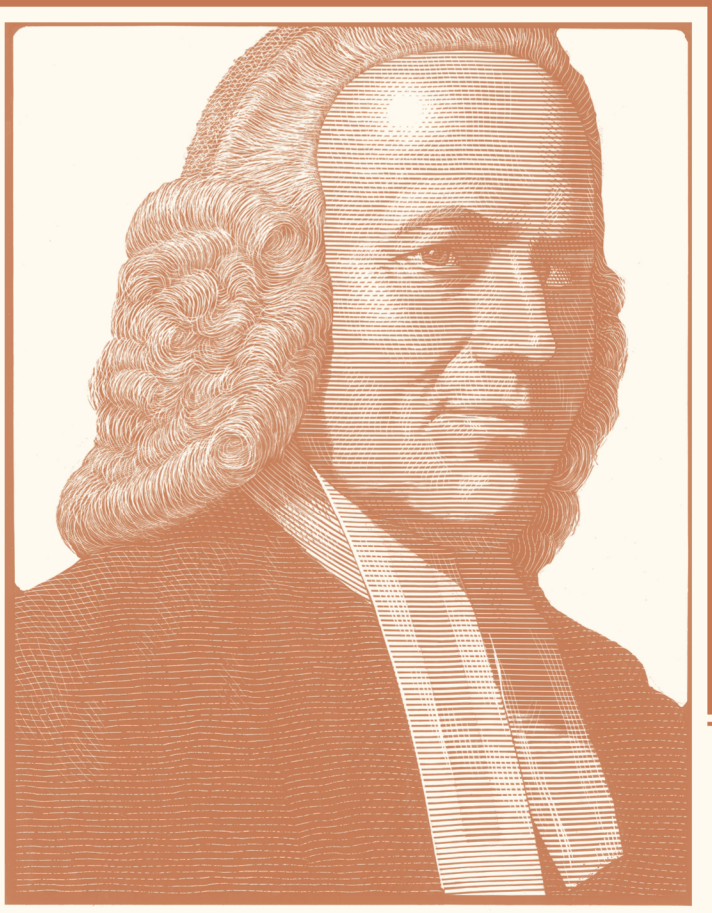
TOM SCHWANDA & IAN MADDOCK



WHITEFIELD

on the Christian Life

NEW BIRTH TO ENJOY GOD

"With thorough research, empathy balanced by criticism, and unusual attention to often neglected aspects of George Whitefield's life, Tom Schwanda and Ian Maddock make a notable contribution to the Theologians on the Christian Life series. If Whitefield is best known as a celebrity preacher and, more recently, as having tolerated slavery, he still provided many insights that lead from 'the new birth' he so famously preached into mature, enduring Christian existence. This book explains all that and much more."

Mark Noll, Research Professor of History, Regent College; author, *America's Book: The Rise and Decline of a Bible Civilization, 1794–1911*

"By all accounts, George Whitefield was one of the greatest, most prolific, most persuasive preachers in evangelical church history. At the heart of his preaching was a gospel experience that tragically became a Christian cliché and is often neglected altogether: the necessity of a new spiritual birth to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. This accessible yet comprehensive introduction to Whitefield's ministry and theology helps us to recapture the cruciality of conversion for our own spiritual experience and evangelistic ministries."

Philip Graham Ryken, President, Wheaton College

"Zealous in mission, Christ-centered in doctrine, experiential in piety, peripatetic in ministry, and fiery in preaching, Whitefield was consumed, for his entire post-conversion lifetime, with the inexhaustible riches of Jesus Christ. This masterful portrait is at once balanced, nuanced, and thoughtful—far from hagiographical, delightfully historical, and at times painfully human and realistic. May the flaws and failures of this great (if somewhat complex) evangelist remind us that even the godliest of men on this side of eternity are far from sinless, yet those flaws too should point us to the Savior whose gospel he so freely proclaimed. Above all, may this story of Whitefield's life and doctrine encourage us to pursue what he pursued with passion—the glory of Christ, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the satisfying smorgasbord that is the means of grace, and a life of vital, heartfelt, experiential, and *enjoyable* piety."

Joel R. Beeke, Chancellor and Professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary; Pastor, Heritage Reformed Congregation, Grand Rapids, Michigan

"George Whitefield has been called 'the apostle of the English empire' for his evangelical zeal but also 'God's erring and human instrument.' This book unpacks the glorious gospel that Whitefield preached so fervently and successfully, yet it doesn't shy away from the flaws in this celebrity preacher's business methods more clearly seen from a distance (including an attempt to redeem but still use the institution of slavery). It both inspires us to live as wholehearted Christians today and rightly warns us of our own potential pragmatic complicity with fallen prevailing culture."

Lee Gatiss, editor, *The Sermons of George Whitefield*; author, *Living to Please God*

"Evangelicals must rediscover their identity as evangelists. Other accounts of George Whitefield's life and ministry analyze many strengths and notable weaknesses of the preeminent evangelist of the evangelical movement. This guide offers more—an intimate picture of Whitefield, showing us how to cultivate a relationship with Jesus that can't keep quiet about the gospel."

Sean McGever, Adjunct Professor, Grand Canyon University; author, *Born Again* and *Ownership*

"Avoiding 'chronological snobbery,' Schwanda and Maddock's engaging and well-researched biography masterfully summarizes the immense legacy of George Whitefield to today's evangelical church. Whitefield, perhaps the first celebrity evangelist, had his personal flaws and struggles. Yet ultimately his commitment to God's word, his dependence on the Holy Spirit, his evangelical ecumenical mindset, and his desire that sinners like himself discover the new birth in Jesus Christ were used powerfully by God to impact countless people. Read this book and be encouraged to know that God can use you too for his purposes."

Joel Woodruff, President, C. S. Lewis Institute

"Evangelicalism has a rich, complicated, sometimes contradictory history. As one of evangelicalism's founding leaders, George Whitefield too has a rich, complicated, and sometimes contradictory legacy. His life not only is worthy of study in itself but also illuminates the larger history of the movement. To better understand evangelicalism today, one can do no better than to read this probing account of Whitefield's place in his time and ours."

Karen Swallow Prior, author, *The Evangelical Imagination: How Stories, Images, and Metaphors Created a Culture in Crisis*

"The 'relational glue' of the Great Awakening is how the authors of this fine book describe George Whitefield. And given the central role he played in the revivals of his transatlantic world, it follows that his vision of the Christian life was equally influential and far-reaching, both for good and for ill. What I appreciate in this fresh study of Whitefield is the attention paid not only to the good but also to the bad—specifically, the English preacher's disturbing advocacy of slavery. All in all, this is a helpful guide to Whitefield's theological convictions and key elements of evangelical thought and piety."

Michael A. G. Azad Haykin, Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"If you want to understand early American views of Christian spirituality, you would do well to spend time reading Whitefield. He emphasized intimacy with Jesus, the vital importance of evangelism, and the practical side of a distinctive Calvinistic approach to the Protestant faith. This volume nicely captures all of that and so much more. Thankfully, the authors do not romanticize the man, especially as they dive into Whitefield's complex relationship with slavery, but rather offer a nuanced and honest treatment. There is much for us to learn in this book."

Kelly M. Kapic, Professor of Theological Studies, Covenant College

"Tom Schwanda and Ian Maddock have created a lucid introduction to the Christian life—from deadness in sin to sinless perfection in glory—as lived, preached, and journaled by George Whitefield. This book is a treasure of the Christian life given as a thick description in candid illumination. Theology preached, friendships cultivated, and evangelistic sermons printed—all reveal the full humanity and large persona of this great founder of modern evangelicalism. The apt subtitle of this volume, *New Birth to Enjoy God*, reminds us that Whitefield's theology, and the best of ecumenical evangelicalism, is driven by gratitude and joy."

Scott W. Sunquist, President, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

"By examining occasional writings like sermons and letters, Schwanda and Maddock distill Whitefield's understanding of the spiritual life and present to us the abiding themes of Christian experience celebrated in the midst of Whitefield's peripatetic ministry. Along with crisp prose and thoughtful structure, we encounter in this book refreshment and inspiration for our own walks with the Lord."

Rhys Bezzant, Principal, Ridley College, Melbourne

"Writing with clarity and grace, Tom Schwanda and Ian Maddock give us a fresh spiritual biography of the Great Awakening's most renowned evangelist. Without sugarcoating the problematic aspects of George Whitefield's life, they explore the many salutary aspects of his spirituality. This book is a compelling invitation to live a life marked by a new birth, a transformed heart, and sweet communion with God."

Gwenfair Walters Adams, Professor of Church History and Spiritual Formation, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

"Schwanda and Maddock do a tremendous job helping us appreciate the potent spiritual message at the core of Whitefield's ministry, especially his concern for regeneration—new life in Christ. But the authors are more than just cheerleaders. They show us Whitefield in all his complexity to help us learn from his flaws as much as from his virtues."

Bruce Hindmarsh, James M. Houston Professor of Spiritual Theology and Professor of the History of Christianity, Regent College; author, *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism*

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on the Christian Life

THEOLOGIANS ON THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

EDITED BY JUSTIN TAYLOR AND THOMAS KIDD

Grimké on the Christian Life:
Christian Vitality for the Church and World,
Drew Martin

Whitefield on the Christian Life:
New Birth to Enjoy God,
Tom Schwanda and Ian Maddock

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Living in Light of the Gospel,
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Fred Sanders

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TOM SCHWANDA
AND IAN MADDOCK

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For Tom's children,
Rebecca and Steve,
and for Ian's,
Lachlan, Phoebe, and Silas,
all of whom know the new birth
and enjoy God

CONTENTS

SERIES PREFACE

Some might call us spoiled. We live in an era of significant and substantial resources for Christians on living the Christian life. We have ready access to books, videos, online material, seminars—all in the interest of encouraging us in our daily walk with Christ. The laity, the people in the pew, have access to more information than scholars dreamed of having in previous centuries.

Yet, for all our abundance of resources, we also lack something. We tend to lack the perspectives from the past, perspectives from a different time and place than our own. To put the matter differently, we have so many riches in our current horizon that we tend not to look to the horizons of the past.

That is unfortunate, especially when it comes to learning about and practicing discipleship. It's like owning a mansion and choosing to live in only one room. This series invites you to explore the other rooms.

As we go exploring, we will visit places and times different from our own. We will see different models, approaches, and emphases. This series does not intend for these models to be copied uncritically, and it certainly does not intend to put these figures from the past high upon a pedestal like some race of super-Christians. This series intends, however, to help us in the present listen to the past. We believe there is wisdom in the past twenty centuries of the church, wisdom for living the Christian life.

Justin Taylor and Thomas Kidd

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While an author may conceive the ideas for a book in isolation, its development is best shaped by interaction with a community of scholars and colleagues.

We are grateful for the support and counsel of Justin Taylor and Thomas Kidd, editors of the Theologians on the Christian Life series, as well as Steve Nichols, who originally guided this project. Our appreciation is also extended to all the staff of Crossway who assisted in the various phases of the publication and marketing process.

Various themes that eventually found their way into this book were tested at several gatherings of the Evangelical Theological Society. Thank you to all those participants who raised questions to further refine our ideas.

Additionally, we acknowledge the following colleagues, who in some ways stimulated our thinking or suggested resources to assist our writing of this book: Keith Beebe, John Coffey, Geordan Hammond, Michael A. G. Haykin, Bruce Hindmarsh, Digby James, David Ceri Jones, George Marsden, Sean McGever, Alan Morgan, Mark Noll, Mark Olson, Isabel Rivers, Steve Rockwell, John Thomas Scott, Sara Singleton, John Tyson, and Timothy Whelan.

Finally, and most importantly, we thank our wives, Grace and Pam, for their patience and encouragement.

INTRODUCTION

George Whitefield's life as a Christian was dedicated to knowing God and making him known. His transformative personal experience of the new birth in Christ undergirded and propelled a remarkable public preaching ministry that not only transcended denominations and oceans but also attracted listeners from all segments of society. For over three decades, rapt audiences flocked in the thousands to hear him deliver dramatic extemporaneous sermons. Indeed, by the age of twenty-four, as he set sail for North America and the first of many preaching tours of the American colonies, he had already become something of a transatlantic sensation: arguably the first—but by no means the last—evangelical celebrity.

Whitefield might have been relatively singular in his evangelistic focus, but he was by no means a simplistic thinker. While admittedly not a conventional systematic theologian—and this by his own design—he preached and embodied an experiential Calvinism in the Puritan mold. No armchair theologian, he had a lifelong allergic reaction to unapplied and abstract theology, decrying "letter-learned" professing Christians who wrote about the new birth but lacked a corresponding experience of these truths. And yet, at the same time, he was a surprisingly nuanced and dexterous practical theologian willing to expend significant time and energy defending cherished and nonnegotiable Calvinistic convictions in the public arena.

As a veritable "founding father" of this burgeoning movement, Whitefield always instinctively deferred to Scripture as his normative source of religious authority. He found in the pages of the Bible the way to enjoy a true and restored relationship with God by grace through faith in the justifying merits of Jesus alone. On what he understood to be the core and essentially salvific message of Scripture, he once wrote:

> The foundation of God's revealing himself thus to mankind, was our fall in *Adam*, and the necessity of our new birth in Christ Jesus. And if we search the Scriptures as we ought, we shall find the sum and substance, the *Alpha* and *Omega*, the beginning and the end of them, is to lead us to a knowledge of these two great truths.[1]

Promoting the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout an itinerant ministry that saw him preach a staggering eighteen thousand sermons—an average of nearly 530 sermons a year from 1736 to 1770—Whitefield was relentlessly ambitious about proclaiming the gospel to those who had never recognized their need for salvation and those who needed to mature deeper in their relationship with Christ. However, at times this ambition was interpreted by detractors as evidence of an insatiable appetite for self-promotion and personal advancement, whether financial or reputational. He cultivated many distinctive practices that continue to find expression among professing evangelicals today. Of particular note, his evangelistic entrepreneurialism has helped to normalize, wittingly or otherwise, evangelicalism's fondness for parachurch ministries and seemingly insatiable receptivity to high-profile, platformed preachers.

Without a doubt, his vocation and self-identity as an evangelist were tightly bound together. Overflowing from a heart shaped by God's grace, Whitefield's sermons proclaimed the gospel boldly and passionately, in that he first devoted himself to cultivating a life of communion with God. Before calling others to follow Jesus in a life of discipleship, he first sought to walk intimately with God through the intentional use of the means of grace and a perennial reliance on the felt presence and experience of the Holy Spirit. A hunger and thirst for knowing and loving Jesus Christ enabled him to delight in and enjoy God and motivated his desire to serve as a spiritual guide. In the process, God used him to help usher others into a deep friendship with God that so characterized his own experience of walking with Christ.

While he had his share of fallings-out over differing theologies and ministry philosophies, he was an evangelical ecumenist at heart. He craved and sought reconciliation wherever possible. Indeed, the wealth of relationships he established and worked hard to maintain not only were conspicuous for their variety but also afford us a glimpse into his expansive

[1] Whitefield, "The Duty of Searching the Scriptures," in *Works*, 6:80 (italics in the original).

vision of the Christian life as one to be lived in relationship—not simply with God but also with fellow divine image bearers in all of their theological, demographic, racial, and socioeconomic diversity.

Just as Whitefield encouraged his eighteenth-century contemporaries to journey alongside him in his experience of the Christian life, we too invite readers to encounter George Whitefield in all his complexity. Unavoidably influenced, without being inevitably determined, by the times and places he inhabited—much as we are today—Whitefield embodied contradictions common to many first-generation evangelicals of his day. Most notably, this included his active role in advancing slavery, one of the most ubiquitous features of life in the British Empire. Initially known for his excoriating attacks upon slave masters in the American south for their physical and spiritual maltreatment of slaves, Whitefield would eventually become an enthusiastic advocate for the introduction of slavery into Georgia—and even a slave master himself. While he boldly urged slaves to experience spiritual freedom and, in the process, helped establish the emergence of Black evangelicalism, he never advocated for their physical emancipation—a failure of biblical justice and love that invites us to interrogate the clarity of our own moral vision.

All told, if Jonathan Edwards was evangelicalism's most profound and original theologian, and John Wesley its most able organizer, then Whitefield provided the evangelical community's relational glue: his seemingly ceaseless peripatetic ministry lifestyle, intricate and widespread correspondence networks, and publishing ventures were instrumental in creating a unified sense of transatlantic evangelical fellowship. It is to George Whitefield's experience of the Christian life as one to be lived in enjoyment of God that we introduce you now.

ABBREVIATIONS

Names of nearly all recipients of Whitefield's letters cited in the footnotes have been abbreviated by the editors of his *Letters* and *Works* to maintain a degree of privacy. A few also lack first initials. For consistency, we are using a long dash to indicate omitted names or portions of names.

Eighteen Sermons	George Whitefield. *Eighteen Sermons Preached by the Late Rev. George Whitefield, A.M. . . . Taken Verbatim in Short-Hand, and Faithfully Transcribed by Joseph Gurney: Revised by Andrew Gifford, D.D.* London: Joseph Gurney, 1771.
Journals	George Whitefield. *George Whitefield's Journals*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960.
Letters	George Whitefield. *Letters of George Whitefield for the Period 1734 to 1742*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976.
Memoirs	John Gillies. *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield.* London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1772.
Works	George Whitefield. *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield. M. A*. Edited by John Gillies. 7 vols. London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771–1772.

CHAPTER I

THE NEW BIRTH

Central to George Whitefield's life and ministry was the new birth. In 1769, one year before his death, he recounted a retrospective review of his conversion in which he narrated his struggle to find peace with God. His listeners were reminded that baptism alone does not assure anyone of entering heaven. He vulnerably rehearsed his misguided journey of excessive asceticism that almost killed him and the futility of seeking God solely by external human efforts. He joyfully credited Charles Wesley's gift of *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* by the Scottish minister and professor Henry Scougal (1650–1678), which confronted him with his need to be born again. With a tinge of delight, he then added, "Whenever I go to Oxford, I cannot help running to that place where Jesus Christ first revealed himself to me, and gave the new birth." His frequent return to this specific place illustrates how it served as an Ebenezer for him (1 Sam. 7:12) as he vividly remembered what Jesus Christ did for him, and could do for anyone else. When he concluded his sermon, Whitefield extended God's gracious invitation to the unconverted.[1]

Twenty-nine years earlier, when he had completed his first journal, he expressed the same hope that his conversion narrative would inspire and guide others to discover their same need to be born again. Some readers, he observed, might experience less intense struggles, while others might face even greater obstacles. Regardless, his "hearty prayer" was that "whoever thou art, mayst experience the like and greater blessings."[2] Because of his own experience, he never grew tired of proclaiming the same joy and liberating

[1] Whitefield, "All Mens Place," in *Eighteen Sermons*, 345–72, quotation at p. 360.
[2] *Journals*, 70–71, quotation at p. 71.

news of the new birth. How Whitefield discovered this freedom that became the cornerstone of his new life in Christ is the story of this chapter.

Whitefield's Early Life

Whitefield was born on December 16, 1714, in Gloucester, located about 105 miles northwest of London.[3] The youngest of seven children, he was raised in the Bell Inn, owned and operated by his parents. Gloucester's largest inn, it served as the social hub for city life. During his life, inns were the most reputable institutions for providing food, drink, and accommodations. Whitefield became fatherless when only two, and eight years later his mother remarried in what he later described as "an unhappy match."[4] It meant he had a dependable father for only the first two years of his life.

Early in his childhood, Whitefield recognized the corruption of his heart. He was addicted to vulgar language and often stole money from his mother. He recounted using this money to satisfy his "sensual appetite" by buying plays, playing cards, and romance novels. When he compared himself with the young man in the Gospel who claimed that he had kept all God's commandments (Matt. 19:20), Whitefield confessed he had broken every one of them. Starkly aware of his immorality, he also recognized the occasional movements of God's Spirit that reminded him that he was loved by God. Despite his rebellion and degeneracy, Whitefield considered becoming a minister and mimicked the way they prayed. By this time, he was convicted to give the stolen money to the poor or to purchase books of devotion. At twelve he was enrolled in St Mary de Crypt, the local grammar school, and demonstrated an aptitude for speaking and memorizing, and he was given key roles in school plays. Later he regretted, with a sense of embarrassment, being cast in plots that required him to wear girls' clothing.

Before the age of fifteen, Whitefield discontinued his education to assist his mother in managing the Bell Inn. Increasingly his thoughts turned to God, as he read the Bible nightly and composed a few sermons. When he had the unexpected opportunity to attend Oxford University to become a minister, he declared that God had called him "from drawing wine for

[3] In 1752 the British Parliament switched from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, which accounts for Whitefield's later usage of December 27 as his birth date. Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 4.

[4] Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History, 1200–1830* (London: Longman, 1983), 5–19. Taverns and alehouses were the other two types of institutions. Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival*, 2 vols. (London: Banner of Truth, 1970, 1980), 1:43; *Journals*, 39.

drunkards, to draw water out of the wells of salvation for the refreshment of His spiritual food." This passionate desire to become a minister was later deleted from his *Journals*, which he revised in 1748, though they were not republished until 1756. Following the release of his first published journal in 1738, he was attacked by critics as well as friends for his perceived immaturity and frequent spiritual glosses.[5] Statements in which he compared himself with biblical persons, including Jesus and Paul, and expressed an immodest sense of himself were eliminated. He also deleted or revised references to impressions of the Holy Spirit, ecstatic encounters with God, and battles with intense temptations from Satan. Additionally, rash judgments made against other Anglican ministers and bishops were purged.

Whitefield's spiritual life continued to oscillate between valleys of spiritual anxiety and mountain peaks of peace with God. Yet his introspective efforts to draw closer to God were soon smothered by Satan's temptations. New hope and encouragement arose when he dreamed that he would see God on Mount Sinai. When he reported this to a woman, she interpreted it as a "call from God."[6]

Social and Spiritual Context

Whitefield's inner anxiety mirrored a similar tension he observed in a society characterized by "drunkenness, debauchery, licentiousness, profanity, Sabbath-breaking, and heterodox beliefs."[7] Born into the Church of England, he was shaped early in life by worship that had lost much of its fervor and often was consumed by external forms devoid of heart engagement. Mark Noll observes that "confident religious life, persuasive preaching of the gospel and effective Christian pastoring were in relatively short supply during the first decades of the eighteenth century."[8]

While many ministers sought to provide pastoral care to their congregations, some devoted more energy to their dinner menus than to their

[5] *Journals*, 37–41, quotations at pp. 37, 41. Whitefield began keeping a private journal in 1735, no doubt from John Wesley's urging. While many critics accused Whitefield of self-conceit, Tyerman deemed immaturity, impulsiveness, and defective training the real culprits. Luke Tyerman, *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield*, 2 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876–1877), 1:45–46.
[6] *Journals*, 41, 43–44, quotation at p. 44.
[7] For a valuable introduction to Whitefield's eighteenth-century context, see Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 27–49.
[8] W. M. Jacob, "England," in *The Oxford History of Anglicanism*, vol. 2, *Establishment and Empire, 1662–1829*, ed. Jeremy Gregory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 111; John Walsh, "Origins of the Evangelical Revival," in *Essays in Modern English Church History*, ed. G. V. Bennett and J. D. Walsh (London: Black, 1966), 139; Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 39.

parishioners' souls.[9] For the average British churchgoer, this created a conventional faith, though some laypeople still desired deeper experiences of God.[10] This accounts for the attractiveness of Whitefield's preaching to many dissatisfied worshipers. Additionally, a hunger for devotional literature created a strong market for his *Journals* and sermons.[11] But if some congregations found themselves led by spiritually lethargic ministers, it was equally true that some Anglican clergymen serious about their spiritual duties encountered congregations indifferent to living consistent Christian lives. For example, while some ministers "frequently lectured their parishioners against sin and vice," elsewhere laypeople criticized their ministers as "incompetent" and "poor preachers," whom they "accused of intemperance in drinking."[12]

Deism and the excessive consumption of gin were two of the major challenges faced by the church during Whitefield's time. Deism denied the supernatural nature of Christianity and challenged the integrity of the Bible. It also sought "to replace traditional Christianity with a religion of mere morality and a distant God."[13] Whitefield often warned of the danger of deists in his sermons. He countered their assaults by affirming a personal God revealed by the miracle of the virgin birth and Jesus's resurrection from the dead. Furthermore, the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit—which was central to Whitefield's ministry—assisted him in refuting the limitations of deism.

The gin epidemic—usually dated between 1720 and 1751—afflicted England both socially and morally. Drinking was especially problematic in London and affected every class of people, including ministers. Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), the well-known British biographer and lexicographer, confessed, "A man is never happy in the present, unless he is drunk."[14]

When the popularity of gin subsided, it was due to the price of malt rather than to moral convictions.[15] Sexual morality was at a low ebb, and

[9] John Walsh and Stephen Taylor, "Introduction: The Church and Anglicanism in the 'Long' Eighteenth Century," in *The Church of England, c. 1698–c. 1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism*, ed. John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 13.
[10] Jacob, "England," 112.
[11] Jacob, "England," 98, 112; Walsh and Taylor, "Introduction," 25.
[12] Jeremy Gregory and Jeffrey S. Chamberlain, "National and Local Perspectives on the Church of England in the Long Eighteenth Century," in *The National Church in Local Perspective: The Church of England and the Regions, 1660–1800*, ed. Jeremy Gregory and Jeffrey S. Chamberlain (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2003), 23.
[13] Walsh and Taylor "Introduction," 13, 21. For a helpful introduction to deism during Whitefield's time, see Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd. ed. (London: Epworth, 2002), 30–33; Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 1:20–24; Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 41.
[14] James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1817), 483.
[15] Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727–1783* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 148–49.

erotic literature and "scatological satire" abounded in the press. A directory of local prostitutes provided a variety of resources for those seeking sexual pleasure.[16] During Whitefield's life, the increase of adultery and fornication disrupted family and public life, and created a greater financial burden to provide for illegitimate children.[17] Isaac Watts (1674–1748), a British minister best known today as a hymn writer, challenged laypeople regarding this immorality: "'Tis time, my friends, when religion is sunk into such universal decay in the nation, to enquire whether we have not suffered it to decay amongst us also, and whether we are not sharers in the common degeneracy."[18]

Whitefield was a keen observer of his surroundings, no doubt sharpened by his awareness of the destructive potential of alcoholic abuse from working in the Bell Inn. He grasped the power of the gospel to transform these social ills. During his initial voyage in 1738 to America, he witnessed the drinking habits of the crew, which prompted his sermon titled "The Heinous Sin of Drunkenness," based on Ephesians 5:18, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." He denounced the "plague of drinking" and claimed that excessive consumption could lead to six sinful outcomes: it abuses God's "good creatures"; it is a sin against the person's own body; it robs a person of reason; it usually leads to other sins, including "horrid incest"; it separates one from the Holy Spirit, and it makes a person unfit to enjoy God in heaven.[19] Whitefield recorded with gratitude the ship captain's response, which affirmed the effectiveness of his sermon and strongly encouraged the crew to heed his warning.[20]

Morality was no better in the American colonies, which Whitefield would visit seven times. During Jonathan Edwards's time at Yale, it had already established a reputation for drinking, which prompted the professors to emphasize piety to reduce immorality. Edwards preached a sermon in 1729 declaring that both the American colonies and Britain had fallen into degeneracy displayed in debauchery and profanity. Bundling was a common New England practice during Edwards's time. It permitted young couples to sleep in the same bed partly clothed but separated by a

[16] Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 1990), 25, 147, 148, 261; Porter, *London: A Social History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 171.
[17] W. R. Jacob, *Lay People and Religion in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 143.
[18] Isaac Watts, *Humble Attempt toward the Revival of Practical Religion among Christians* (London: E. Matthews, 1731), 288, 292–93.
[19] Whitefield, "The Heinous Sin of Drunkenness," in *Works*, 6:303–16, quotations at pp. 304–5, 309.
[20] *Journals*, 141–42, 149, 171.

"bundling board." The purpose was to develop relationships without sexual intercourse, though, not surprisingly, premarital sex and pregnancies escalated in New England. Further south, in Pennsylvania, Presbyterian minister Samuel Blair (1712–1751) lamented in 1744 the "dead formality" of the spiritual landscape and that the Christian life "lay a-dying, and ready to expire its last breath of life."[21] This moral landscape of the American colonies and Britain created a hunger for Whitefield's gospel preaching.

Time at Oxford

Amid these swirling social and spiritual anxieties, Whitefield entered Pembroke College at Oxford University as a "servitor" in 1732. John and Charles Wesley's father, Samuel (1662–1735), attended the university under the same provision. It marked Whitefield's humble background and required him to fulfill menial tasks for wealthy students. His training at the Bell Inn had prepared him well for this. These early student days were difficult to navigate as his serious desire to prepare for ministry collided with the corruption of fellow students, not to mention his continued struggle with "playing at cards and reading plays." This inner tension raged within Whitefield's heart until God convicted him during a period of personal fasting, which intensified his desire to pray the Psalms, fast, and receive the Lord's Supper more regularly.[22]

Influence of Anglicanism

Whitefield's spirituality leading up to his conversion was shaped by Anglicanism, Pietism, Puritanism, and the direct experience of the Holy Spirit. These continued to influence him throughout his life, though the degree of their importance varied.[23] The Anglican spirituality of his childhood was his initial formative factor. His eagerness to know God more intimately soon united him to John (1703–1791) and Charles Wesley (1707–1788) and their friends known as the Oxford Methodists. The term *Methodist* was pejorative. Whitefield surmised its origin lay in their "custom of regulating their time, and planning the business of the day every morning," and it became the "re-

[21] George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 102, 130, 296–97, and quoted in Tyerman, *George Whitefield*, 1:322.
[22] Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 63; *Journals*, 45–46, quotation at p. 45. This reference to playing cards was removed in a 1756 journal revision.
[23] This section is indebted to Bruce Hindmarsh's analysis, though revised and supplemented with our thoughts. D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism: True Religion in a Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 15–36.

puted mad way."[24] He soon submitted himself to this same spiritual paradigm, which included morning and evening spiritual disciplines, visiting the sick and prisoners, and providing charity to those in need each day.[25]

While he acknowledged his awareness of *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728), by William Law (1686–1761), before entering Oxford, Whitefield did not have the money to purchase it until he became a student. Law's *Serious Call* had a profound effect on many evangelical leaders, including the Wesleys, John Newton (1725–1807), and Henry Venn (1725–1797).[26] Whitefield himself confessed, "God worked powerfully upon my soul" through reading *A Serious Call*, as well as Law's "other excellent treatise upon *Christian Perfection*" (1726). This devotional classic was written to awaken a person from superficial piety to a more methodical and integrated holy life through the cultivation of various disciplines, including prayer, fasting, and self-examination. Reading this treatise heightened Whitefield's efforts at praying and singing the Psalms five times a day.[27] During this period, his life resembled that of a monk. Luke Tyerman, Whitefield's prominent nineteenth-century biographer, criticized Whitefield's devotional intensity for its "somewhat pharisaic tinge."[28] The expression of Anglican piety in which Whitefield was immersed in his youth knew little of the nature of grace or justification. This theological and spiritual formation eventually led him to a more discerning resistance toward Law.

Whitefield also read *The Imitation of Christ* (ca. 1427), by Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471), which he called a "great delight," before arriving at Oxford.[29] *The Imitation of Christ* ranks as one of the most popular devotional writings in church history, and one source claims 444 different editions were printed just in the seventeenth century.[30] Thomas was a German monk of the Modern Devotion, a movement dedicated to countering the dry scholasticism of his day.[31] Scholasticism was originally a medieval

[24] *Journals*, 48, 75.
[25] *Journals*, 47–48. For a helpful summary of the early organization, activities, and devotional practices of Oxford Methodism, see Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1989), 81–105.
[26] Hindmarsh, *Spirit of Early Evangelicalism*, 217.
[27] *Journals*, 45–46, quotation at p. 45. Whitefield deleted the reference to Law's influence on his soul in his 1756 revised *Journals*.
[28] Hindmarsh, *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism*, 21; Tyerman, *George Whitefield*, 1:26.
[29] *Journals*, 41.
[30] R. W. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 48. Some make a similar claim for John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.
[31] See Arie de Reuver, *Sweet Communion: Trajectories of Spirituality from the Middle Ages through the Further Reformation*, trans. James A. De Jong (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 62–102. We have followed de Reuver's development of à Kempis.

approach that emphasized the importance of reason and speculation in learning while often minimizing the role of experience. Consistent with refuting the nature of scholasticism, Thomas began his book with this confession: "I would rather experience repentance in my soul than know how to define it."[32] The Modern Devotion recovered Augustine's emphasis on the inner life, loving God, heavenly-mindedness, humility, self-examination, and self-denial for the laity. All of these factors became central to Whitefield's spirituality and preaching; nevertheless à Kempis's understanding of justification and sanctification was inconsistent with the theology of the Protestant Reformation, thereby marginalizing Christ's role as the mediator and further skewing Whitefield's early understanding of the gospel.[33]

Despite the assistance from Charles Wesley in suggesting these and other books, and the counsel of John Wesley, whom Whitefield would later call his "spiritual father," he continued to battle with temptations whose origin he typically attributed to Satan. In response, he turned to another Roman Catholic, Lorenzo Scupoli (ca. 1530–1610), and his popular book *Spiritual Combat* (1589), which encouraged Whitefield to overcome temptation through increased mortification of his sinful nature and isolation from the unhelpful influence of others. Careful readers might recognize that Whitefield devoted more energy at this time to reading devotional books than to reading the Bible. This approach was reinforced by the counsel of Charles Wesley, who at the height of Whitefield's spiritual turmoil urged him to read à Kempis rather than Scripture. Shortly before his conversion, Whitefield noted that he was still reading à Kempis, Castaniza's *Combat*, and his Greek Testament, while seeking to turn every reading into a prayer. These ascetic practices were once again intensified during Lent, which led to his collapse from exhaustion during Holy Week and the ensuing seven weeks of sickness. Ever optimistic in attitude—even in the face of great affliction—Whitefield gratefully reported that God used his illness to purify his soul.[34]

Influence of German Pietism

The second major influence was German Pietism, which resembled the devotional and experiential emphasis of British Puritanism. German Pietists

[32] Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, ed. and trans. Joseph N. Tylenda (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 1998), 3.
[33] De Reuver, *Sweet Communion*, 99.
[34] *Journals*, 49–57, quotations at pp. 49, 52, 56–57. The reference to seven weeks of sickness was removed in the 1756 *Journals*.

discovered the liberating message of à Kempis within the context of their scholastic formalism and what they considered to be the dead orthodoxy of their Lutheran tradition. Pietists turned to Scripture not only for doctrine but also for guidance on how to live the Christian life. Whitefield's faith was nurtured specifically by the writings of Johann Arndt (1555–1621) and August Hermann Francke (1663–1727). Charles Wesley first introduced Whitefield to Francke's *Nicodemus: or, A Treatise against the Fear of Man* (1706), to help alleviate his spiritual struggles and later encouraged his boldness in evangelistic preaching.[35] Further, Francke's *Pietas Hallensis* (*Piety of Halle*, 1705), the story of his orphanage in Halle, Germany, inspired Whitefield to establish his own orphan house in Georgia.

Arndt became the champion for revitalized Christian living. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, his popularity rivaled that of even Luther, producing the proverb "Whosoever does not savor Arndt's *True Christianity* has lost his spiritual appetite." Whitefield's reading of *True Christianity* (1606) introduced him to a personal faith that was vibrant and life-giving, and the necessity of the new birth in contrast to the mere external formalities of his Anglican background, which rarely penetrated his heart. "The main scope of the whole book" was to reveal "the secret and abominable depth of original corruption cleaving to mankind," and "to set forth Jesus Christ as the sole" means of "our whole conversion to God." This shaped Arndt's agenda, which proclaimed the centrality of grace and faith of the Protestant Reformation. Justification by faith would soon transform Whitefield's life and become foundational to his evangelistic preaching. For Arndt, it was critical to grasp that "works do not justify; because we must be engrafted into Christ by faith, before ever we can do any good work; and so this justification, O man, is a gift of God, freely given before, and preventing all thy merits." Later Arndt added, "True justification is only through faith, not through works."[36]

While Arndt claimed that God's grace freely gives justification and is a gift to receive by faith, eighteenth-century Anglicanism commonly taught that justification is "conditional" and, despite the role of grace, the process needs to be supplemented by the person's own "practice of holiness and

[35] Carter Lindberg, introduction to *The Pietist Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 3; Hindmarsh, *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism*, 21–24.

[36] Cited by Lindberg, *The Pietist Theologians*, 6; Johann Arndt, *True Christianity*, pt. 1, trans. Anthony William Boehm (London: D. Brown, 1712), v, vii, xiii, liv, 44. Similar references throughout *True Christianity* assert the primacy of divine grace and faith, always reinforcing "that justification cannot be the work of man, but must be the work of Christ only." *True Christianity*, pt. 1, 390.

good works."[37] This in part clarifies Whitefield's continuing frenetic and consuming asceticism, which nearly drove him mad during his Oxford days. One writer has observed that before their conversions, Whitefield and his Oxford companions "were legalists, trying to save themselves" and "were morose ascetics rather than happy Christians."[38]

Despite having experienced the new birth in 1735, Whitefield did not come to grasp this redemptive truth of justification until sometime later in 1738. One plausible explanation is that the teaching of Peter Böhler (1712–1775)—an early Moravian influence on both Whitefield and the Wesleys—had filtered down to him and corrected his distorted understanding.[39] Whitefield's continuing embrace of the formative nature of German Pietism is validated by the response of those who perceived him as a Pietist in positive and negative ways. Those who admired Whitefield prayed that his style of preaching might create future revivals in Germany, while his detractors promptly rejected him.[40]

Influence of Puritanism

Puritanism was the third primary influence that shaped Whitefield's spirituality.[41] Like German Pietism, it stressed the importance of Scripture and the necessity of the new birth. Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (like *The Imitation of Christ*) was originally published anonymously and challenged Whitefield's understanding of authentic Christianity. Whitefield confessed that at his "first reading" of it, he was amazed and "wondered what the author meant by saying, '. . . some falsely placed religion in going to church, doing hurt to no one, being constant in the duties of the closet, and now and then reaching out their hands to give alms to their poor neighbors.' " Confused, he wrote, "If this be not true religion, what is?" Finally, he discovered the redeeming message: "True religion was union of the soul with God, and Christ formed within us."[42] The Pauline phrase "Christ formed within us" (Gal. 4:19) communicated that a person

[37] Mark Smith, "The Hanoverian Parish: Towards a New Agenda," *Past & Present* 216 (August 2012): 85.
[38] Tyerman, *George Whitefield*, 1:31–32. Dallimore asserts that Whitefield's spirituality at this time stressed "outward ritual" devoid "of grace as taught in the Scriptures." Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 1:71–72.
[39] Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, 342; *Memoirs*, 31.
[40] Andrew Kloes, "German Protestants' Interpretation of George Whitefield, 1739–1857," *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 8, no. 2 (2016): 118.
[41] For a partial list of the Puritan authors that inspired Whitefield, see Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Revived Puritan: The Spirituality of George Whitefield* (Dundee, ON: Joshua, 2000), 72–74.
[42] *Journals*, 47; Whitefield to Mr. H—, February 20, 1735, in *Letters*, 6. For a helpful treatment of Scougal's influence on Whitefield, see Sean McGever, *Born Again: The Evangelical Theology of Conversion in John Wesley and George Whitefield* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 122–27.

experiences true freedom not through self-striving or human regulations but through a new life in Christ.

Whitefield soon recognized his self-deception, due in part to the preceding verse of Scripture: "But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing" (Gal. 4:18). No one ever questioned his zeal, but he lacked the proper perception of union with Christ and that the new birth is not attained through external practices that do not engage a person's heart. However, this enlightening discovery did not immediately produce his desired conversion. Instead, he was persuaded to engage the means of grace promoted by the Oxford Methodists with greater intensity than before. Throughout this turbulent time, he experienced steady temptations from Satan. Whitefield's retrospective journal reflections five years later acknowledged the benefit of these trials, which reduced his "self-love" and taught him "to die daily."[43] Despite Whitefield's appreciation of *The Life of God*, Scougal was clearer on the nature of the divine life than on the means of growing in it. This lack of clarity later led to Whitefield concluding his sermons with specific applications shaped by the needs and contexts of his listeners.[44]

The Puritans also gave Whitefield new eyes to read Scripture. Before attending Oxford, he declared, "Frequently I read the Bible," and he confessed his "diligence . . . in studying [his] Greek Testament." However, this reading was more academic than for personal growth. Now as he followed Scougal, Scripture took on a radically new meaning for him: "The lively Oracles of God were my soul's delight. . . . I meditated therein day and night."[45] This recalibrated his reading as he devoted two hours nightly in rigorous prayer over his "Greek Testament, and Bishop Hall's most excellent *Contemplations*."[46] Joseph Hall (1574–1656), a popular devotional writer admired by many Puritan readers, authored *Contemplations on the Historical Passages of the Old and New Testament* (1612–1662). This multivolume collection ushered readers into a careful integration of biblical instruction coupled with devotion. Hall's vivid retelling of the scriptural narratives likely stimulated Whitefield's imagination and inspired his future preaching. In response, he declared, "I began to read the holy Scriptures (upon my knees) laying aside all other books, and praying over, if possible, every

[43] *Journals*, 47, 51. The last reference was deleted in 1756.
[44] J. I. Packer, *Puritan Portraits* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2012), 42–43.
[45] *Journals*, 40, 44, 48.
[46] *Journals*, 48, 57.

line and word." This became his lifelong practice of meditating, in an attentive posture, on the Bible. With a combination of delight and discovery, he continued, "I got more true knowledge from reading the Book of God in one month, than I could *ever* have acquired from *all* the writings of men."[47]

Whitefield also began to read the biblical commentaries of William Burkitt (1650–1703) and Matthew Henry (1662–1714). These Puritan authors examined Scripture in a manner that included a devotional awareness rather than mere cognition and contributed to his maturing understanding of the gospel. This new method of reading proved refreshing for Whitefield and other Oxford Methodists, who at this time privileged devotional books over biblical and theological writings. Once he recognized his unbalanced habits, he challenged all readers that the Christian life must always be nurtured by both doctrine and devotion. His experience helped validate that devotional classics could deepen a person's desire for Jesus, but they must never become a substitute for Scripture. Given the choice, he would have adamantly stressed that it was more important to read Scripture to learn of Jesus than to read about Jesus in secondary sources.

The Puritans also assisted Whitefield's understanding of the nature and dynamics of the new birth. He devoured *Alarm to the Unconverted* (1671), by Joseph Alleine (1634–1668); *Call to the Unconverted* (1658), by Richard Baxter (1615–1691); and *The Holy Life of Mr. John Janeway* (1673), by James Janeway (1636–1674). These writings galvanized his understanding of the new life in Christ and began his early introduction to Calvinism, to which he had not yet been exposed at Oxford.

One Whitefield biographer observes the "spiritual bricolage" of his sources, and indeed some readers might be amazed by the breadth of Whitefield's reading of numerous Roman Catholic authors.[48] Another historian accurately observes, "The new evangelical devotion was not cut off from the Christian past; it depended upon it."[49] But evangelicals did not blindly consume Roman Catholic writings; nor did they borrow from Catholic doctrinal writings. Rather, they read with a discerning eye, through their theological sensibilities, not only Roman Catholic sources but Anglican as well. Whitefield's revision of Law's *Serious Call* in June 1748 confirms this. His lengthy title provides a commentary of why he revised this

[47] *Journals*, 60 (italics in the original). This phrase was deleted in the 1756 *Journals*. See *Journals*, 87, for Whitefield's continued practice of reading Scripture on his knees.
[48] Kidd, *George Whitefield*, 17, 26, 30.
[49] Hindmarsh, *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism*, 95.

classic: *Law Gospelized; or An Address to All Christians concerning Holiness of Heart and Life: Being an Attempt to Render Mr. Law's Serious Call More Useful to the Children of God, by Excluding Whatever Is Not Truly Evangelical, and Illustrating the Subject More Fully from the Holy Scriptures*.[50] Some believe Law himself became frustrated with his moralistic teaching and eventually became a follower of Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), the controversial German Lutheran mystic whose views eventually rejected biblical orthodoxy.

Influence of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit's presence and power was the fourth major stream that fashioned Whitefield's life. He recorded his early awareness before he attended Oxford, noting the Holy Spirit's role in "bringing many things to my remembrance," "movings of the blessed Spirit upon my heart," and "illuminations" of God's "foretastes of his love." This inner sensitivity to the promptings of the Spirit imparted valuable guidance but also required spiritual maturity and discernment. His dependence on the Spirit intensified during his student days, which convicted him of sin and the dangers of relying upon others but eventually provided the courage for him to live boldly for Jesus Christ. His awakening came in the spring of 1735, amid an intense seven weeks of sickness in which he reported, "The blessed Spirit was all this time purifying my soul."[51]

These four streams coalesced to bring Whitefield to his liberating discovery, thus making him the first member of the Oxford Methodists to experience an evangelical conversion, which he recorded in his journal:

> God was pleased to set me free in the following manner. One day, perceiving an uncommon drought, and a disagreeable clamminess in my mouth, and using things to allay my thirst, but in vain, it was suggested to me, that when Jesus Christ cried out, "I thirst," his sufferings were near at an end. Upon which, I cast myself down on the bed, crying out, I thirst! I thirst! Soon after this, I found and felt in myself that I was delivered from the burden that had so heavily oppressed me! The Spirit of mourning was taken from me, and I knew what it was truly to rejoice in God my Saviour, and, for some time, could not avoid singing Psalms wherever I was;

[50] Whitefield to Rev. Mr. S—, June 24, 1748, in *Works*, 2:144. Whitefield's revision is published in his *Works*, 4:375–437. Isabel Rivers provides a helpful summary of the evangelical ambivalence to Law. See Isabell Rivers, "William Law and Religious Revival: A Reception of *A Serious Call*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2008): esp. 636–44.

[51] *Journals*, 35, 38, 41, 54, 57. The final phrase was deleted in the 1756 *Journals*.

> but my joy gradually became more settled, and, blessed be God, has abode and increased on my soul (saving a few casual intermissions) ever since!
>
> Thus were the days of my mourning ended. After a long night of desertion and temptation, the star, which I had seen at a distance before, began to appear again, and the day-star arose in my heart. Now did the Spirit of God take possession of my soul, and, as I humbly hope, seal me unto the Day of Redemption.[52]

Several key insights emerge from Whitefield's language, which echoes Christian in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) when his overwhelming burden of sin rolls off his back as he gazes at the cross. This exemplifies Whitefield's common practice of borrowing from Jesus or other biblical persons to describe his experience. The centrality of Jesus's crucifixion was also center stage when he cried out, "I thirst" (John 19:28), as was the star that led the magi to the baby Jesus (Matt. 2:2, 10) when "the day-star arose" in Whitefield's heart. Once again, the Holy Spirit was active in leading and confirming his experience of the new birth. An insightful comparison can be made between Whitefield's initial account of his conversion recorded in 1740 and his revised, 1756 account. The later entries removed the graphic language that identified him with Jesus Christ on the cross; and his faith, absent in the 1740 account, became prominent in 1756.[53]

After his conversion at Oxford, Whitefield returned to Gloucester and spent nine months recuperating from the effects of his excessive spiritual introspection.[54] While at home, he chronicled his new freedom in the Spirit when he wrote, "I felt that Christ dwelt in me, and I in him, and how did I daily walk in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and was edified and refreshed in the multitude of peace," and the Holy Spirit "led me into the knowledge of divine things."[55] Guidance and impressions from the third person of the Trinity continued to grow in importance as Whitefield began his ministry.

The day after his ordination, he struggled to write a sermon until he perceived the Spirit's guidance. In his journal, he recounted the way the words "speak out, Paul" flooded his soul with great power, and "immediately," he wrote, "my heart was enlarged. God spoke to me by his Spirit, and I was no longer dumb." His newfound awareness of a "direct and immediate experience of God" and the "felt presence of the Holy Spirit" has been

[52] *Journals*, 58. This entire section was deleted in the 1756 *Journals*.
[53] McGever, *Born Again*, 130–33.
[54] *Journals*, 48, 52, 54–60.
[55] *Journals*, 61–62. This was also deleted in 1756.

attributed to Scougal's influence from *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*.[56] This was not an isolated occasion for Whitefield, as he recorded numerous entries in his unpublished diary, declaring that he was "full of the Holy Ghost" and that he experienced "joy in the Holy Ghost."[57] His first journal concluded by reminding his readers that by thirsting after Jesus Christ they would receive the "indwelling of his blessed Spirit in [their] heart[s]."[58]

A later sermon proclaimed that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was the privilege of every believer in Christ.[59] Despite his 1756 deletion of many journal entries that mentioned his immediate experience of the Spirit, "this emphasis on the Holy Spirit would be a consistent theme in Whitefield's career, although he would in time back away from claims for his immediate guidance."[60]

Thus, of the four formative streams of influence on Whitefield, Oxford Methodism would gradually diminish in importance; following his conversion, Pietism, Puritanism, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit would continue to expand.

Ordination and Early Ministry

Just as Whitefield struggled to find peace with God, he agonized over whether he should become a minister. In 1736, he wrote to John Wesley—then still in Georgia—of his dilemma, reporting that while his friends had urged him to seek holy orders, he believed it was unnecessary to be ordained to serve God. This, combined with his serious self-examination, convinced him that he was unqualified because he was a great sinner and came from a humble background.[61] In his discernment, and remembering Moses's resistance when God called him to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, Whitefield felt he should not run ahead of God's possible call. He prayed fervently that God would prevent him from accepting this challenge unless he was conscious of divine confirmation. Eventually he concluded, "If God did not grant my request in keeping me out of it [the ordained ministry] I knew his grace would be sufficient to support and strengthen me whenever he sent me into the ministry."[62]

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56 Hindmarsh, *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism*, 33; cf. 34–36.
57 Kidd, *George Whitefield*, 35.
58 *Journals*, 71. This section was deleted in 1756.
59 Whitefield, "The Indwelling of the Spirit, the Common Privilege of all Believers," in *Works*, 6:89–102.
60 Kidd, *George Whitefield*, 36; for a helpful treatment of Whitefield's reliance on the Spirit, see pp. 35–37.
61 Tyerman, *George Whitefield*, 1:39.
62 *Journals*, 65. This was deleted in 1756.

Ordination for Whitefield required a conversation with Bishop Benson of Gloucester. Despite the bishop's policy not to ordain a man unless he was at least twenty-three, Whitefield received his approval at only twenty-one. Presumably, this exception was due to the strong impression his "character" and "behaviour at church" made on the bishop. Additionally, he gave Whitefield a gift of money to purchase a book, which confirmed his earlier dream in which he met the bishop and received a gold coin.[63] Like his dependency upon the immediate impressions of the Holy Spirit, his receiving guidance through dreams drew frequent criticism of Whitefield and was deleted from his 1756 revision of his *Journals*.[64]

The same intensity that characterized Whitefield's conversion marked his preparation for ordination. He carefully studied the Thirty-Nine Articles—the primary theological teaching of the Church of England—proving each point by Scripture, as well as the biblical qualifications of a minister. Prayerfully he pondered two questions the bishop would ask: "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office and administration?" and "Are you called according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ?" Bishop Benson certified Whitefield's responses and agreed to ordain him on Trinity Sunday, June 20, 1736.[65] After his ordination, Whitefield confessed that the "good of souls" would be his primary motivation. He further proclaimed his unwavering commitment to Jesus Christ by writing, "I gave myself up to be a martyr for him, who hung upon the cross for me."[66] Gratitude was a primary impulse for Whitefield throughout his ministry as he would often take inventory of Christ's numerous provisions for him and how he could respond more faithfully.

In the week leading up to his first sermon, which he delivered at his home church in Gloucester, Whitefield felt considerable trepidation. He wrote to a woman and expressed his fears that people might not appreciate his message. But, he declared, "I must tell them the truth, or otherwise I shall not be a faithful minister of Christ."[67] The commitment to always proclaim the truth, regardless of the consequences, created frequent trouble for him. This initial sermon—"The Necessity and Benefit of Religious Society"—explored how small groups could assist believers in growing into deeper maturity in Christ.[68] Reports reached the bishop that Whitefield

[63] *Journals*, 66–67. Much of this was deleted in 1756.
[64] *Journals*, 66.
[65] *Journals*, 68–69.
[66] Whitefield to Mr. S—, June 20, 1736, in *Letters*, 15–16.
[67] Whitefield to Mrs. H—, June 28, 1736, in *Letters*, 17.
[68] Whitefield, "The Necessity and Benefit of Religious Society," in *Works*, 5:107–22.

drove fifteen listeners mad during his sermon, to which the bishop "wished that the madness might not be forgotten before next Sunday."[69] In due course, not all reactions from the Anglican hierarchy would be nearly as appreciative of Whitefield's passionate and confrontational homiletical style.

Nonetheless, British ministers were warned of spiritual anorexia, owing to their anemic preaching, which produced "a starvation of the souls for Jesus Christ."[70] Whitefield quickly comprehended the same danger and addressed this tepid spiritual condition in his second sermon, preached on the new birth. This message would become his signature sermon. While it stressed the necessity of being born again, the sermon lacked awareness of justification by faith or grace.[71] Despite this absence, he proclaimed the redeeming power of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. The popularity of this radically new message was confirmed by a third edition, published in October 1737.[72] Regardless of the topics, many of his sermons stressed the necessity of the new life in Christ. It was also frequently woven into his correspondence; for example, "Indeed we may flatter ourselves, that we may go to heaven without undergoing the pangs of the new birth; but we shall certainly find ourselves desperately mistaken in the end."[73]

Whitefield soon became convinced that he should join the Wesleys in Georgia as a missionary to this newly established British colony. While waiting to cross the Atlantic, he engaged in various short-term ministries in and around London, which provided frequent opportunities for preaching in diverse settings. In the final months of 1737 before his departure, he preached an average of nine times a week, becoming a preaching sensation and achieving celebrity status. He acknowledged that his meteoric rise from a lowly servitor at Oxford to an admired Anglican preacher created the temptation to pride. This popularity soon restricted his movement through the streets of London and forced him to travel by coach.[74] While mass crowds thronged to hear him wherever he spoke, Anglican clergymen became increasingly incensed by his message of the new birth.

Celebrating the New Birth

But the new birth continued to empower Whitefield's preaching and life, and he would never grow weary of proclaiming this message. He examined

[69] *Memoirs*, 10.
[70] Watts, *Humble Attempt*, 47.
[71] Whitefield, "On Regeneration," in *Works*, 6:257–72.
[72] Whitefield to Mr. H—, October 25, 1937, in *Letters*, 30.
[73] Whitefield to Mrs. H—, June 28, 1736, in *Letters*, 18.
[74] *Journals*, 70, 89.

this in his sermon on new life in Christ, titled simply "On Regeneration," which reveals how Scougal shaped both his theology and spirituality. Exegeting 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature," Whitefield declared, "To be in him not only by outward profession, but by an inward change and purity of heart" leads to "the cohabitation of his Holy Spirit." Further, to be in Christ is "to be mystically united to him by a true and lively faith" that introduces a person to all of the benefits of being joined with Jesus, just as the branches receive all of the nourishment of the vine.[75] The themes of union with Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the emphasis on inward transformation would continue to resonate throughout his entire ministry.

The burning desire of Whitefield's life was to become a new creation, shedding the past and being born into the newness of life in Christ Jesus. He reiterated the centrality of the Spirit's work in applying Christ's redemption, "that we should have a grant of God's Holy Spirit to change our natures, and so prepare us for the enjoyment of that happiness our Saviour has purchased by his precious blood."[76] This was Whitefield's experience; the new birth, after all, had brought him into a new relationship of enjoying the triune God. There was little wonder that whenever he visited Oxford he could not resist, in his own words, "running to that place where Jesus Christ first revealed himself to me, and gave the new birth."[77]

[75] Whitefield, "On Regeneration," 259.
[76] Whitefield, "On Regeneration," 265.
[77] Whitefield, "All Mens Place," 360.