheelock.80 Wheelock, a Congregationalist and staunch

78 Ibid. 29.
79 Ibid: 47.
80 Eleazar Wheelock, A Continuation of the Narrative of the Indian Charity-School, Begun in Lebanon, in Connecticut; Now Incorporated with Dartmouth-College, in Hanover, in the Province of New-Hampshire (Hartford, CT: Ebenezer Watson, 1773).
supporter of the liberty of conscience, later founded of Dartmouth College, with the principle goal of educating Native Americans. Along with fellow evangelist missionaries, the Reverends James Davenport, Jonathan Parsons and Benjamin Pomeroy, Wheelock encouraged Whitefield to visit their Native American students when he came through Connecticut in 1745.\textsuperscript{81} Whitefield's influence on Occom will be explored later in this chapter, but Whitefield's catechism across racial lines and his conviction that all races had equal propensity for sin and salvation in the eyes of God left a mark on Occom's own ministry. Whitefield also supported Occom early in his career.

Whitefield was also influential among the slaves in New England.\textsuperscript{82} As we have seen, most famously influenced Phillis Wheatley, a prolific African-American writer and early contributor to antislavery literature. Wheatley's mistress, Susanna Wheatley, was a devout follower of Whitefield who brought her slave to hear him speak during his sixth tour of America. Wheatley was among several African Americans who “gained access to the Countess of Huntingdon’s literary patronage through Whitefield,” and Christianity, in turn, became a way to “resist slavery in ways more subtle and effective than open defiance.”\textsuperscript{83}


\textsuperscript{83} Carretta, \textit{Phillis Wheatley}, 33.
Whitefield’s Experiences in New England

Whitefield’s first visit to New England was preceded by a considerable attention in the newspapers, to his activities in Great Britain elsewhere in the colonies. The publication of Whitefield’s journals and other writings also helped to build anticipation for his visit. An excerpt of his journal, recounting his exchange with the Bishop of Gloucester, in which the Bishop advised Whitefield “to preach only in the Congregation in which he was lawfully appointed,” appeared in The Boston Evening Post in November of 1739.84 This excerpt included Whitefield’s impetuous reply, in which he informed the Bishop that he “equally offended” when he preached “outside of [his] own diocese.”85 The publication of the excerpt was clearly intended to legitimize Whitefield’s itinerancy in a period where his traveling and his preaching were coming under fire throughout Great Britain and its dominions.

News of Whitefield’s activities in other colonies also reached New England. In 1740, The New England Weekly Journal republished his infamous letter rebuking southern planters for their treatment of their slaves and their failure to catechize them. Although Whitefield clearly intended the letter’s original publication and frequently sought out publication of his letters and other writings in newspapers, it is less clear whether he was also behind the reprints. By 1740, Whitefield was generating enough interest that he received plenty of attention in the press without

85 Ibid.

Whitefield’s visit to New England also was preceded by a flurry of publications warning frantically of the impending doom, from those who were apprehensive about the impact of his visit on the region. Alarmists characterized his meetings as “unlawful,” capable of inciting “riots, perpetual Quarrels among Friends, and Neighbours, continual Insults and Bullying.”  

86 Another writer feared that Whitefield would further the “disorders...already too visible among us.”  

87 The actions of individuals who engaged in itinerancy were considered “threatening” and “disruptive.”  

88 Those who disliked itinerant preaching also tended to conflate ordained revivalists like Whitefield with the unschooled itinerant preachers that he helped to inspire.

For his part, Whitefield eagerly “entreated to visit the descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers.”  

89 He arrived in Newport, Rhode Island on Sunday, September 14, 1740. Colonial Rhode Island was founded under the principles of Roger Williams and the liberty of conscience, after Separatist-inclined Williams was exiled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for his criticisms of the local ministry. Shortly after Whitefield’s arrival, he received an invitation to stay in the home of Mr. Clap, a


87 Ibid.

88 Ibid, 1412.

89 Belcher, *George Whitefield*, 152.
dissenting minister. Whitefield wrote that Clap “looked like a good old Puritan, and gave me an idea of what stamp those men were who first settled New England.” Later that evening, he went with Reverend Clap to visit Reverend Honeyman, Newport’s Anglican minister, to request the use of his pulpit. Whitefield reported that Honeyman at first “seemed a little unwilling” and was particularly suspicious of Whitefield’s desire to preach on weekdays, calling it “disorderly.” Honeyman eventually consented, allegedly telling Whitefield that, “If [his] preaching would promote the glory of God, and the good of souls,” he was “welcome to his church.”

When Whitefield reported that his were largely well-received in Newport by large audiences, which he described as a “very plain people in general,” who were “sadly divided amongst themselves as to outward things.” He wrote that there were no fewer than “four different congregations of Baptists, two of the Independents, and one of them Quakers.” Whitefield also reported that the “Established Church is in excellent order as to externals; but many of the chief members were bigots.” He noted that the Anglican clergy in particular “seemed very fearful lest I should preach in Mr. Clap’s meeting-house,” though Whitefield

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91 Davis, ed, GWJ, 452.
92 Belcher, George Whitefield, 154.
93 Sept. 16, 1740, Davis, ed, GWJ, 456.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
denied that the “bigotry” amongst the Anglican clergy was worse than “those of other communions.”

From Newport, Whitefield continued on to Bristol. He noted that several friends from Newport continued onto Bristol with him. He spent only a day in Bristol and preached to a large crowd, on short notice from the dissenter minister who received him. On the morning of September 18, 1740, he went on to Boston. In spite of an alarmist response to his impending visit to Boston, Whitefield reported being well received upon his arrival by a number of the local clergy, including Benjamin Colman. Colman initially believed that bringing Whitefield to New England was the right action. In a letter written shortly after Whitefield’s first tour, Colman noted that Whitefield was a clergyman of the Church of England, but he nonetheless felt that his popularity overcame his association with the Church and that Whitefield was received with much “affection.”

During Whitefield’s visit, Colman himself spent considerable time squiring Whitefield around to see various local clergymen. At one sermon attended by over 5000, Colman recounted that there was such a clamor to hear Whitefield speak that the pews broke underneath the crushing audience, leaving some in the congregation with “greatly bruised arms, thighs and body black and blue.” He also wrote of his

96 Ibid.
99 Benjamin Colman to Unknown, October 7, 1740, Papers of Benjamin Colman, MHS. Note: The letter is faded enough that the intended recipient’s name is no longer readable.
100 Ibid.
surprise that Whitefield initially refused his invitation to preach from Colman’s pulpit until after he had heard Colman preach.\textsuperscript{101} This surprise was no doubt, based on the not-infrequent reports concerning Whitefield’s lack of humility and deference towards other members of the clergy.

In addition to Benjamin Colman, Whitefield enjoyed considerable support from other local clergy, including Thomas Prince, Robert Abercrombie, William Hobby and Thomas Foxcroft.\textsuperscript{102} Even Governor Belcher and the Commissary reportedly politely received Whitefield on several occasions. Indeed, the only church or meetinghouse he found consistently closed to him was King’s Chapel, then an Anglican church.\textsuperscript{103} Once Whitefield preached, some of the things he said did displease his “hosts” among the New England clergymen. Colman was reportedly “offended by the ‘harsher epithets and Expressions which dropt from his lips,” although he did not withdraw his support from Whitefield.\textsuperscript{104}

The next day, a group of five clergy members of the Church of England set upon Whitefield and particularly castigated him for his friendship with the Tennents. These ministers, which included SPG missionary Timothy Cutler, were hostile to the New Lights, criticized Whitefield “for calling that Tennent and his brethren faithful ministers of Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{105} For his part, Whitefield continued to

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Foxcroft fell under criticism of his own in 1745 for exposing his congregation to “Errors and mischief.” See, \textit{A Letter to the Reverend Thomas Foxcroft} (Boston, 1745).
\textsuperscript{103} Belcher, \textit{George Whitefield}, 157.
\textsuperscript{104} Winslow, \textit{Jonathan Edwards}, 187.
\textsuperscript{105} Sept. 19, 1740, Davis, ed, \textit{GWJ}, 458.
insist that indeed, they were faithful ministers. The Anglican ministers continued to berate Whitefield, and “questioned the validity of Presbyterian ordination,” using words from Whitefield’s own journal against him. They also questioned him about Wesley’s sentiments, noting that when Wesley was in Boston, “he was very strenuous for the Church, and rigorous against all other forms of government when he was at Boston.” Whitefield replied, “he was then a great bigot, but God has since enlarged his heart, and I believe he was now like-minded with me in this particular.” Though it is doubtful that he realized it, Whitefield failed what was intended by these Anglican clergymen as a litmus test to gauge his loyalty to the Church and its scripture. The queries continued into doctrinal matters, with no progress on either side. Whitefield eventually grew tired of their line of questioning and departed.

In spite of Whitefield’s failure to pass muster with the local Anglican clergy, a number of dissenting Boston clergy still generously lent Whitefield their pulpits. He preached at several Boston churches, including those of Benjamin Colman and Thomas Foxcroft, who was the colleague of Charles Chauncy, Whitefield’s most vocal critic. To the surprise of many, he also preached at Old North Church, the pulpit long occupied by members of the Mather family. Few Bostonians had expected

106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
Whitefield to preach at church. Attendance at this sermon was uncharacteristically low.\textsuperscript{111}

Whitefield also visited Harvard College. His impression was less than favorable. He scoffed, “it is scarce as big as one of our least colleges at Oxford, and as far as I could gather from some who knew the state of it, not far superior to our universities in piety and true godliness.”\textsuperscript{112} “Tutors neglect to Pray with and examine the hearts of their pupils,” he continued, “Discipline is at too low an ebb.”\textsuperscript{113} “Bad books are fashionable,” he remarked.\textsuperscript{114} Nonetheless, Whitefield reported that he was “very civilly received” and that he approached to “about seven thousand students” on the afternoon of his visit.\textsuperscript{115} After his journal was published, however, his denigration of Harvard earned him a number of new opponents. Among them, was Reverend Clapp of Newport. After Whitefield’s comments on Harvard were published, Clapp became a very public opponent of Whitefield.\textsuperscript{116}

An anonymous critic also wrote a scathing letter to Whitefield, published in \textit{The Boston Evening Post} in July 1745. He referred to a letter in support of the College Testimony against Whitefield and told him that it “is beyond Dispute, that you have sown the pernicious Seeds of Separation, Contention, and Disorder among

\textsuperscript{111} Sept. 22, 1740, Davis, ed, \textit{GWJ}, 461.
\textsuperscript{112} Sept. 24, 1740, Ibid: 463.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Belcher, \textit{George Whitefield},161.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid: 187.
us.”117 The writer also took Whitefield to task for undermining the authority of New England’s clergy. “Your injurious Insinuations respecting Ministers as unacquainted with Christ,” he wrote, has “greatly impeded the Success of the Gospel, and struck boldly, not only at the Peace and good Order, but at the very Being of these Churches.”118

The letter’s writer exemplified Christopher Grasso’s Speaking Aristocracy, attempts by more traditional “Old Light” ministers to channel the increase in New England piety.119 His letter painted Whitefield as an outsider, and a troublemaker, and also delivered a snide remark on Whitefield’s itinerancy. He remarked that he thought that Whitefield and the New England clergy had an agreement that Whitefield “would not preach in any Pulpit without the settled Minister’s Consent.”120 When Whitefield found many pulpits closed to him, he preached in the fields instead, much as he had done in other localities. The writer called into question Whitefield’s honesty and told him to “hasten to your own Charge, if you any you have.”121 The message was clear. Whitefield was not (or no longer) a welcome reviver of religious piety to the region; he was a dangerous interloper and a destructive force.

118 Ibid.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
As Whitefield’s comments in his journal about his experience with the five Anglican ministers shows, Whitefield was not unaware of the hostilities toward him. He was obviously less aware of the complexities of New England religious life, or its contentious history. After a sermon he delivered in Salem, he noted that, “the inhabitants had been sadly divided about their ministers.” 122 Whitefield reported it as though this were a relatively new development, although religious fissures had existed in New England for over a century. He does not appear to have realized old his visits only increased that divisions.

Whitefield knew that the fractious nature of New England’s religious landscape meant that there were ebbs and flows in his reception. He reported that one night, after he dined with the Governor and “most of the ministers” in town, he honored a request from the Governor to pray for all who were in attendance, and then “went in the Governor’s coach to the end of town.” 123 While Whitefield did not report the specifics, it is clear that something must have occurred after these prayers. During that ride, Whitefield noted that he felt “such a sense of my vileness upon my soul, that I wondered people did not stone me.” 124 This sense of foreboding, or “damp” as Whitefield described it, lasted for much of the day, which suggests that there were unpleasant elements of this visit that Whitefield elected not to share with those who would eventually read his journal.

122 Sept. 29, 1740, Davis, ed, *GWJ*, 466.
124 Ibid, 163.
In spite of the misgivings of a number of Boston clergy, many ministers were quick to support Whitefield. William Hobby, pastor at the Old South Church in Reading, even wrote a pamphlet defending Whitefield’s preaching and particularly his itinerancy. Hobby was a Boston-born Congregationalist minister with sympathies toward New Light preaching. He served in the Council that dismissed Jonathan Edwards from Northampton, Massachusetts in 1755, but protested against the majority, in support of Edwards.\textsuperscript{125}

Richard Pateshall, a Harvard-trained minister from Boston, roundly criticized Hobby for his defense of Whitefield.\textsuperscript{126} Pateshall was particularly incensed at “that haughty Air which manifestly runs thro’ the whole of it; and your supercilious and scurrilous Way of treating Gentlemen, of much greater Figure and Character of yourself.”\textsuperscript{127} Pateshall castigated Hobby for writing a letter “in Vindication of the grand itinerant,” with “the most unmannerly Reflections on Gentlemen of superior Note and Merit.”\textsuperscript{128} In his zest to defend Whitefield, Hobby had modeled the grand itinerant’s lack of deference to senior figures of authority. His zealous defense of Whitefield, along with his critics of Whitefield’s opponents irked more traditionally minded preachers like Pateshall, who expected younger ministers, such as Hobby,

\textsuperscript{125} William Buell Sprague, \textit{Annals of the American Pulpit: Unitarian Congregational, 1865} (Robert Carter and Brothers, 1865): 132.


\textsuperscript{127} Richard Pateshall, “Pride Humbled, Mr. Hobby Chastised: Being some Remarks on Said Hobby’s Piece, Entitled, a Defence of the Itinerancy and the Conduct of the Rev. Mr. Whitefield. In a Letter to the Reverend Mr. William Hobby, Pastor of the First Church in Reading” (Boston: Draper, 1745): 1.

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid: 2.
who did not come from ministerial families, to defer to the older order. Elders, in the Puritan tradition, maintained order over the Church.¹²⁹

Whitefield’s dramatic, extemporaneous preaching was in marked contrast to the solemn, deeply hierarchal Puritan church experience that was predicated on prayer and non-explicative and non-emotive preaching by the Minister.¹³⁰ In Pateshall’s criticisms of Whitefield that followed his scolding of William Hobby, he charged Whitefield with enthusiasm and ridiculed Whitefield’s attempts to model Christ. In particular, Pateshall denounced as “literalist,” Whitefield’s assertions that some dreams that he recounted in one of his sermons came directly from God.”¹³¹ He wrote of Whitefield’s tendency to play the divine, “It’s the Manner of Enthusiasts to take their crude and extravagant Notions of Things to be the infallible Dictates of the Spirit of God, and in no wise to call them in question.”¹³² Pateshall continued, “Are not Enthusiasts the Bane of the Christian Church? They ought therefore be crush’d. [sic]”¹³³

News of Whitefield’s troubles with the Anglican planter elite, Alexander Garden and others had preceded him to New England and contributed to criticisms of Whitefield. Thomas Foxcroft was one of a number of the members of the New England clergy who defended Whitefield, issuing a pamphlet that proposed to offer

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¹³² Ibid: 5.

¹³³ Ibid.
“a fair solution of certain Difficulties, objected against some Parts of his publick Conduct.” Colman was also initially quick to defend Whitefield against Garden and his other detractors in the South, who had challenged the administration of Whitefield’s Orphan House at Bethesda. Colman dismissed rumors that Whitefield appropriated the money to his own purposes. He countered that, “the order of it was admirable.” In spite of Colman’s sympathies toward the Church of England, it is not particularly surprising that a New England Congregationalist minister sided with a revivalist against the southern Anglican hierarchy. That he did so further underscores the erosion of Whitefield’s reputation as a respectable.

Whitefield’s first visit to New England also included brief visits to Portsmouth, New Hampshire and further north, though the details of these visits are scant in comparison to his recounts of visits to other colonial locales. Whitefield did note that at Portsmouth, he “preached to a polite auditory, but so very unconcerned that I began to question whether I had been speaking to rational or brute creatures.” “Seeing no immediate effects of the word preached, I was a little dejected,” he continued. This visit to Portsmouth was yet another example of the ebb and flow that characterized his ministry. Though many were curious, some audiences were more receptive than others.

This first visit to New England also marked Whitefield’s introduction to Jonathan Edwards, who was somewhat of a kindred spirit. Edwards, a Connecticut-

136 Belcher, George Whitefield, 165-166.
137 Ibid.
born Yale-trained theologian, was born into a family of clergy. His father, Thomas Edward, was minister in Connecticut. His mother, Esther Stoddard, was the daughter of Reverend Solomon Stoddard, an eminent Congregationalist minister from Northampton, Massachusetts. Stoddard’s controversial ideas, which included admitting to Communion those who were not full members of the Church, led critics to dub him the “pope” of Connecticut Valley.\textsuperscript{138} His grandson too, came to evoke controversy.

During his years at Yale, Edwards came under the influence of enlightenment philosopher John Locke. Most of the younger, educated New Englanders, and particularly clergymen, had at least a passing knowledge of the writings of Locke, Newton and other enlightenment thinkers, along with classical philosophers like Aristotle.\textsuperscript{139} Locke’s endorsement of a “broader, more tolerant, and more ‘reasonable’ religion” particularly intrigued Edwards, though he was “not strictly, a Lockean.”\textsuperscript{140} Whitefield was not an intellectual, but he shared Edwards’ interest in a broader and more tolerant religion.\textsuperscript{141}

Edwards also shared fears of other dissenting New England clergy in the eighteenth century, that the Church of England had “injurious, oppressive designs” against the dissenting congregations. Although Whitefield was an Anglican priest, his reputation as a defier of the “tightly organized and decorous Anglican parish system” and ability to appeal to “the laity over the heads of their priests” was

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, 60.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid, 63-64.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, 59.
promising to Edwards. Whitefield, for his part, was excited to meet the grandson of Solomon Stoddard. Both Whitefield and Edwards reported that the visit to Northampton went well. Edwards reportedly wept with joy through Whitefield’s sermon. Edwards wrote, “Mr. Whitefield’s sermons were suitable to the circumstances of the town; containing just reproofs of our backslidings and in a most moving and effecting manner.” Edwards wrote that: “the minds of the people in general appeared more engaged in religion, showing a greater forwardness to make it the subject of their conversation.”

The visit to Northampton was not without its dark points. He quarreled with a minister who approached Whitefield to assert, “It was not absolutely necessary for a gospel minister, that he should be converted.” What the minister meant was that the effective gospel minister need not be an adherent of the New Birth. Whitefield vehemently disagreed. He took this opportunity to sermonize on the necessity of a minister’s conversion to the New Birth, and to castigate several of the ministers present, Whitefield asserting that unconverted ministers were “the bane of the Christian Church.” He continued that he “honour[ed] the memory of that great and good man, Mr. Stoddard: but I think he is much to be blamed for

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143 Ibid, 178.
144 Ibid, 180.
145 Belcher, George Whitefield, 181.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid: 183.
148 Oct. 21, 1740, Davis, ed, GWJ, 480.
endeavouring to prove that unconverted men may be admitted into the ministry.”  
Whitefield saw Gilbert Tennent’s sermon, “The Danger of an Unconverted Minister,” as “unanswerable.” He also claimed that only one of the ministers in the audience was offended, and that many thanked him for his directness. Nonetheless, this was an important point of controversy during the visit; it further eroded his relationship with the Church of England and made Whitefield an even more polarizing figure in New England.

His second visit to New England occurred during his third voyage to the Americas. He arrived in York Harbor, then still part of Massachusetts, in November 1744, after an arduous eleven-week voyage, and received a hearty welcome from Reverend Samuel Moody. In spite of Whitefield’s still-queasy traveler’s stomach, Whitefield was persuaded by Moody to put aside his nausea and to preach a sermon. Whitefield then departed for Portsmouth, New Hampshire, almost immediately after the sermon. His stay in New Hampshire was brief, but he reported that he found his Portsmouth audience more receptive to his message during this second sermon.

Still nauseated, Whitefield continued on to Boston on November 24, 1744. A number of Bostonians reportedly still held some ill-will against him, but an acquaintance of Whitefield’s reported that “the prejudices of most that set

149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
152 Belcher, George Whitefield, 256.
153 Ibid: 258.
themselves against him before his coming, seem to be in great measure abated, and in some, wholly removed.”\textsuperscript{154} In spite of his poor health, Whitefield maintained a busy schedule of preaching and offering communion to congregants in and around Boston, including at a church in Malden, at the behest of Reverend Joseph Emerson. Emerson was impressed with Whitefield and wrote, “He comes with the same extraordinary spirit of meekness, sweetness and universal benevolence as before. In opposition to the spirit of separation and bigotry, he is still for holding communion with all Protestant churches.”\textsuperscript{155} Emerson firmly defended Whitefield against accusations of enthusiasm. He wrote that Whitefield “preaches a close adherence to the Scriptures, the necessity of trying all impressions by them, and of rejecting whatever is not agreeable to them as delusions.”\textsuperscript{156} Emerson continued “In opposition to Antinomianism, he preaches up all kinds of relative and religious duties, though to be performed in the strength of Christ; and, in short, the doctrines of the Church of England.”\textsuperscript{157}

Emerson clearly identified Whitefield as an Anglican minister, but invited him to preach in the spirit of inter-denominational cooperation. Others were less charitable. Whitefield’s administration of communion at the Brattle Street Congregational Church in Boston was cause for “great offence.”\textsuperscript{158} Those opposed claimed that the Church did not give its consent for Whitefield to administer

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid: 259.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
communion. Benjamin Colman, who invited Whitefield to the pulpit, was the subject of considerable scrutiny. Colman refuted the argument that he should have garnered the approval of the Church’s governance. He replied that, “it was customary for pastors to invite the assistance of other ministers on such occasions [as communion],” and “thought it unnecessary to call for a vote of the church.” 159 Colman also noted that during prayers, he made his intentions known to call Whitefield up to assist in administering the Lord’s Supper, and the congregation “seemed in universal agreement.” 160

The more contentious nature of Whitefield’s second visit can be attributed largely to his outspokenness about unconverted ministers during his previous visit, four years earlier, which had offended many. A considerable exchange of pamphlets and other writings on the subject had followed among the members of the New England clergy. Charles Chauncy, of Boston’s First Congregational Church, wrote a pair of pamphlets castigating revivalism in general and Whitefield in particular. The first pamphlet, published in 1742, railed specifically against Whitefield and bemoaned the state of religion in New England. Chauncy blamed Whitefield and the other revivalists for inciting “confusion” and “trouble” over the conversion of ministers. “They become very turbulent, and disorderly,” he wrote. 161 “They give their Minister, if he is not of this new Way, a great deal of Trouble, and form parties to turn him away from his Charge,” he continued. “Order, Regularity, Decency, and

159 Ibid: 260.
160 Ibid.
161 Chauncy, The State of Religion, Since the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield’s Arrival There, 8
such Things, are made light of and, in their Opinion, the more confusion there is, the more there is of the spirit of God amongst them,” he wrote.¹⁶²

Although fractiousness had always existed among the New England clergy, Chauncy blamed Whitefield for inciting further divide: “the Ministers here are divided, and look upon one another with an evil and jealous Eye.”¹⁶³ Of the parishioners, he wrote, “Several of them have rambled through the country, after the Pattern of Mr. Whitefield, and without asking leave of the Minister of the Parish, have gathered the People together, and in a riotous manner entered the Meeting-house and preached.”¹⁶⁴ Very few Ministers, he continued, “have dared to open their Mouths in favor of Reason, Virtue, Order, or any-thing that is thought to be against this World.”¹⁶⁵ Chauncy clearly saw revivalism in general, and Whitefield specifically, as having a profoundly negative impact on New England religious life and as having turned the people against the clergy.

In a second pamphlet against unschooled revivalist itinerant ministers, published in 1743, Chauncy “prevailed” upon the clergy of New England to tend to their “obligations” to “use their Endeavours” to “suppress the prevailing disorder.”¹⁶⁶ Amongst his many other criticisms of revivalism, Chauncy clearly responded to the arguments of Whitefield, Tennant and Edwards that a minister’s conversion was by far the most important qualification to preach. Chauncy

¹⁶² Ibid.
¹⁶³ Ibid.
¹⁶⁴ Ibid.
¹⁶⁵ Ibid.
dismissed their teachings as “without any Respect to, or Concurrence with the
Word.”167 He also firmly rejected the notion that a man could “evidence his
Justification by his Sanctification.”168 “It is a Fundamental and Soul-damning Error,
to make Sanctification an Evidence of Justification,” he wrote, roundly dismissing
the entire notion of justification by faith on which revivalism was predicated.169

Chauncy went a step further in 1745, issuing a public letter calling upon
Whitefield to “Vindicate his Conduct, or Confess his Faults.” In it, Chauncy claimed
that, when Whitefield first came into New England, he was “much prejudiced in
favour of you, from the accounts I had heard of your abundant labours and success
in the Gospel.”170 He also claimed to have heard Whitefield preach several times and
that his “preaching as well as conduct were stumbling to me.”171 “And the sad
confusions I have since been a mournful spectator of, have fully convinced me you
were in a wrong way,” he continued.172 Chauncy’s letter echoed Pateshall’s
criticisms of William Hobby and Whitefield. He outlined the ways in which
Whitefield was brash in his interactions with local clergy. He also called into
question Whitefield’s commitment to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of
England. Recognizing Whitefield’s assertions that he was an Anglican minister,

167 Ibid, 3.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid.
170 Chauncy, A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Whitefield, 1. Note: There is no evidence
to indicate that Chauncy really ever supported Whitefield’s invitation to Boston. His
language in that letter was probably a function of etiquette, rather than a sincere
claim of past support.
171 Ibid.
172 Ibid.
Chauncy asked, “how [he] can reconcile the 26th of these Articles, with what [he] both preach’d and printed?”\(^{173}\) Chauncy insisted that Whitefield’s repeated assertions, in sermon and elsewhere, about the importance of the conversion experience over all, was in violation of this article.

On a similar note, a number of ministers, led by President Clap, Samuel Whittlesey and Thomas Darling, all of Yale, all issued a public declaration against Whitefield’s actions.\(^{174}\) The corporations of both Harvard and Yale vehemently opposed him. It is not surprising that Whitefield was threatening to Yale, since the Great Awakening effectively challenged the salient purpose of its establishment.\(^{175}\) After all, if Jonathan Edwards was right, “the purpose of the minister is not to store the head but to stir the heart.”\(^{176}\) This meant that learned ministers might no longer be necessary. The same could be said for Harvard. For their part, Yale’s corporation claimed “that he (Whitefield) intended to root out all the standing ministers in [the] land, and to introduce foreigners in their stead.”\(^{177}\) Their declaration was published in 1745 and advertised in *The Boston Evening Post*, much as Whitefield advertised his own publications.\(^{178}\)

\(^{173}\) Ibid: 2.


\(^{176}\) Ibid: 34.

\(^{177}\) Belcher, *George Whitefield*, 261.

\(^{178}\) “This Day is Published,” *BEP*, Issue. 503 (April 15, 1745): 4.
As Whitefield’s experiences with Alexander Garden and South Carolina’s planter elite show, Whitefield was often perceived as an outsider to the Colonies. In the case of this writer, Whitefield was a foreigner whose presence would incite the appearance of other foreigners who would then displace ministers who had been voluntarily incorporated into their communities by the members of the communities. Ultimately, Harvard’s Corporation, and Whitefield’s venerable enemy Reverend Holyoke, were forced to taper their anti-Whitefield rhetoric in 1768, after Whitefield and his supporters donated a large collection of books to replace the collections destroyed by fire.\textsuperscript{179} In doing so, Whitefield demonstrated that he could support the good of the community and potentially overcome his status of threatening interloper. Nonetheless, this did not stop the tide of condemnations against him.

Other ministers also spoke out against Whitefield. In a letter published in 1745, two associations of ministers from the country addressed the ministers of Boston and Charlestown, Massachusetts about the “hasty Admission that Whitefield Obtained into some of [their] Pulpits, and is, [they] feared, about to find into others.”\textsuperscript{180} Its signers included clergy from both Massachusetts and New Hampshire, including Caleb Cushing of Salisbury, Joseph Parsons of Bradford, John Cushing from Boxford, Nathaniel Gookin of North-Hampton and William Johnson of

\textsuperscript{179} Belcher, \textit{George Whitefield}, 269.

\textsuperscript{180} A \textit{Letter from Two Neighbouring Associations of Ministers in the Country, to the Associated Ministers of Boston and Charlestown, Relating to the Admission of Mr. Whitefield into their Pulpits} (Boston, 1745): 2. A similar pamphlet, \textit{The Sentiments and Resolutions of an Association of Ministers}, was published and sold early in 1745: “This Day Published,” \textit{BEP}, Issue 495 (February 4, 1745): 3.
The writers insisted that their design was not to dictate whom their fellow ministers should receive. Rather, they argued that any receipt of Whitefield should be done under less public circumstances. Their concern was that public receipt of Whitefield by reputable members of the clergy might provide undesirable encouragement to “Itinerants of far less name than Whitefield.”

The “country ministers” attempted to soften their criticism of Whitefield in order to make their message more palatable to fellow-ministers, who, they knew, might not share their general distaste for revivalism. Nonetheless, their position on both Whitefield and revivalism was clear. They were skeptical that Whitefield had done enough to distinguish himself from the less-reputable and unschooled itinerant preachers of revivalism. They encouraged the Boston and Charlestown, Massachusetts clergy to carefully consider Whitefield’s actions. “Are you satisfied Mr. Whitefield approves not of these disorders,” they asked. “Is he against Separations? Is he an Enemy to Enthusiasm?” They also felt that Whitefield ought to help to heal “the unhappy Divisions occasioned by his former Visit.”

The language of the letter demonstrates the ministers’ anti-revivalist inclinations, but it also suggests that they were not necessarily opponents of religious tolerance, provided that the practice of religion did not create disorder or

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181 Ibid, 7.
182 Ibid, 2.
183 Ibid, 3.
184 Ibid, 2.
185 Ibid, 3.
186 Ibid, 4.
undermine the ability of other factions to practice their religion peacefully. Because he inspired those who created disorder and did not sufficiently distinguish himself from the more “unsavory” elements of revivalism, Whitefield, in their estimation, did not live up to this standard.¹⁸⁷

Even some of Whitefield’s supporters, like Benjamin Colman, expressed concern about Whitefield’s imitators among the young, untutored ministers. Colman issued a letter on May 15, 1742, outlining his concerns. He called the itinerant ministers “confused in their Discourses, which are addressed to the Passions of their Hearers without opening their subjects in any proper Method for enlightening their minds.”¹⁸⁸ He also described them as “without [Whitefield’s] Gift.”¹⁸⁹

Clearly, Colman intended to defend Whitefield and counter tendencies to associate him with unschooled itinerants. In his reference to the “Passions of their Hearers,” he also conveyed his belief that Whitefield was not a dangerous enthusiast. His denunciations of enthusiasm were both a defense of Whitefield’s character and respectability, and of Colman’s as well. That this letter appeared in extract form in an anti-revivalist pamphlet by consummate Whitefield critic Charles Chauncy as an example of how a respectable sermon speaks to its partial success.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 5-6.
¹⁸⁸ An Extract from a Letter of Doctor Benjamin Colman, Boston, May 15, 1742 in Charles Chauncy, The State of New England in New England Since the Reverend Mr. Whitefield’s Arrival There (Glasgow, 1742): 42.
¹⁸⁹ Ibid.
Chauncy still detested Whitefield, but he did not contest Colman’s ministerial respectability, in spite of Colman’s defense of Whitefield.

Colman and the other Whitefield supporters, which included the cosmopolitan ministers that the aforementioned letters addressed, believed that the renewed interest in religion occasioned by Whitefield and the revivalists was worth the drawbacks. Whitefield and the Boston ministry who supported the revivalists launched a campaign to garner support behind the renewed interest in religious life and the spirit of interdenominational cooperation. A convention of ministers, which included Reverends Sewall and Prince of Boston, Reverend William Hobby of Reading and twenty-nine other members of the clergy, met together. The meeting produced a proclamation, in which the supporters announced that they thought it their

...Indispensable duty – without judging or censuring such of our brethren as cannot at present see things in the same light with us – in this open and conjunct manner to declare...that there has been a ‘happy and remarkable revival of religion in many parts of this land through un uncommon divine influence...’

The ministers did not all necessarily support Whitefield’s message of the New Birth, but, they recognized revivalism as a positive force, both in terms of its promotion of religious tolerance – as Whitefield symbolized – and counterpoint to the “long time of decay and deadness” that preceded it.

The ministers who signed this declaration included Samuel Sewall, Benjamin Colman, Thomas Prince, Nathan Webb, Samuel Cooper, Thomas Foxcroft, John

190 Belcher, *George Whitefield*, 263.
191 Ibid.
Checkly, Jonathan Gee, Samuel Eliot, and John Moorhead of Boston, as well as twelve ministers from Essex County, nine in Middlesex, six in Worcester, ten in Plymouth, one in Barnstable, three in Bristol (MA), three in York, five in New Hampshire and one in Rhode Island. A total of 114 ministers “gave attestations, either by their signature or by written attestations.” Of these, 96 had earned their Bachelor of Arts more than ten years previously, before the revival began. Whitefield’s support crossed denominational lines. The fact that more senior members of the clergy lent their support demonstrates that his message for religious tolerance also transcended the traditional bounds of the Great Awakening in New England.

Indeed, Michael Crawford and other historians have consistently found that revivalists in New England tended to elude democratic, economic and geographic categorizations. It is therefore not surprising that Whitefield produced such a response from amongst a diverse group of clergy. Another “dissenting protestant,” who wrote in support of Whitefield just a few years later, took this argument further. He argued that “the right of private judgment belongs to Christians of every Denomination.” The author wrote that churches ought to “have the Power, according to the Directions given in the Word of God, to chose their Own Minister.” He believed that there was “no greater Liberty” for dissenters.

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192 Ibid. 266.
193 Ibid.
196 Ibid.
Whitefield continued to face opposition, of course. In the winter of 1745, he was denied the use of several pulpits. In a visit to Ipswich, Massachusetts on February 7, 1745, Reverend Theophilus Pickering refused Whitefield access to the pulpit of the Second Church. Pickering cited an anti-revivalist publication by the Bishop of London on “Lukewarmness and Enthusiasm.” Whitefield caustically replied, “All ought to be thankful to the pilot who will teach them to steer a safe and middle course.”198 Pickering drolly replied, “But what if the pilot should take the vane for the compass?”199 While there is no evidence that the Bishop was referring directly to Whitefield in the pamphlet, Bishop Gibson had long been concerned with the effect of Whitefield on the British American colonies. The pamphlet was intended to send a message to Anglican clergy that revivalism was not to be tolerated. In doing so, it undermined the Anglican identity of revivalist itinerant preachers like Whitefield. Pickering took this message to heart snidely implying that Whitefield was ignorant of church doctrine and Anglican law.

Whitefield’s third visit to New England took place in 1748. He arrived in Boston from Pennsylvania on October 9, 1748. He reported an outpouring of support and tears on his arrival. He also briefly revisited Portsmouth, New Hampshire, continuing down to Rhode Island and then on to Maryland. The details of this voyage are scant, though it is clear that he continued to attract large crowds.

197 Ibid.
198 Belcher, George Whitefield, 270.
199 Ibid.
at his sermons. He returned to Great Britain after only a short time and remained there through 1751. He made three subsequent tours to the American colonies during the last nineteen years of his life. He also went through a series of changes during this period, facing obstacles to his efforts to establish a college and dealing with the death of his wife on August 9, 1769, following a bout of inflammatory fever. Shortly thereafter, he began to prepare for his seventh and final voyage to the Americas.

Whitefield bid his friends in England farewell in a sermon he delivered in the summer of 1769. He had delivered farewell sermons before other missionary voyages, and this sermon made no mention of any plans to remain in the Americas permanently. He arrived in Georgia for the last time in January 1770. In a letter to his friend Robert Keen of London, he wrote that he enjoyed “a greater share of bodily health than I have known for many years.” Whitefield obviously did not expect that he would be dead in just over seven months.

Whitefield spent several months in Georgia, then the middle colonies. He returned to Boston in September 1770. He experienced what he described as a “violent flux, attended with retching and shivering,” which hampered some of his missionary plans. Letters to his friends suggest that his presence in New England met with far more anticipation than his previous visits. On September 17, 1770, he

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200 Ibid: 356.
201 Ibid: 412.
203 Ibid.
204 Ibid: 431.
wrote to his friend Mr. Wright of Bethesda, “people are so importunate for my stay in these parts, that I fear it will be impracticable.”\(^{205}\) Just a week before his death, Whitefield wrote to his friend Richard Keen, “Poor New England is much to be pitied; Boston people most of all. How grossly misrepresented! What a mercy that our Christian charter cannot be dissolved!”\(^{206}\) Whitefield clearly felt that he was needed. He reportedly continued to preach up until two days before his death, heading to Newburyport to honor a preaching engagement on the following Sunday morning.\(^{207}\)

Whitefield’s experiences in New England changed both him and the religious landscape of the region dramatically. His experiences with the dissenter culture of New England excited and encouraged him, even if, as was the case in South Carolina, his understanding of the local colonial culture was often incomplete or inaccurate. Like his experiences in the more southern colonies, they also demonstrated just how contentious a figure Whitefield had become within less than five years of the start of his missionary career. Even though each colony had its own character and religious geography, his Anglican respectability in the colonies was all but gone among the Anglican clergy by the early 1740s.

Whitefield also had another lasting impact on the subaltern members of the New England community by playing a significant role in the early career of Mohegan preacher Sansom Occom. When Occom made his preaching debut in 1766, he did so

\(^{205}\) Ibid.

\(^{206}\) Ibid: 432.

\(^{207}\) Ibid: 433.
in Whitefield’s London Tabernacle. Occom’s preaching followed Whitefield’s example of “using sin as a leveler of racial and class distinctions." 208 His sermons were “an occasion to convict all present – ‘Indians, English and Negroes’ – as sinners in need of redemption." 209

Although apparently quite supportive of Occom, Whitefield managed to sow some discord between Occom and his mentor, Eleazar Wheelock, before the former returned to the colonies from Great Britain from his preaching tour. Occom’s tour of Great Britain was intended in part to raise money for Dartmouth College, much as Whitefield had once done for Bethel Orphan House. However, Occom grew concerned about the racial composition of the College after Whitefield told Occom that he had been “a fine Tool to get Money for them (Wheelock), but when you get home, they won’t Regard you, the’ll Set you a Drift [sic].” 210 Occom wrote to Wheelock to express doubts about his mentor’s intentions. In this letter, he complained about the lack of Indian students at Dartmouth and told Wheelock what Whitefield said to him about being used as a fundraiser, informing Wheelock, “I am ready to believe it now." 211 Occom continued to feel Whitefield’s influence through the rest of his life. On April 2, 1786, nearly sixteen years after Whitefield’s death, Occom recorded a dream about Whitefield in his journal. In this dream, he

208 Joanna Brooks, ed, The Collected Writings of Sansom Occom, Mohegan, 162.
210 To Eleazar Wheelock, Jul 24: 1771, in Ibid: 99. Note: Occom’s concerns were not without merit. Wheelock had complained in his “Continuation of the Narrative of the Indian Charity-School (1771) about the “bad conduct” of the Native American alumni and said that he believed that “white students were better candidates for the ministry.” See Brooks, ed, The Collected Writings of Sansom Occom, 98n68.
211 Ibid: 99.
envisioned Whitefield preaching to “a great number of Indians and Some White People,” as he had so often done in the past.212 Whitefield saw Occom, took his hand in a fatherly manner, and told him “I am glad that you preach the Excellency of Jesus Chris yet.”213 In this dream, Whitefield continued to praise Occom for his work, which Occom interpreted as a divine approval of sorts for his life’s work.

As noted previously, Whitefield’s preaching was also a source of inspiration to Phillis Wheatley, the influential black writer and voice of African-American Christians against slavery, and to revivalist preacher John Marrant, who became an evangelical Christian after he heard Whitefield speak as a teen. Marrant’s ministry was particularly focused on the catechism of blacks and Native Americans throughout British North America.214 In 1789, he preached in Boston at the invitation of the African Lodge of the Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons, or Prince Hall Masons. This Lodge was established by Prince Hall, in the 1770s, as the first brotherhood for African Americans.215 Marrant’s sermon emphasized the “the great duties of Brotherly Love” and reminded its listeners that they were “all members of the body of Christ with the Church.”216 “First the anciency

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213 Ibid.
[sic] of Masonry, that being done, will endeavour to prove all other titles we have a just right as Masons," he said," to claim -- namely, honourably, free and accepted."\textsuperscript{217} Marrant's words were directly specifically at African Americans, but the Brotherhood was, unsurprisingly, quite active in speaking out against slavery and violence against blacks, and in championing for other rights for blacks.\textsuperscript{218} Marrant's words were another example Whitefield's influence on antislavery forces in the colonies, and in New England particularly.

Whitefield's own efforts could never fully shape his image. People's understandings and uses of his public image, in fact, contradicted Whitefield's own image of himself as an orthodox Anglican. Since Whitefield continued to appeal to the Bishop of London for permission for various projects of his, at least through 1768, it is clear that he still believed that he was engaged in a dialog with the Church about religious tolerance. He seems never to have recognized that he had all but alienated himself from the Church, even to the end of his life. His funeral and memorialization in the colonies, which was orchestrated by Whitefield himself, are also intriguing. Whitefield does not appear to have expected to die quite when he did, but by a number of accounts, he did set clear wishes as to how he was to be remembered. This included an entombment within the Old South Presbyterian Church in a colony that was profoundly divided on the subject of religion. It also included sermons by a number of non-Anglican ministers, including John Wesley. Whitefield's will does not detail his funeral wishes, and there are no records that

\textsuperscript{217} Ibid: 5.

confirm whether these plans were made as he knew he was dying, or if he made them earlier. Nonetheless, his funeral was, in many ways, the ultimate manifestation of his 1739 declaration that “the World is Now My Parish,” as people from across denominational lines paused to mourn and remember him and his tomb became a site of sacred and contested memory for evangelical Christians.\textsuperscript{219} Because he was a pluralist protestant icon in life, it was not always clear what his legacy would be after death. The malleability of his public image meant that his celebrity was readily co-opted for a variety of purposes.

\textsuperscript{219} Tyreman, \textit{George Whitefield}, 316. Note: Whitefield’s mentor, John Wesley is the originator of “The World is Now My Credit,” but Whitefield echoed it frequently.
CHAPTER SEVEN

INVENTING GEORGE WHITEFIELD

Fig. 4: Death of Rev. George Whitefield, 1770. John Carter Brown Archive of Early American Images. Accession 8134-1

The final phase of the evolution of Whitefield’s public image came with this death, memorialization and entombment in a basement crypt of the Old South Presbyterian Church in Newburyport, Massachusetts in 1770. His funeral was a veritable spectacle, as he was mourned by figures of various denominations on both sides of the Atlantic. His entombment in the colonial church that he helped to found and the subsequent pilgrimages to his grave claimed him as a central icon of trans-Atlantic religious revivalism. Any chance of Whitefield having a legacy as an Anglican who simply wanted reform of the Church came to an end, particularly with his enshrinement in a Presbyterian church. To his followers, the mourning that
followed his death also gave rise to a legacy that was suggestive of sainthood. For his American followers at the outset of the American Revolution, it suggested an image that was part heroic, and entirely filiopietistic, as they sought to construct a new religious identity and tradition in a new republic without a national church.

Because of the lack of ties to any specific formal institution, Whitefield’s legacy was incredibly fragmented. He left behind an enormous body of religious literature in which he consistently reaffirmed his ties to the Church of England. Other writings about him either spoke of his trans-denominational appeal, or occasionally tied him with the Methodist Church, which formally split with the Church of England in 1790. As an extension of his public image, his extensive writings were also posthumously used by others, and in ways that Whitefield likely never intended. Anthony Benezet’s mostly unsuccessful attempt to reframe Whitefield’s image, vis-à-vis Whitefield’s early criticisms of slavery, into the abolitionist narrative, serves as one example.

Most accounts of Whitefield recognized that he was a trans-national figure. As this chapter demonstrates, his tomb drew pilgrims from around the Anglo-American world. After his death, memorials and other literature appeared in periodicals both in Great Britain and, after the War for Independence, the United States. At the outbreak of the American Revolution, and thereafter, American evangelicals sought to carve out a national religious culture began to invoke Whitefield’s image as a symbol of their own.

As Whitefield himself constructed a public self-image through print, some of his followers worked to re-construct that image into the national narrative of the
young United States, re-creating Whitefield as a heroic founding father. As Benedict Anderson notes of the early religious print-market, “Protestantism was always fundamentally on the offensive.”¹ Anderson’s point was directed at the proliferation of print culture during the Reformation, but it is relevant here nonetheless. Whitefield’s evangelical followers harnessed the image that he carefully constructed through this religious print-market in imagining a post-Revolutionary Protestant American society, a phenomenon that Anderson identifies as an “old language” used within a “new model.”² “Print-languages,” Anderson observes, “laid the basis for national consciousness.”³ In this case, it is a national conscious that is specific to evangelical Americans, rather than Americans as a whole.

Whitefield’s preaching, as Lambert points out, was contemporary with the transition from “toleration” to “religious liberty” in the colonies, but the American brand of “religious liberty” that these Christian writers have attributed to him did not solidify until after the American Revolution, becoming enshrined in the first amendment of the Constitution, seventeen years after Whitefield’s death. And, while his preaching did inspire anti-slavery resistance, as the fourth chapter demonstrates, his influence there was still felt throughout the Anglo-American world, rather than restricted to a young United States.

² Ibid: 67-82.
³ Ibid: 44.
Whitefield’s Final Years

Publications critical of Whitefield and his doctrine continued appear throughout Great Britain and its dominions during the last years of his life. In 1764, English astronomer James Harman twice published his observations on Whitefield’s character. He attempted to use astronomical calculations to discredit Whitefield’s frequent assertions that his success was assured by Divine will, but rather, were the result of a “mere Fatality, evident in the fatal Catastrophe of his unhappy, gloomy, and misguided Followers.”⁴ The publication included a note, which suggested that some of Harman’s readers “may...take him for a Conjuror.”⁵ The anonymous writer or editor gleefully described Harman as “a comical, out-of-the-way sort of a Genius, who has contrived to plague the Methodists, and their great Leader, in the style of an Almanac-maker, and with all the antiquated jargon of Astrology.”⁶ Bemusement aside, while the article is not, on the whole, particularly “pro-Whitefield,” it does suggest that Whitefield’s popularity was sufficient that there were some, in the press, who saw attempts to discredit Whitefield as futile.

Other criticisms included a published letter to Whitefield that was published from Reverend Dr. Durell, Vince-Chancellor of Oxford, a year before Whitefield died. It blamed “Methodism,” and Whitefield particularly, for the “Neglect of the Parochial

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⁵ Ibid: 77.
⁶ Ibid.
Clergy.” It also asserted Durell’s belief in the necessity of “Episcopal ordination, Episcopal baptism, and Episcopal communion” as “essentials of the Christian religion.” The implication, of course, was that in his insistence on the conversion experience as tantamount both to the trueness of faith and qualification to serve as a minister, Whitefield was neither a proper Anglican, nor a true Christian. The description of Durell’s letter in The Monthly Review’s Catalog held some Whitefieldian sympathies and described Durell as “a zealous stickler for the established church, and of course, an utter enemy to all dissenters, as such.” This entry underscores not only the success of his media campaign, but just how divisive a figure Whitefield had become.

None of this divisiveness derailed Whitefield’s popularity, of course. News of George Whitefield’s travels throughout the colony and Great Britain continued to appear in newspapers throughout his career, with numerous accounts of his arrivals, preaching and departures in various localities around the colonies and Great Britain. These newspaper accounts frequently reported Whitefield’s

8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
activities in other vicinities. A Boston newspaper, for instance, reported

Whitefield’s visit to Charles Town in January 1765, along with this plans to return to

Georgia to tend to some legal matters concerning his goal of turning Bethel Orphan

House into a college. The Pennsylvania Gazette reported Whitefield’s arrival in

London in August 1763, in a “poor State of Health.” Two additional colonial papers

reported Whitefield’s preaching activities in Scotland and England respectively.

Some of the press was negative. In September 15, 1763, The Pennsylvania

Gazette published a report by Presbyterian minister John Brainerd refuting claims

that “the Christian Indians in New-Jersey, under my Care, were many of them gone

back to join the murdering Indians on the Frontier.” The report does not mention

Whitefield by name, but Brainerd was a revivalist profoundly influenced by

Whitefield. John’s brother David, with whom he ministered, matriculated Yale in

1740, just as a division arose over the influence of visiting preachers, including

Gilbert Tennent and George Whitefield, as well as a controversial speech by

Jonathan Edwards, in inciting religious enthusiasm among the students.

7, BNL, Issue 3146 (June 7, 1764): 3; “Charles Town (South Carolina), Nov. 30/Dec.

7, PG (Jan. 3, 1765): 2; “Charles-Town, South-Carolina, Jan. 26,” BPB, Issue 395

(March 11, 1765): 3; and “Savannah, (in Georgia,) Feb. 21,” NHG, Vol. IX, Issue 443

(April 4, 1765): 3.

11 “Charles-Town, South-Carolina, Jan. 26,” BPB, Issue 395 (March 11, 1765): 3; Whitefield’s (unfulfilled) intentions concerning the Orphan House also appeared in

the newspapers, “The Memorial of the Reverend George Whitefield, Clerk,” GG, Issue


12 “James and Mary, Captain Sparks, is arrived in London from this Port,” PG, Issue

1812 (Sept. 15, 1763): 2.


Issue 368 (Feb. 5, 1750): 2.

David was expelled from Yale following these visits, after he said that his tutor, Chauncey Whittelsey, ‘has no more grace than a chair’ and inquired why Whittelsey “did not drop down dead” for fining students he perceived to be “over-zealous.” He was unable to finish his studies, but in spite of his lack of college degree, he received a license to preach from the Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Together with his brother John, he undertook missionary work among the Native Americans throughout the colonies. For anti-revivalists, a report of Christianized Native Americans attacking their non-converted brethren had two implications. The first is that they saw another example of revivalism stirring up religious division. The second is racial, akin to fears that revivalist conversions might induce African slaves to rise up against their masters. In order to continue their work, it was imperative for preachers like the Brainers to counter accusations that their teachings were an impetus for trouble. This was not unlike Whitefield’s earlier public appeal to African slaves to help him to prove to opponents of religious instruction for slaves, that their conversion would not be a negative influence on them.

There is continued evidence of Whitefield’s own hand in the press that he received in the newspapers, even if he could not control everything that appeared in print about him. The extract of one of Whitefield’s letters to an acquaintance, concerning his plans to voyage from Scotland to Boston aboard Jenny, and some

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comments about his ill-health, appeared in *The New York Gazette* on July 25, 1763.\(^{17}\) Other newspaper articles also mentioned the Itinerant’s health; in one instance, an article denoted a rather frail Whitefield as he struggled in “not more than two feet [of] water,” as he went “to cool himself” after preaching on a hot summer day.\(^{18}\) The personal details suggest that Whitefield contributed to these reports; the appearance of extracts of letters is entirely in line with his longstanding practice of slipping snippets of his letters and journals to the media.

**Founding of Old South**

![Fig. 4: Old South Presbyterian Church, Newburyport, MA. Photograph by the author.](image)

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\(^{17}\) “The Following is an Extract of a Letter from the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield to His Friend in This Town, May 11, 1763,” *NYG*, Issue. 241 (July 25, 1763): 2.

Whitefield’s association with Presbyterians – namely the Tennents – cost him a great deal in terms of his reputation with the Church of England. His public support of Gilbert Tennent’s sermon asserting the necessity of the conversion experience had particularly drawn fire from Church of England Commissary Alexander Garden and Charles Town’s Anglican planter elite as well as from New England dissenters who were concerned both with preserving Christian unity and respect for erudite, orthodox clergy. By the 1750s, newspapers began to specifically note when Whitefield preached at a Presbyterian church; for example, news of his 1754 visit to Philadelphia noted that he “preach’d almost every Evening in the New Presbyterian Church.”  

Nine years later, a Boston newspaper reported that Whitefield “preached twice in the Presbyterian Church....We hear he is to preach To Morrow at the Same Place,” during a 1763 visit to New York City. A similar report appeared in *The Boston Evening-Post*, in 1764, of a visit that Whitefield made to Boston in July 1764. A fourth example appeared in *The Newport Mercury* two months later, noting Whitefield’s sermon at “the new Presbyterian church,” in Fort Cumberland, Maryland, along with his plans to preach at St. Paul’s Church, the morning of September 3, 1764. While newspaper reports of his sermons were not uncommon, and these reports occasionally mentioned the church by name, it was far less common to note the denomination.

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Whitefield’s association with Gilbert and William Tennent, and his 1740 visit to New England that inspired the Presbyterian church in which he was eventually interred, brought about the special attention to his activities in Presbyterian churches. Old South Presbyterian Church was first founded in Newburyport, Massachusetts in 1742, as a small, unaffiliated house of worship of about one hundred members. By the time of the Church’s founding, Presbyterianism already had a long, contested existence in New England’s religious landscape. Scottish Missionary George Keith, a then-Quaker minister born into a Presbyterian family, wrote a lengthy pamphlet attacking the Church. He declared that these “independent visible churches” were “no true church of Christ” and urged their followers to “repent.” Keith’s attitude toward the Presbyterian Church was relatively typical of the reaction in much of the British Atlantic World toward Presbyterians, even into the eighteenth century.

Many of the Old South Church’s founding members came from the First Religious Society of New England, a Congregational parish founded in 1725. After its early members decided to withdraw from the First Religious Society, they called Jonathan Parsons of Lyme, Connecticut to serve as pastor. Parsons was a Yale-

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25 Ibid.
trained Congregationalist minister who was mentored by Jonathan Edwards and became strongly influenced by revivalism.

The founding of the Old South Church came on the heels of Whitefield’s first missionary tour of New England. In part on the advice of Whitefield, the Church’s brethren voted to unite with the Presbyterian Church on September 15, 1748.26 Whitefield’s influence is evident in the Church’s founding documents, which construed the Church as a “society of Believers...shewing their faith by an holy life and an heavenly conversation, being professed, subjected to Christ in the Faith and Order of the Gospel and by mutual consent.”27 The Church’s founding members declared that they were to “maintain the worship and ordinances of God,” but were “not necessarily bounded by the lines of Civil Society but may be made of many such societies, provided it be most for Edification.”28 The emphasis on the Gospel and mutual consent and the rejections of civil authority are particularly Whitefieldian.

Old South Church grew rapidly. An examination of its baptismal records reveal not only the names of several prominent New England families – Coffin, Greenleaf, Jewett – but also a steady increase in membership overall.29 The Church quickly outgrew its small meetinghouse, and in 1756, a new church building was constructed on its present-day location, on the corner of Federal and School Streets in Newburyport. At Whitefield’s death, this church took center stage for the

27 Call to Jonathan Parsons, *Old South Documents, Collection 2*, Box 4, Item 20. Archives of the Old South Presbyterian Church, Newburyport, Massachusetts.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid. *Book of Records, Old South Presbyterian Church, ca. 1746-1868*. Archives of the Old South Presbyterian Church.
memorialization of him as a major figure of the Great Awakening. Whitefield was thus an Anglican minister, yet one, who received funeral rites at and was entombed in a Presbyterian Church, and eulogized by protestant evangelicals around the British Atlantic World. Whitefield had never rejected his Anglican orders, even if the Anglican hierarchy largely no longer recognized or accepted him as an Anglican minister. Old South also became the site of a contented memory, wherein various fractions “claimed” Whitefield and sought to preserve his legacy and mold it in accordance with their own agendas.

**Death of an Itinerant**

![Image](image_url)

*Fig. 5: The former parsonage as it appears today. Old South Presbyterian Church. Photograph by the author.*

George Whitefield died in the parsonage of the Old South Presbyterian Church at around six o’clock in the morning on September 30, 1770, at the age of fifty-five. He was a recurrent sufferer of asthma and had experienced several serious bouts of wheezing in the last two to three days of his life. At around four o’clock on that Sunday morning, he awoke and said, “My asthma, my asthma is
coming on." He expressed concerns not only that he would be unable to meet his upcoming preaching commitments, but that he might be dying. Whitefield’s deathbed pronouncement was characteristic of eighteenth-century rituals of death in which the individual “prepared to die – preferably with resignation to God’s will,” which Whitefield certainly did. The wife of fellow evangelical preacher Jonathan Edwards expressed similar premonitions shortly before her own death. A local doctor was called to the parsonage to tend to Whitefield, but he confirmed Whitefield’s suspicions that his asthma attack was to be fatal. His death came just under an hour after the doctor arrived. It attracted an unusual amount of attention across the British Empire.

Shortly after Whitefield’s death, Reverend Parsons, the Pastor of the Old South Church, summoned Captain Fetcomb and several of Reverend Parson’s church elders and deacons to begin the preparations for Whitefield’s funeral. As was typically the case in the eighteenth-century, these preparations occurred quickly, and the rituals that surrounded death was a group event, to “insure that neither the

30 Belcher, George Whitefield, 438.
34 Belcher, George Whitefield, 440.
36 Ibid: 441.
dying nor survivors faced this momentous passage alone.”

Such rituals usually also included the decedent’s family, but Whitefield’s wife had predeceased him two years beforehand and their only child had died in infancy. A collection of clergymen and friends of Whitefield’s stood in their stead. Reverend Sherburne of Portsmouth sent several representatives to ask that Whitefield be interred at his church. Sherburne offered to have Whitefield’s body interred in Sherburne’s new tomb at his own expense. Parsons denied these requests, owing to a repeatedly expressed wish by Whitefield that if he died at Newburyport, he wished “to be buried before Mr. Parson’s pulpit.”

On the afternoon of Whitefield’s funeral, all the bells in Newburyport tolled for thirty-minute intervals at three separate times, first at one o’clock, then a second time at two in the afternoon, then again at three signifying the start of the funeral. Seventeenth-century New England churches, in contrast, “tended to look like large one-story houses.” The ringing of bells from church steeples reflected the changing tide of religious architecture in post-Puritan society, where Boston-area churches built after 1700 typically had bells, even if Bostonians were not always “quite clear what to do with them.” Churches and meetinghouses in the colonies

37 Isenberg and Burstein, Mortal Remains, 58.
38 Belcher, George Whitefield, 442.
41 Butler, Awash in a Sea of Faith, 110-112.
had traditionally been without steeple, which were considered ostentatious and suggestive of either of Roman Catholic churches, or of Anglican parishes, but the architecture of many colonial churches changed to make the parishes and worship experiences of dissenting churches more competitive with the influx of Anglican churches.42 It is therefore unsurprising, that some observers complained about the pandemonium and excess surrounding Whitefield’s funeral.43

The tolling bells were not the only signifiers of change. The emotional response of his followers, to Whitefield’s death also did so. Julia Stern and Nicole Eustace outline the “vicarious emotion” and the “persistent centrality of the sentimental in American life” during the eighteenth century.44 Whitefield’s funeral was marked by profound sentimentality. As Eustace observes, expressions of grief could have multiple interpretations, ranging from signs of respect to signs of rebellion. In many ways the emotion that surrounded death were not that different from enthusiasm, in their potential to be construed as seditious. “Any eighteenth-century statement of grief thus held the potential to challenge the standing social order,” she further notes; grief was “never inconsequential.”45

43 Butler, Awash in a Sea of Faith, 187.
The sentimentality that surrounded Whitefield’s death is reflective of both respect and a bit of rebellion. The respect and admiration of his followers was quite evident in the displays of grief. The suggestion of rebellion through this outpouring served as a challenge to anyone who might denigrate the late minister after his death and to elevate his standing and respectability posthumously. Whitefield’s death most certainly transformed him, and his status as an international religious figure meant that he no longer really “belonged” to a particular Protestant denomination.

For revivalists, there was the additional problem that the tension between eighteenth-century sentimentality and fears of false hopes of salvation ran deep around funerals. Those who believed in predestination balanced a need to issue reassurance as part of the funeral, yet not appear presumptuous about the achievement of salvation. “Once death had overtaken an individual,” David Stannard wrote, “there was nothing his family or acquaintances could do but reassure themselves that his spirit was at least in the hands of God.”46 The general fear against an excess in emotion surrounding a funeral was that survivors “played the hypocrite, and used stronger terms than their case would fairly allow of; and yet could not find how to correct themselves.”47

For the funeral of such a central figure in revivalism, the problem was two-fold. First they knew that they were memorializing a man who was a central figure of revivalism; if his salvation was ever in doubt, then so was that of his many

converts and followers. A second problem was that his followers knew that
Whitefield and his memory would come under fire from his critics. His elegies and
enshrinement therefore became an exercise in claiming, shaping and protecting his
legacy on the part of his supporters, in many ways, taking up Whitefield’s own self-
marketing campaign. Their actions were, in no small way, an extension and
preservation of the public image that Whitefield had so carefully constructed for
himself.

There was also a question of what was appropriate for the funeral of
someone who embraced Calvinism (as did his followers), as well as for someone
who projected his religious practices as a more orthodox form of Anglicanism.
Whitefield had carefully planned his funeral, and the rites he chose were not those
of the more simplistic funerary traditions of Calvinists and orthodox Puritans. His
funeral seemingly went against his own public sentiments about the corrupting
nature of the excesses of wealth. It also went against the prevalent seventeenth and
eighteenth-century attitudes that the wealth of the departed should “be spent on the
living rather than on opulent and elaborate funerals for themselves.”

Christians in general were suspicious of wealth, and many ministers across
denominations, including Whitefield, expressed alarm over the “effects of wealth
and luxury as manifest in growing contentiousness in many areas of public life.”
During his life, Whitefield had called out the southern planters for their gratuitous

49 Jack P. Greene, The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and
Identity from 1492 to 1800 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1992):
105.
displays, and in turn, had been called a hypocrite by his detractors for his own spending of habits and manner of dress. Thus, his funeral served as yet another example of the tension between long-held values and the promise of improvements in mobility and in the material lives of many in the eighteenth century.  

Whitefield’s funeral expenses, which included construction of his tomb, were estimated at around fifty pounds sterling. Since the second half of the seventeenth century, on both sides of the Atlantic World, funerals had tended to be simple occasions, and largely avoid “ceremony.” “Excessive displays of sadness or grief” were usually avoided. Whitefield’s funeral was very much a departure from this mentality, more reflective of the great social changes in New England society in the eighteenth-century. That is part of why some observers raised objections to the pomp that surrounded it.

Whitefield’s funeral arrangements were carefully attended to by an assemblage of his supporters, from among the New England clergy. Reverend Dr. Haven of Portsmouth, Reverend Rodgers of Exeter, Reverends Jewett and Chandler of Rowley, Reverend Moses Parsons of Newbury and Reverend Bass of Newburyport all served as pallbearers. The procession was a mile long, reduced to just under half the planned length because the day of the funeral was raw and rainy. The crowd of

53 Ibid: 103.
54 Ibid: 137.
one hundred and four couples that followed the coffin was greatly reduced because of the weather.\footnote{55}

When the cortege reached the end of its route, Whitefield's coffin was carried into Old South Presbyterian Church and placed near the vault at the foot of the Church's alter. Attendance at the funeral was estimated at around five thousand people.\footnote{56} Attendees included ministers from around the New England colonies. The turnout did not rival the largest audiences of Whitefield's sermons, but it was still a sizeable number of attendees for an eighteenth-century funeral.

Each of the clergymen who helped carry Whitefield's coffin took a turn memorializing him. Following his offering of prayers, Reverend Daniel Rodgers declared that he owed his conversion to Whitefield. According to Smith, he then cried out, “O my father, my father!” then stopped and wept as though his heart would break.\footnote{57} The remainder of the funeral service consisted of additional prayers, weeping and some singing. In his address, Reverend Jewett urged the congregation to “follow his [Whitefield's] blessed example.\footnote{58}
After his funeral, Whitefield was entombed in the crypt of the Old South Church, in accordance with his wishes. Church crypts were a longstanding practice dating back to Medieval Europe, but, as the previous discussion of funerary rituals suggests, they were an unusual practice in the Colonies, and particularly in Massachusetts. These places of memorialization became sacred spaces for the followers of the departed. Reverend Smith, who regularly attended to Whitefield, said, “When I visited the place where he is entombed, Newburyport, I could not help saying, ‘The memory of the just is blessed.’ Few are there like George Whitefield

59 When his fellow Anglican Evangelical Josiah Smith died in 1781, he was similarly venerated. The Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia had him interred within the crypts of its Arch Street Church, between the tombs of Gilbert Tennent and Samuel Finley. See David Ramsay, M.D., The History of the Independent or Congregational Church in Charleston, South Carolina from its Origin till the Year 1814 (Philadelphia: J. Maxwell, 1815): 16. Tract A1, BA.
however zealous, they do not possess the masterly power, and those who do, too often turn it to a purpose that does not glorify God.”

Whitefield’s tomb became a place where his followers came to honor his memory. His corpse became a tool of rhetoric; his remains became the subject of a cultural form of adoration. His legacy took on multiple meanings.

Whitefield’s death was also a catalyst for the widespread reprinting of his many writings. Barely a month after his death, The London Magazine circulated an abbreviated memoir of Whitefield’s life, which included extensive quotes from Whitefield himself. Not surprisingly, the Memoir mimicked the tone of his earlier autobiographies, which emphasized the centrality of his conversion experience in his turn to religious life. It concluded with an insistence upon Whitefield as “universally esteemed the principal teacher of the Methodists, that many characters have been given in the public prints to this effect.”

“The name of George Whitefield,” it proclaimed, “will long be remembered with esteem and veneration not only by his personal acquaintance...but by all true christians of every denomination, whilst vital and practical religion hath a place in the British dominions.”

This article, which also appeared in Scots Magazine at the same time, melded Whitefield’s own words with those who hoped to propagate his legacy in

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60 Belcher, George Whitefield, 436.


63 Ibid: 552.

64 Ibid.
print.\textsuperscript{65} The New-Jersey Magazine followed suit sixteen years after Whitefield's death, as it had with his Will. The article's heading was, "Memoires of the Life of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, A.M. According to the Account He Has Given of Himself in His Own Journals, Desired to be Inserted in the Present Magazine."\textsuperscript{66} There is no question that Whitefield desired publication of his journals, though it is almost certain, at this point, that it was his followers that placed the account, rather than a factor of the magazine posthumously following a Whitefield directive. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that Whitefield's followers were actively perpetuating the legacy he constructed for himself in the public prints.

Almost two years later, this effort was still ongoing. English Baptist Minister Reverend Andrew Gifford published a new volume, containing eighteen of Whitefield's sermons, in March of 1772. Advertisements appeared in both The Monthly Review and Scots Magazine.\textsuperscript{67} The following July, Whitefield's patroness, The Countess of Huntingdon, released The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield, a seven-volume publication that purported to contain Whitefield's sermons, journals and his other writings.\textsuperscript{68}


\textsuperscript{66} "Memoires of the Life of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield..." NJA (Dec. 1786): 44-49. AASHPC. Series 1.


Whitefield’s *Last Will and Testament*, which was probated in a Georgia court, was also reproduced in periodicals around Great Britain and its dominion. It appeared both in *The London Magazine* and *Scots Magazine*, the winter following Whitefield’s death. *Scots Magazine* published it in January 1771, and *The London Magazine* followed a month later. The Will was reproduced yet again in *The New-Jersey Magazine and Monthly Advertiser* sixteen years after Whitefield’s death, in December 1786. The appearance of memoirs and the legal documents of his state internationally all demonstrate the transnational nature of Whitefield’s character and image. Whitefield was not one whose influence was confined to a particular locality, and this was not lost on his followers.

Numerous other sermons and eulogies of Whitefield were offered in churches and appeared in the popular press throughout the British Atlantic world in the weeks and months following his funeral. Some of these eulogies were of those who admired Whitefield’s work in reinvigorating an interest in religious life. Many of them spoke to his preaching, his moral character, and the success of his labors. Others, like Phillis Wheatley and Selina, the Countess of Huntingdon, were devout followers. Some of the eulogies, including that of William Cowper, elevated Whitefield to a proverbial level of sainthood. Some of the eulogists were considered “respectable” clergy of dissenting sects; others were not.  

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70 “Mr. George Whitefield’s Will...” *NJM* (Dec. 1786): 49-52.

Among the most famous of the memorials was Phillis Wheatley’s elegiac poem, published shortly after Whitefield’s death, in 1770. Wheatley extolled Whitefield’s virtues, including his commitment to Christian charity through the Bethel Orphan House.\textsuperscript{72} Like others, she captured Whitefield in near-messianic terms, “Hail happy Saint on they immortal throne,” but expressed concerns about the posthumous fate of his message:

\begin{quote}
We hear no more the music of thy tongue,  
Thy wonted auditories cease to throng  
Thy lessons in equal’d accents flow’d!  

....  
Unhappy we the setting sun deplore!  
Which once was splendid, but it shines no more...\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

Another of Whitefield’s eulogists was John Wesley, his one-time mentor with whom he had fallen out after Whitefield challenged Wesley over his preaching in favor of free grace. In August 9, 1740, in response to comments of Whitefield about Wesley’s sermon, Wesley wrote to Whitefield. He wrote that, “There are bigots both for predestination and against it,” implying that Whitefield himself was a bigot.\textsuperscript{74} These words must have struck a painful cord with Whitefield, who frequently accused those of challenging his preaching and doctrinal interpretation of bigotry. Whitefield’s reply to Wesley, which he wrote on Christmas Eve of 1740, was abrasive and lengthy. The caustic letter concluded, “I cannot but blame you for

\textsuperscript{72} Phillis Wheatley, “An Elegiac Poem,” 1
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid: 5
censuring the clergy of our church for not keeping to their articles.”75 Although they did reconcile before Whitefield’s death, the great friendship between the two men was thereafter never quite the same.76

Still, Wesley eulogized his onetime friend twice in London on November 18, 1770, approximately seven weeks after Whitefield’s death. The sermon was delivered at the behest of Whitefield’s executors, who reiterated that it had been Whitefield’s wish for Wesley to deliver a eulogy.77 Wesley spoke once at the Chapel at Tottenham Court Road, again at the Tabernacle near Moorfields. Wesley recalled Whitefield’s commitment to righteousness, the history of his missionary work, and his ability to draw crowds of thousands to religious life. In contrast to his private comments of thirty years before, warning Whitefield against bigotry, Wesley wrote in his eulogy that Whitefield was “endued with the most nice and unblemished modesty.”78 He also remarked upon how Whitefield’s personal style altered the way individuals responded to clergy: “he feared not the faces of men, but “used great plainness of speech” to persons of every rank and condition, high and low, rich and poor; endeavoring only “by manifestation of the truth to commend himself to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”79 He continued, “You are not ignorant that

75 Whitefield to Wesley, Dec. 24, 1740, Bethesda, Georgia, on Ibid.


77 Tyerman, The Life of George Whitefield, 614.

78 John Wesley, A Sermon on the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield. Preached at the Chapel in Tottenham-Court-Road and at the Tabernacle near Moorfields, on Sunday, November 18, 1770 (London, 1770): 19.

these are the fundamental doctrines which he everywhere insisted on....You are not ignorant that these are the fundamental doctrines which he everywhere insisted on...the new birth, and justification by faith?...These let us insist upon with all boldness, at all times, and in all places...”

In doing so, Wesley acknowledged the way in which Whitefield’s ministry changed the relationship between minister and congregant and encouraged his audience to carry on in the example that Whitefield he had set.

His brother Charles Wesley also wrote elegiac verse about his late friend. He spoke of Whitefield’s ability to elicit conversion from “hardened sinners.” He also wrote of Whitefield’s labors in the colonies, as well as his championing of “redemption from above.” He also expressed regret that Whitefield was buried in the colonies, rather than back in Great Britain:

Shall I a momentary loss deplore,
Lamenting after him that weeps no more?
What though, forbid by Atlantic wave,
I cannot share my old companion’s grave,
Yet, at the trumpet’s call, my dust shall rise,
With his fly up to Jesus in the skies,
And live with him the life that never dies.

Charles Wesley’s elegy is romantic in tone, in that it also suggests that he will share Whitefield’s afterlife. The idea of living a Godly life with the promise of salvation, of course, had been rather central to Whitefield’s work during his life. Invoking it in

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\(^{80}\) Ibid: 25.

\(^{81}\) Tyerman, *The Life of George Whitefield*, 611.

\(^{82}\) Ibid, 612.

\(^{83}\) Ibid.
the elegy and encouraging Whitefield’s followers to continue to live these messages gave Whitefield a means to live beyond his death.

On another related point, Andrew Burstein’s analysis of romantic verse elegies describe how late eighteenth-century elegiacs sought to immortalize and enshrine figures, like Washington, who “required a metaphorical foundation that would withstand internal conflict.” The eulogies of Benjamin Franklin, George Washington and others extolled the virtues of the deceased and ascended their subjects to a “supernatural guardianship.” Burstein’s analysis speaks specifically to founding fathers, which Whitefield was not. Nonetheless, Whitefield certainly was a figure whose followers, like those who defended the “founders’ immortality,” knew that Whitefield’s legacy would need to be shored up against critics. Like the elegies of the founding fathers, those of Whitefield were also designed to help shape Whitefield’s memory and offer a dialogue about the character and future of the Great Awakening.

The remembrance by Selina, the Countess of Huntingdon was another poignant attempt at protecting and enshrining Whitefield’s memory. The lengthy memoir she commissioned was written by John Gillies, a minister of the Church of Scotland, and published two years after Whitefield’s death. The memoir detailed

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85 Ibid: 94.
86 Ibid: 96.
87 “Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield, M.A. Late Chaplain to the Right Honourable the Countess of Huntingdon.” Critical Review by a Society of
Whitefield’s entire life, beginning with his birth, education at Pembroke College, conversion and missionary work in the Americas. It also included an assessment of Whitefield’s character as a minister, and excerpts of select elegies, including Jonathan Parsons’s, delivered during Whitefield’s funeral service. Parsons's funeral sermon emphasized Whitefield’s Oxford roots and refuted common criticisms of Whitefield and the tendency of his opponents to conflate him with untutored itinerants. Another minister, Boston’s Reverend Pemberton wrote, “He was no contracted bigot, but embraced Christians of every denomination in the arms of his charity, and acknowledged them to be children of the same father, servants of the same masters, heirs of the same undefiled inheritance.” Every one of these eulogies spoke to Whitefield’s character and countered criticisms of him, including those who had characterized him as a force destructive of Christian unity. The volume concludes with an assortment of Whitefield’s published sermons.

The memoir served as a literary monument to Whitefield’s life, but as the conception of a revivalist minister and Whitefield’s dear benefactress, friend and executrix, it was also a conscious endeavor to shape Whitefield’s legacy. The repeated references to Whitefield’s education and sanctioned ordination are

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89 Ibid: 223.

particularly important, given revivalism and itinerancy’s increasing association with unschooled preachers. As previously noted, Whitefield was criticized by several New England ministers for what they saw as a failure on his part to differentiate himself from the unschooled itinerants.\textsuperscript{91} His followers clearly wanted to distinguish Whitefield from the “less reputable” sorts and to protect his memory from his critics.

Other devotees of the late minister also proactively sought to shape Whitefield’s legacy. William Cowper, an evangelical Christian, English poet and hymnodist who never personally knew Whitefield but greatly admired him, eulogized him in a verse. “Hope” somewhat martyrized Whitefield, recounting the criticisms that he faced over the course of his ministry. Cowper placed Whitefield upon a proverbial pedestal, calling him “pillaried on infamy’s high stage,” and “the butt of slander.”\textsuperscript{92} The poem also compares Whitefield to the Apostle Paul, recounting how he too, “cross’d cheerfully tempestuous seas” and bore “shame” of ridicule “where’er he went.”\textsuperscript{93} In the final verse, Cowper reframes Whitefield’s legacy in near-messianic terms:

\begin{quote}
Blush, Calumny; and write upon his tomb
If honest eulogy can spare thee room
They deep repentance of a thousand lies
Which aim’d at him, have pierced the offending skies
And say, Blot out my sin, confess’d deplored
Against Thine image in Thine Saint, O Lord!\textsuperscript{94}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid, 3.

\textsuperscript{92} Tyerman, \textit{The Life of George Whitefield}, 613.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid, 614.
Cowper's deeply romanticized remembrance of a man he never knew was not unlike that of Charles Wesley, even if Wesley made no comparisons between Paul and Whitefield. Cowper elevated Whitefield to sainthood and suggested his tomb as a site of pilgrimage for the faithful; the tomb did indeed become such a site, and Whitefield’s skull became a relic of sorts.

In the colonies, an article that appeared in the *Pennsylvania Journal* on October 1, 1770 reported the “melancholy” news of Whitefield’s death. The testimonial called him a “truly pious and very extraordinary personage” as well as a “prodigy of eloquence and devotion.”\(^95\) Another report attributed to Whitefield the conversion to “serious religion” of Reverend Dr. Cooper of Brattle-Street, Boston “called an enthusiast by none.”\(^96\) Cooper himself eulogized Whitefield, favoring his “holy and successful activity in the cause of vital and practical religion through the English dominions.”\(^97\) Sermons such as these solidified Whitefield’s legacy as one who succeeded in reaching across denominational lines in the Colonies and elsewhere.

Whitefield was unsurprisingly the subject of intense memorialization in Georgia, where, prior to his death, he arguably put down the most roots of any where in the British American Colonies. Georgians bought out the black fabric in the stores, and the pulpit, desk and organ loft of the church in Savannah were draped in black bunting. So too, were the pews of the governor and council, who convened at


\(^{96}\) Ibid: 446.

\(^{97}\) Ibid.
the State House, and processed in the Church. A lengthy memorial service followed. Georgia’s Legislature honored Whitefield with high eulogies in admiration of the preacher and unanimously appropriated a sum of money for having Whitefield’s remains disinterred and removed to Georgia. The proposed move was met with fierce opposition by the residents of Newburyport and was eventually dropped.98

Those of Whitefield’s followers who knew him when he was alive remained loyal for decades after his death. Reverend Archibald Alexander, a prominent Presbyterian theologian, visited the Old South Presbyterian Church in 1800. He reported seeing an elderly woman of between eighty to ninety years of age who had belonged to the Old South Presbyterian Church since Whitefield had helped to found it. She still attended the weekly prayer meeting.99

Whitefield’s tomb became the sight of macabre visits that continued long after his death. Two visits of note occurred in the eighteenth century. The first, as noted in the first chapter, was by a revolutionary chaplain and a group of officers that included Benedict Arnold, in 1775. When the visitors viewed Whitefield’s body, they removed his clerical collar and wristbands as souvenirs to pass among their soldiers.100 The second visit, by a trio of evangelical ministers, was more characteristic of visits to Whitefield’s tomb. Jesse Lee and two Methodist ministers entered the tomb in 1789 to view Whitefield’s body. They lifted the lid of his coffin

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98 Ibid: 447.
100 Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 188.
and peered inside, with Lee remarking “How quiet the repose, how changed the features.”\textsuperscript{101}

The nineteenth century saw a number of visits to Whitefield’s tomb. Methodist minister Abel Stevens visited sometime in the 1820s. He picked up the skull and examined it “with great interest.”\textsuperscript{102} Stevens was to become one of many to report handling the skull and scrutinizing it. Handling the skull became a sort of ritual that was an accepted and indeed, expected part of the pilgrimage to Whitefield’s tomb. The tomb and the rituals surrounding its visitation became a “cult of the skull” of sorts, the term Margaret Stratton coined to characterize the Neapolitan devotion to the dead and care for skulls and corpses.\textsuperscript{103}

Whitefield’s followers’ actions at his tomb differed from those of the Neapolitans, in that the Neapolitans cared for the remains “primarily in the hope of gaining material assistance.”\textsuperscript{104} Whitefield’s followers were more concerned with their spiritual wellbeing, and Whitefield became an “immortal messenger” of the Great Awakening.\textsuperscript{105} These visitations had a touch of supernatural, with Whitefield’s skull and remains taking on a role where, in death, Whitefield could serve as a potential aid to followers. They were a deeply spiritual experience for Whitefield’s admirers, who craved a direct contact with the man. As such, his tomb became a

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{103} Margaret Stratton, \textit{The Living and the Dead: the Neapolitan Cult of the Skull} (Chicago: Columbia College Press, 2010): 5.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid: 6-7.
\textsuperscript{105} Elizabeth Reis, “Immortal Messengers: Angels, Gender, and Power in Early America,” in Isenburg and Burstein, eds: 163.
sacred space. His tomb, combined with the “growing sentimentalization of religious culture,” communicated a desire for optimism about salvation, much as Jesus’ ascension had also suggested the promise of an afterlife.106

Two additional visits to Whitefield’s tomb occurred in 1834. One was by Freewill Baptist Minister David Marks, who remarked on the bones, and how the skull was “detached from the rest and turned over,” no doubt from the penchant of visitors for handling it. The other visit was by Congregationalists Reverend Andrew Reed of London and James Matheson of Durham. With the blessing of the Pastor of the Old South Presbyterian Church, the two men entered Whitefield’s tomb, where his coffin lay between those of his friends, the Reverends Prince and Parsons. They slipped the lid of Whitefield’s unsealed coffin aside, and in a Shakespearian gesture, Reed picked up Whitefield’s skull. He recalled being able to say little as he held the skull in his hand. Back in the chapel of the Church, Reed, Matheson and the Pastor held a special memorialization of Whitefield. The men “collected over the grave of the eloquent, the devoted and seraphic man, and gave expression to the sentiments that possessed us, by solemn psalmody and fervent prayer. It was not an ordinary service to any of us.”107

This ritual was repeated a year later, with another delegation from Great Britain and Ireland. The delegates included Reverend F. A. Cox of London and Reverend James Hoby of Birmingham. They made a thirty-nine mile detour from Boston specifically to visit Whitefield’s grave. Like Reed and Matheson, they

106 Ibid: 164.
107 Belcher, George Whitefield, 453.
descended into the vault and sat on either side of the coffin. By this time upper part of the lid of Whitefield’s coffin was removed for easier access to his remains. The two men handled the grand itinerant’s skull, whispering their adorations back and forth to each other.\textsuperscript{108} These visits continued well into the nineteenth century.

William B. Tappan wrote a verse about Whitefield in September 1837. His opening verse reads:

And this was Whitefield! – this, the dust now blending.  
With kindred dust, that wrapt his soul of fire –  
Which, from the mantle freed, is still ascending.  
Though regions of far glory, holier and higher.\textsuperscript{109}

Tappan’s verse clearly refers to the power and veneration surrounding Whitefield’s remains.

Whitefield continued to appear in the popular press long after his death. An 1845 article in one of London’s daily papers detailed Whitefield’s life, with considerable attention paid to his death, funeral and tomb. The writer recounted his experiences discussing Whitefield with an unnamed person in Ipswich, Massachusetts, where Whitefield had once met with widespread refusals by local ministers to use their pulpits. The quite elderly man, had heard Whitefield preach in Ipswich during his childhood. The writer mentioned his plans to travel to Newburyport the next day. The old man replied, “I suppose, sir, you’ll be going to see his bones? He was buried at Newburyport, and you can see ‘em if you like.”\textsuperscript{110} The writer resolved to

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid: 454.  
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid: 456.
visit Whitefield’s crypt. When he was in Newburyport, he visited the room in which Whitefield died, and then walked the short distance to the Church. The sexton of the Old South Presbyterian Church escorted the writer to the basement. He lifted the coffin’s lid, adjusted the lamp and told the writer, “Here, look in...THAT’S THE MAN.”111 The writer held Whitefield’s skull like the others before him, then put it back into the coffin.112

Whitefield died of natural causes; he cannot be construed as a martyr. Still, Whitefield’s skull had become a connection to a fallen symbol and his message transcended his death. The practice was suggestive of the “cult of relics” that existed during the middle ages, as “sacred objects that have been in touch with the body.”113 In Whitefield’s case, there were obvious biblical connotations, where relics of purported saints were kept in churches for veneration by the faithful. No miracles have been attributed to Whitefield, nor, was any care to preserve the remains taken, as in bodies of saints that were preserved as relics. Nonetheless, his remains were still housed in a place where pilgrims could visit them, and, in a manner of speaking, “worship and cherish them,” as a connection to the living

111 Ibid: 458.

112 The recurrent disturbance of Whitefield’s remains for souvenirs and memorialization rituals did have precedent in Anglo-American history. After his beheading, royalist supporters of King Charles I reportedly rushed the scaffold so that they could dip their handkerchiefs in their fallen king’s blood. This collection of blood served as a symbol for a sort of “cult of the dead” for a king that Philip Henry and other royalists saw as a martyr to their cause.

man. The distribution of “parts” among the faithful as the collar and cuffs of Whitefield, “received a share of the sanctification from the grace dwelling in them.”

The rituals surrounding veneration of Whitefield’s skull also assumed a posthumous existence vis-à-vis a “holy necromancy,” of sorts. This was not the occult art ritual of necromancy that was feared as a challenge to religious orthodoxy and outlawed in many of the British American Colonies by the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, in which practitioners believed that they could truly resurrect the dead. Whitefield’s followers who visited his tomb did not expect to actually raise the dead. Rather, the rituals surrounding the visitation of his grave and the rituals around the handling of his remains served to rejuvenate the messenger. The visitations continued until 1932, when the town of Newburyport ordered the crypt be sealed for sanitary reasons.

**Conclusion: Meaning of an Icon**

In 1739, near the beginning of his missionary work in the colonies, Whitefield echoed his mentor, John Wesley, when wrote to a friend, “The whole world is now my parish.” “Wherever my Master calls me I am ready to go and

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115 Ibid.
preach his everlasting gospel,” he continued. Whitefield had resigned himself to, and even embraced, the idea that he would never be a settled minister. Nonetheless, this itinerant life was also incompatible with his desire to be seen as an Anglican reformer. From what Whitefield had come to mean for religious liberty in the colonies, the failure of his defense of slavery to align him with the Anglican planter elite in the colonies, and his death and enshrinement in the colonies, Whitefield never realized his goal of combining his itinerancy and his emphasis on the new birth with Anglican respectability. Even after his death, he remained a central figure of the pluralist Great Awakening and a hero to evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic. In spite of his virulent quarrel with John Wesley as well as the fact that he died twenty-one years before the official split of the Methodist Church from Anglicanism, he became recognized as a central figure in Methodism’s founding, though much to Whitefield’s consternation, Wesley’s Arminian brand of Methodism was more influential in the colonies than Whitefield’s Calvinism. In any case, Whitefield’s influence expanded well beyond that of any settled minister, but it alienated him from the Church of England, even as it transformed him into an icon. Whitefield continued to be frustrated with this conundrum through much of his life, though he appeared to accept the fact that his success at conversion came with a price. His role as an icon of American religious life would only grow after his death.

Whitefield’s pluralism also suggests another problem regarding the complexity of his legacy. The territoriality over Whitefield’s body, and the fact that

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119 Ibid.

he was eulogized on both sides of the Atlantic, demonstrate that he was a figure of the Anglo-American religious world. Conversely, his entombment in the colonies and particularly the well-known elegy by Phillis Wheatley claimed George Whitefield as a heroic American figure. As a result, determining whose hero Whitefield was proves challenging, as multiple factions sought to “claim” him.

Many contemporary American evangelicals still claim him as a hero of American religious life, and even a founding father figure. His entombment in Massachusetts did effectively create a “body politic,” of sorts. During the period of the Early Republic, the remains of important public figures became “holy objects” that were “designed to promote patriotic memory and national feeling.” Matthew Dennis particularly notes how the bones of soldiers were venerated as a means to “continue to cultivate memory, nationalism, patriotism, and the particular political agendas of memorializers.” Whitefield was not truly a national figure like the patriot-martyrs whose bones received reverential treatment after the American Revolution, but his body did serve as a “holy object,” intended to keep alive the spirit and momentum of revivalism after the death of one of the movement’s vital figures. His tomb most certainly helped to “cultivate memory” of Whitefield and revivalism as well as of revivalisms’ advancement and expansion. Whitefield’s tomb effectively became a symbol of the movement, just as the bones of the patriot-martyrs served as powerful symbols to a young country also involved in a process of self-determination.

121 Matthew Dennis, “Patriotic Remains: Bones of Contention in the Early Republic,” in Isenburg and Burstein, eds, Mortal Remains, 137.

122 Ibid.
Revivalism was an international movement, rather than uniquely American. To claim Whitefield as strictly American, or as a founding father figure is problematic on a number of levels. First, doing so neglects the international dimensions of the Great Awakening. That Whitefield’s tomb continued to draw evangelicals from both sides of the Atlantic well into the nineteenth-century, well after American national identity was established, shows he was more than a purely American hero or founding father.¹²³

Whitefield was neither particularly engaged in the discourse of republicanism, nor shared the commitments to civic humanism embraced by the Founding Fathers. He admired Penn’s liberty of conscience, but the liberty of conscience is a construct of the English Civil War that cannot be conflated with the revolutionary rhetoric that led to the American Revolution. Moreover, while the liberty of conscience had some religious connotations, it was not exclusively a religious construct. Claiming it as such is a gross oversimplification.

Numerous historians, starting with Bernard Bailyn, have keenly asserted that the origins of the American Revolution were political, rather than social.¹²⁴ “The ideas, the fears, the pattern of responses and expectations in public affairs revealed by the Revolutionary leaders before Independence,” Bailyn wrote, “prove in fact to have been built into the very structure of political culture in eighteenth-century

¹²³ The Old South Church has maintained a visitor’s log to the tomb since 1868.

Britain and America.”125 “These fears, these ideas,” Bailyn continued, “had a peculiar relevance and force in the American colonies, for America’s political world was different from England’s in ways that gave these ideas a heightened meaning.”126 Whitefield occasionally acknowledged current events in his journal, and in letters to friends, but there is no evidence that he was attune to these differences in political culture.

In contrast with Whitefield, some colonial religious leaders did, on occasion, discuss political matters from the pulpit. In the years leading up to the Revolution, Jonathan Mayhew, for instance, occasionally delivered highly charged politicized sermons that are suggestive of the growing rift between Great Britain and the American colonists. For example, many Loyalists blamed one sermon of his for “inciting the riot” that “destroyed Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson’s mansion the next day.”127 Other clergy, like Samuel Cooper, were much better at walking a line that “muted the troubles of the day with a reassuring, warm spirituality,” an ability appreciated by Whigs and Tories alike.128 In short, there were certainly “patriot preachers,” but Whitefield was not among them. In fact, careful attention to sermons of the eighteenth century revealed that, although dissenting clergy occasionally spoke of the “tyranny” of Charles I and II against


126 Ibid.


128 Ibid.
nonconformists, for most, it was a limited sort of engagement with politics that did not really cross into revolutionary rhetoric, even if religion and politics were commonly intertwined in the eighteenth century.

As the previous discussion of the erosion of Whitefield’s Anglican identity suggests, many of his contemporaries made connections between Whitefield and dissenter politics. However these connections drew on historical memory, rather than contemporary events. A farcical script that was reproduced in The Newport Mercury suggests that Whitefield’s contemporaries recognized his oratorical skills, but saw him as a troublemaker who stirred up old religious passions. This script depicts and exchange between a “Mr. Jack Wilkes” and a “Lord Mercurio.” Wilkes, a staunchly anti-Catholic English politician and satirist who was seen as an “imprudent demagogue,” was in his apartment reading Milton’s Paradise Lost when Mercurio dropped by. The two began to discuss Wilkes’s creation of a dictionary, wherein Wilkes suggested the inclusion of some sub-headings under the term “minister.” Wilkes suggested that the sub-headings include, “insolent minister, all-grasping minister...Hungry harpies of the minister; Ministerial zeal; Ministerial effronter...Dregs of ministerial power.” All of this is suggestive of Wilkes’


frequent scathing criticisms of the appointment of Lord Bute, a Scottish “favorite” of George III.\textsuperscript{132} Mercurio cut Wilkes off, “Enough, enough – The dictionary is a real treasure; and every word in it, when transplanted into \textit{The North Briton} [Wilkes’s weekly newspaper], should be printed in Italics, that the readers may pronounce them with a proper [derisive] emphasis.”\textsuperscript{133} Wilkes continued, suggesting other terms, “English Whig; Tools of corruption and despotism; Despotic principles; Highland chiefs; Tyranny of a Stuart.”\textsuperscript{134} He was once again cut off by Mercurio:

\begin{quote}
Stop, Jack; stop – My very ears are stunn’d. One half of those dreadful words properly applied, is enough to throw half the people of England into a panic, as effectually as George Whitefield does his auditory, by thundering out the devil, hell, and damnation to them...\textsuperscript{135}
\end{quote}

This exchange recognized the power of particular words, even one hundred years after the English Civil War, to incite strong feelings in those who read them. Mercurio also acknowledged the ability of Whitefield to stir up people’s passions, as well as the potential for religious speech to contribute to revolution. Nonetheless, the character’s primary concern in invoking Whitefield is his distaste for Whitefield’s revivalist theology, rather than identifying him as revolutionary character. And certainly, the play concerned British religious toleration rhetoric, rather than the American religious liberty that Whitefield’s followers tried to associate with him.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
This play was published in 1764, after tensions between Great Britain and the Colonies had already begun. It followed enactment of the 1763 Royal Line of Proclamation. The play was also published four months after the Sugar Act and only weeks before the Currency Act. Yet, the concerns about Whitefield are, as Noll notes, limited to his focus on eternal matters, rather than the politics of the growing imperial crisis. Absent, is any evidence that the writers made a connection between Whitefield and the contemporary politics of the 1760s.

Given the article’s obvious disdain for dissenter politics, and the speed with which Whitefield’s opponents jumped on any instance of him stirring up dissent, any displays of revolutionary politics on his part would have almost certainly provoked comment. And indeed, with perhaps one exception, reports of his activities that appeared colonial newspapers during this period contain only benign announcements of his travels – when and where he preached, how many times he preached in a location, and occasional reports of his health.136 These reports occasionally appeared alongside other news items concerning the Seven Years War, but there are no reports of his “preaching politics.”

There were, on the other hand, some connections made between Great Britain’s renewed interest in its American colonies after the Seven Years War and

136 “London, Oct. 14, To the Citizen,” BPP, Issue 23 (Jan. 23, 1758): 1. Note: The writer suggests that “the Rev. Mr. Whitefield, and his Flock” are the only members of the “Divine” who has “thrown even a hint into his sermon, or in the list of his addresses of troubles and adversities.” Whitefield may have mentioned the War in a sermon, but given that this appeared before the end of the Seven Years War, and that no details are noted as to the nature of his sermon, it is, at best, weak evidence that Whitefield might have occasionally mentioned current events in his preaching. Since the tone of the notice is derisive toward Whitefield, it is likely that any political speech would have been reported as such.
the inroads made by the Church of England by dissenters in the colonies. According to Frank Lambert, by the 1760s, there was already a concern in the colonies that “a resident bishop of the Church of England,” might be installed.\(^\text{137}\) “It was not a new threat,” Lambert notes, “but in the broader context of Britain’s new imperial policies of the 1760s and 1770s, it took on a much more sinister character.”\(^\text{138}\) Given the enormous amount of attention that Whitefield received in the press and the general pre-occupation with the War in this period, if his preaching turned patriotic, it would have appeared in the news. Collectively, all of this casts considerable doubt on Whitefield as a figure of revolution, or that his preaching was intertwined with contemporary statescraft or politics.

Whitefield was certainly a figure in the shift from “tolerance” to “religious liberty” that began by the middle of the eighteenth century. Nonetheless, he was still irretrievably tied to the greater discussion about toleration and religious freedom throughout the British Atlantic world, specifically to the colonies. He was, as one contemporary observer in the Americas wrote, “an ‘imported Divinity,’ likening Whitefield and the revival he sparked to the latest London fashions.”\(^\text{139}\)

Whitefield frequently invoked the threat of “tyranny,” but it is also very important to differentiate between the politics of toleration that inspired Whitefield and the politics behind the American Revolution, over one hundred years later. Whitefield shared the anti-Catholic and social reform ideologies commonly

\(^{137}\) Lambert, \textit{The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America}, 209.

\(^{138}\) Ibid.

\(^{139}\) Ibid: 135.
attributed to English Whigs, but there is no evidence either that he self-identified as one, or that anyone in the colonies identified him as a Whig. And, as Mark Noll demonstrates, revivalism was not always compatible with the Whig ideology that fueled the American Revolution. Jonathan Edwards was, as Noll noted, castigated by those tutored in “Real Whig Political reasoning,” who used the language of Whigism to challenge any religious preaching they saw as suggestive of the influence of the Church of England. Even though he intermingled considerably with dissenters and, on many occasions, was critical of the behaviors of a number of Church of England clergy, Whitefield identified very strongly with the Church of England. This makes him a very unlikely Whig.

Whitefield’s politics instead, were “much more determined by anti-Catholicism than republicanism.” Anti-revivalist and staunch Whitefield critic Charles Chauncy was, in contrast to Whitefield, much more inclined to employ Real Whig ideology from the pulpit, although he, too, was still pre-dominantly concerned with inflating anti-Catholic sentiments throughout the colonies, “referring to the pope as the ‘Anti-Christ’ and the ‘Man of sin’” as colonists celebrated British defeats over Catholic France following the Siege of Louisbourg. Even if this can be argued as patriotism, in the context of the Seven Years War, it is still British patriotism, rather than American. There were occasional references to America and Americans

\[140\] Noll, *America’s God*, 47.

\[141\] Ibid, 77.

\[142\] Ibid, 79.
among the colonists by the 1750s, but the Seven Years War was nonetheless, an imperial war and had no revolutionary underpinnings.

Arguably the most “political” of Whitefield’s sermons from the middle of the eighteenth-century, was a 1746 sermon titled *British Mercies*, a response to the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745-1746. This rebellion was the second of the eighteenth-century Jacobite Risings, in which the Scottish Prince Charles Edward Stuart (“Bonnie Prince Charlie”) raised an army of Highland clansmen, in an unsuccessful attempt to restore the Catholic Stuart house to the British throne. This uprising took place during the Austrian War of Succession, when a substantial part of the British Army was occupied in combat on the European continent. It was ultimately quashed on April 16, 1746, with British success at the Battle of Culloden and the enactment of a pair of laws, which stripped Scottish lords of their heritable jurisdictions (The Heritable Jurisdictions Act 1746) and outlawed traditional Highland dress (The Act of Proscription 1746).

*British Mercies*, preached in Philadelphia, was a response to this rebellion, which he called “unnatural,” but its concerns are almost entirely focused on what victory meant as far as preserving Great Britain as a Protestant state. The sermon opens with a brief mention of the “remarkable Deliverances wrought out for the Kingdoms of Great-Britain and Ireland, from the Infant State of William the Conqueror.”143 In light of the Jacobite uprising’s effort to restore a Catholic monarch and Charles Edward Stuart’s later William, the invocation of a historic, Norman king

should be understood to reflect Whitefield’s fears of the infiltration of a foreign, Catholic threat.144

His sermon also reminded its listeners of the “many unspeakable Blessings which we have for a Course of Years enjoy’d, during the Right of His present Majesty (George II),” and called him “one of the best of Kings.”145 “It is now above Nineteen years since he began to reign over us,” Whitefield remarked, as he invoked Samuel’s address of the Israelites. Samuel’s followers told him, Whitefield observed, “Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us.”146 To Whitefield, and most revivalists and dissenters, the victory of a Catholic nation or army over the British throne would most certainly have been a threat to English civil liberties. Whitefield called the Jacobite Rebellion a plot “hatched in Hell, and afterwards nourished at Rome, having taken Place, supposing, I say, that the old Pretender (Charles Edward Stuart’s father, James III) should have exchanged his Cardinal’s Cap for a Triple Crown, and have transferred his pretend Title to his Eldest son.”147 Following in his Catholic sympathizer’s footsteps, “The Young Pretender,” Whitefield asserted, might “keep the three Kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland, in greater Vassalage to the See of Rome.”148 Whitefield continued to speculate of a Great Britain and its dominion with a “Popish Pretender” on the throne, “instead of being represented by a free

144 Ibid: 2.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
Parliament, and governed by Laws made by their Consent, as we no are.” His use of this particular language was all the more significant, whereas he delivered this sermon in Philadelphia, a locality with considerable Quaker, Presbyterian and other dissenter populations. It harkened back to the violence of the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution and the struggle for religious toleration faced by dissenters in Great Britain. Nonetheless, these politics were old British politics and this sermon reinforces what his contemporaries saw of Whitefield – not a man of rebellion, but a man who certainly could stir old dissenting British feelings and fears concerning religious persecution.

American Revolutionaries did raise concerns about representation. Indeed, thirty years later, their rejection of virtual representation was one of the many grievances against Great Britain. Whitefield raised the question of what a “popish victory” over the British throne might mean for the American colonies. Nonetheless, the concerns that Whitefield raised in this sermon were entirely steeped in anti-Catholicism and a British political rhetoric and history that were reflective of the Protestant Reformation and British questions about toleration, rather than questions about religious liberties in an American context. The “Young Pretender,” according to Whitefield, was:

...descended from a Father (the deposed James II), who, when Duke of York, put all Scotland into Confusion; and afterwards when crowned King of England, for his arbitrary and tyrannical Government, both in Church and State, was justly obliged to abdicate the Throne, by the Assertors of British Liberty...  

149 Ibid: 5.  
150 Ibid.  
151 Ibid.
While his point about British Liberty, it references the politics of the English Civil War and the struggle over toleration, rather than the notion of religious liberty as it evolved later in the eighteenth century. In short, this sermon is not substantively different from the anti-French, anti-Catholic utterances that were occasionally offered from other pulpits during the eighteenth-century by dissenter clergy.

Sometimes, Whitefield’s sermons emphasized the notion of God as the ultimate sovereign. His 1737 sermon The Benefits of Early Piety, for example, imparted on his audience, the importance of an early commitment to piety when “we are then best qualified to endure Hardness as good Soldiers of Jesus Christ.”152 Christianity – and particularly adherence to the true Christianity, as prescribed by Whitefield – was a concern that defied national boundaries. Whitefield discussed “freedom,” in this sermon, but to him, service to God “is perfect Freedom.”153 It was a spiritual freedom, akin to the one he ascribed for all souls, including slaves, rather than a political freedom that Christian writers and scholars have sometimes ascribed to him.154 This sermon is reflective, once again, of Whitefield’s primary concern with eternal matters.

Other sermons of Whitefield’s contained warnings about religious oppression, though they either referenced the persecutions faced by primitive

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Christians in the early days of Christianity, or contained further references to seventeenth-century politics that emphasized the importance of religious toleration. His sermon The Burning Bush, which invoked Old Testament biblical images of God appearing to Moses, also referenced primitive Christianity and suggested Whitefield as a more recent messenger of God. In the sermon, Whitefield asked, “Now what must the Christian burn with? With tribulation and persecution.” In this sermon, he certainly warned his audience to be on guard against religious persecution. Even so, it still exemplified fears common among English dissenters from the second half of the seventeenth century onward about civil and religious leaders from other denominations impeding their ability to determine their own religious paths. It was not particularly revolutionary or radical.

Whitefield’s 1739 sermon The Almost Christian referenced “Princes and Rulers of the Earth” who were “too happy to be disturbed by unwelcomed truths.” It also referenced those “set out with false Notions of Religion; and though they live in a Christian Country, yet know not what Christianity is.” As Gary Remer’s and Chris Beneke’s analyses of the rhetoric of tolerance show, wherein even as these clergymen preached toleration, but religious leaders had definitive and different ideas of what true religion was and were determined to promote their own visions.

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158 Remer, Humanism and the Rise of Toleration, 6; Beneke, Beyond Toleration, 17.
The idea of a consent-based, republican style of church government did, as Patricia Bonomi notes, make nonconformist colonists “inherently sympathetic to civil republicanism.” They also tended to be deeply suspicious of church and civil hierarchies and therefore more inclined to side with the revolutionaries. Nonetheless, this does not change the fact that Whitefield did not speak the revolutionary rhetoric from the pulpit.

The final, and most obvious problem with claiming Whitefield as a founding father is that he died before the American Revolution, and also well before the existence of an American protestant synthesis, during the Early Republic. Whitefield was alive for and influential in some of the early “cultural terrain” in which "republican Christianity would later flourish," and he was “familiar with the newer language of liberty.” Nonetheless, he tended to employ the language of liberty for “limited purposes.” He criticized monarchs for “arbitrary and tyrannical government, both in church and state,” but his “religious language” was mostly “innocent of political connotations.”

Whitefield retained his status as an international icon after his death, but in the soon-to-be United States, his image became co-opted first, for patriotic purposes,

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160 Ibid.
163 Ibid, 76.
164 Ibid, 76.
and later, by American evangelicals seeking to make sense of the place of religion in Early American culture and politics. It was part of what Lambert calls an “American Revolution of Religion.” It evolved from a struggle to determine how eighteenth-century ideas of religious liberty would play out in the new republic. Lambert envisions this revolution of religion as a social movement that had some roots in the American Revolution, but was not entirely intertwined with it.

There was a sense among “the vast majority of Americans,” Lambert notes, that “religious tyranny and priestcraft must be rooted out of church and state.” It was up to the individual “to decide matters of faith.” This belief was partly the result of the Great Awakening and partly of the Enlightenment. “Threats to religious freedom” was to be assured by “virtuous individuals” who could “check power concentrated in the court and church.” Both American Dissenters and Radical Whigs saw religious liberty as a facet of civil liberties. Whitefield was certainly seen as virtuous by his followers, but once again, his death before the American Revolution limits his use as a symbol of American religious liberty.

As Lambert also observes, the struggle for religious freedom was not a simple matter of accommodating a “broad, catholic view of Christianity.” The “bitter divides” that existed between Catholics and Protestants, and between

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166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
different Protestant sects, still remained.\textsuperscript{170} The result was a first amendment, which protected religious freedom, and a Constitution that did not establish a national church. Beginning in 1776, almost a full six years after Whitefield’s death, the delegates of the Continental Congress began the process of drafting an instrument of government that would “safeguard their liberties.”\textsuperscript{171} Much debate ensued over whether the new republic should embrace toleration, or the more radical religious freedom.\textsuperscript{172} As arguably the most visible icon of the Great Awakening, which had helped to foment eighteenth-century discourse about religious liberty, Whitefield provided a powerful symbol for those who sought to enshrine religious liberty in the cultural and political structures of the fledgling republic. It was a posthumous extension of the heroic self-image that he carefully constructed for himself through the trans-Atlantic print networks through his life, though with a more localized, national context.\textsuperscript{173}

Phillis Wheatley was arguably the first person to claim an “American” image for Whitefield in her 1770 elegiac poem.\textsuperscript{174} Her poem depicted Whitefield as a spiritual savior of the colonies. The second and third verses of her elegy are devoted almost in their entirety, to describing what he meant for religious life in the colonies:

When his AMERICANS were burden’d sore,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid: 7. \\
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid: 207. \\
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{173} Stout, \textit{The Divine Dramatist}, xiv. \\
\textsuperscript{174} Note: This is not the same as claiming him as an American.
\end{flushleft}
When streets were crimson’d with their guiltless gore!
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Towards America – couldst thou do more
Than leave thy native home, the British shore,
To cross the great Atlantic’s wat’ry road,
To see America’s distress’d abode?\textsuperscript{175}

Her poem specifically addresses his entombment in Massachusetts:

Great COUNTESS! we Americans revere
Thy name, and thus condole thy grief sincere:
We mourn with thee, that TOMB obscurely plac’d,
In which thy Chaplain undisturb’d doth rest.
\textit{New-England} sure, doth feel the ORPHAN’s smart;
Reveals the true sensations of his heart\textsuperscript{176}

While this poem reveres Whitefield as a force in providential life in the colonials, it also did not necessarily preclude his Englishness the way a true claim of Whitefield as a founding father would suggest. Wheatley saw herself as “American,” but, like many colonists in 1770, it did not automatically preclude her loyalty to King George III. In 1768, she even wrote a poem in which she praised King George: “May George, belov’d by all the nations round, Live with heav’ns choicest constant blessings crown’d!”\textsuperscript{177} Even Whitefield’s ardent supporters – Wheatley, Selina Hastings, James Habersham - did not necessarily turn revolutionary at the outbreak of war.

Wheatley acknowledged Whitefield’s British home, a shared grief with his patroness, the Countess of Huntingdon, and “his lonely [Moorfields] \textit{Tabernacle}, [in

\textsuperscript{175} Wheatley, “An Elegiac Poem,” 5-6.

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid: 6.

\textsuperscript{177} “To the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1768,” in Phillis Wheatley, \textit{Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral} (London, 1773): 17. Note: This poem was published in 1773.
London] sees no more...A WHITEFIELD landing on the British shore.” Even as she mourned what his death meant for the future of religious life in the colonies, she did not lose sight of his status as an international figure. And while Wheatley self-identified as an American in a period where the strain between Great Britain and its British North American colonies grew, her discourse is limited to religious life and offers no suggestion of Whitefield having a role in revolutionary politics.

The mingling of Whitefield’s discourses of politics and religion was the product of his disciples, beginning shortly after Whitefield’s death, rather than by Whitefield himself. In his elegy of Whitefield, Presbyterian Nathaniel Whitaker began the process of reformulating Whitefield into a revolutionary. Walker’s elegy reshaped Whitefield’s language from a tour of Great Britain to argue that Whitefield “was a patriot, not in shew, but reality, and an enemy to tyranny.” Whitefield’s language had, in fact, been used in an entirely different context, concerning religious tolerance. Whitaker inserted Whitefield’s concerns for spiritual liberty into the discourse for “liberation from terrestrial tyranny.”

During the American Revolution, Whitefield’s American supporters also invoked him in victories. This can be ascribed to what Bernard Bailyn describes as a facet of Revolutionary culture, which tended to emphasize the “heroic quality” of “dominant characters,” which Whitefield certainly was for the religious

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179 Noll, America’s God, 77.
180 Ibid.
181 Ibid.
community.\textsuperscript{182} This ascribed heroism was, as Bailyn also notes, “part of the process of binding the victory down, of securing it on a higher level than war and politics.”\textsuperscript{183} It was “highly personified and highly moral history.”\textsuperscript{184} Such is the case of treatments of Whitefield in the Revolutionary period, by evangelical Christians and Whitefield followers who sought to assign meaning for Whitefield not only after his death, but also in the religious culture of an emerging country. The construction of a heroic and patriotic image for Whitefield is entirely consistent with the reverence and deification surrounding Whitefield, although as Nicole Eustace observes memorialization was “never inconsequential” and had the potential to signify “sedition.”\textsuperscript{185} In remembering Whitefield, his evangelical American followers transformed him into a figure of rebellion.

An article that appeared in 1781, following the burning of New London by General Arnold and his band of British troops, further supports the notion that Revolutionary evangelicals constructed a heroic image for Whitefield. The article claimed that the image of Whitefield “frightened them into a burnt offering of all their finery,” on threat of damnation.\textsuperscript{186} This article referenced Whitefield’s 1740 sermon, delivered in New London, in which he encouraged listeners to hand over their finery – silks, damasks, emeralds – all constructs of a corrupt life of excesses, to

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{185} Eustace, Passion is the Gale, 287.
be burned on the common in a bonfire. General Arnold, now a British officer, had by this time visited Whitefield’s tomb along with fellow members of the Continental troops. Given Whitefield’s frequent criticisms of material extravagance, it is significant that a onetime American officer and turncoat who had visited the tomb was “haunted” into burning his [British] finery. As T.H. Breen observed, “eighteenth-century Americans communicated perceptions of status and politics to other people through items of everyday material culture.” Boycotts of certain goods, akin to those that Arnold and his troops burned, were in some cases, a response to political grievances or political principles. The depiction in the public prints, of Arnold and his troops being frightened into burning their clothes by the ghost of Whitefield, was highly political in nature, and suggested one of several ways in which his image became politicized by Revolutionary evangelicals.

That Whitefield was a trans-denominational and in many ways international figure lent his legacy quite a bit of malleability, whether it meant co-option of him

187 Ibid.
188 Lambert, The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America, 138-139. Also Note: Erik Seeman argues that Protestants tended towards a “distaste for miracle stories,” of which this is suggestive. Nonetheless, other examples of “miracles” attributed to divine figures followed. Most notable, is the response people had to the storm that spurned the British troops' ability to march on Washington, D.C. during the War of 1812. See Erik R. Seeman, Death in the New World: Cross-Cultural Encounters, 1492-1800 (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010): 141.
190 Breen, “Baubles of Britain,” 78.
into the revolutionary cause or the perpetuation of a trans-Atlantic evangelical community. Various denominations claimed him in support of their own religious liberties. In particular, evangelism’s mixture of communalism and individualism and its rejection of church establishments signaled “the freeing of individuals from traditional, family, and inherited authority even as it allowed believers to take in hand the commerce of their own souls.” In a post-Revolution United States, where Americans were uncertain what Americanness was, this ideology had mass appeal among the religious. This in turn, led to an explosion in the expansion of evangelical churches in the nineteenth century. American evangelicals would begin to claim him as a founding father and patriot of sorts. This tendency continued through to the twenty-first century, as Whitefield’s legacy continues to evolve, transforming him even further from his Anglican reformer roots.

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191 Noll, America’s God, 214.
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