

George Whitefield:
Lessons in Innovation and Preaching

Presented to Professor Garth Rosell
Church History 102: The Church From The Reformation

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Introduction

George Whitefield's ministry struck wide reverberations in his own lifetime and across history. During his lifetime, an estimated 80% of all colonial Americans heard him preach at one time or another. Historically, both Billy Graham and Dennis Rodman can reasonably trace their lineage to this 18th century evangelist. In religious terms, Whitefield begot the mass revivalist; in cultural terms, he prefigured the modern, self-promoted celebrity. Despite the magnitude of his impact, however, George Whitefield's life and ministry struck me as personally relevant in two key aspects. To analyze this relevance, this paper focuses on Whitefield the Innovator and Whitefield the Preacher. Examination of these aspects, I hope, will also provide an adequate biographical sketch of his overall life.

Whitefield the Innovator

By definition, revivals represent a "new work" of God. The key workmen of God in such revivals thus will tend to display the gift of innovation: the ability to grasp the key features of a given context and devise new, more effective methods in response.¹ Whitefield's early ministry provides an excellent picture of how this gift is nurtured and practiced.

While innovation seems to be a natural trait, young innovators grow best when they participate in what one scholar of innovation has called, "learning communities."² Whitefield's very life was transformed by a paradigmatic version of such a community: the Holy Club of the Wesleys. In 1732, Whitefield attended Oxford as a servitor (a lower class servant/student) and was mired in the midst of a profound spiritual struggle with his lack of righteousness. Lonely and confused, he visited Charles Wesley for the first time. In his journal, Whitefield recounted that "it was one of the most profitable visits I ever made in my life. My soul, at that time, was athirst for some spiritual friends to lift up my hands when they hung down, and to strengthen my feeble knees." Wesley also gave Whitefield several devotional books to read. While reading those books, Whitefield discovered the "new birth" which in turn would fuel all his new methods:

"God soon showed me; for in reading a few lines further, that 'true religion was union of the soul with God, and Christ formed within us,' a ray of Divine light was instantaneously darted in upon my soul, and from that moment, but not till then, did I know that I must be a new creature."

Soon afterwards, Whitefield learned from the Holy Club the innovative "method" of spiritual growth. This personal and community mentoring process built the foundation of the rest of Whitefield's ministry.³

The Holy Club's value on ministry experimentation also ignited Whitefield's development. In 1735, John Wesley accidentally discovered extemporaneous preaching when he forgot his notes. The power of the

¹ For an excellent analysis of "revivals" in the corporate world that neatly parallels religious institutions, see Ichak Adizes, *Corporate Life Cycles*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1988). Adizes emphasizes the absolute necessity of innovators for such revivals.

² See Peter Senge, et. al ed., *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, (New York, 1994)

³ George Whitefield, "A Short Account of God's Dealings" in ed. Iain Murray, *George Whitefield's Journals*, (London, 1960), 46-7

ensuing sermon led him to urge other Oxford methodists to experiment with this radical departure from the standard, carefully prepared sermons of the Anglican church. Whitefield tried preaching this way for the first time two years later with great success. Extemporaneous preaching seemed to perfectly match Whitefield's general urge to operate outside fixed lines -- of established protocol as well as written text. He would be the era's most powerful practitioner of this method, outstripping even Wesley himself.⁴

The best innovators in fact consistently outgrow the contexts that nurtured them at one time. Whitefield was no exception. After Whitefield's graduation from Oxford, the Wesleys invited him to serve as a missionary to the colony of Georgia. By all accounts, the Wesleys themselves had failed in Georgia. While there were several factors involved (including their denunciation of slavery), they had alienated the polyglot community with insistence on the Anglican liturgy. They had also failed to build any trust or attract much interest with their efforts at evangelism. By the time Whitefield set sail for Georgia in 1738, the Wesleys had both returned and John even counseled him against going. Whitefield departed anyway, believing in God's call and probably also displaying the independent spirit, self-confidence, and arrogance typical of the innovator.⁵

During the sea journey, he made use of the time by continuing to experiment in his ministry to the sailors and soldiers on board, practicing extemporaneous preaching and especially combining a ministry of charity with his evangelism.⁶ His work upon his arrival in Georgia further developed this combination. Realizing that many of the felt needs of the residents in this poor colony were material, he employed the considerable funds he had raised for the mission to dispense relief supplies. Stout describes how Whitefield sized up his new context and responded:

Homes and small chapels replaced crowded cathedrals and massive pulpits, and Whitefield instinctively adapted his ministry to suit the small groups... He moved from door to door enlisting worshipers and learning about the country's customs and faiths.⁷

Realizing the importance of the national traditions of the German, Swiss, French, and Scottish residents, he incorporated their traditions into the Anglican liturgy. Whitefield's mission to Georgia was so successful that he would eventually call it his home for his itinerant ministry. A colonial orphanage house in Savannah would be the primary recipient of the extensive fund raising efforts that were part of all of his subsequent revivals.

Whitefield consistently wedded his innovative spirit to a burning sense of mission. This union accounts, I believe, for the extraordinary power God unleashed in his ministry. Many can innovate, but Whitefield did not seek to do things in a new way just for the sake of creativity. Rather, he focused this gift

⁴ Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, (Michigan, 1991), 43

⁵ Stuart Clark Henry, *George Whitefield: Wayfaring Witness*, (Nashville, 1958), 33. See also Stout, 50

⁶ George Whitefield, "A Journal of a Voyage from London to Savannah in Georgia" in ed. Iain Murray, 97-152

⁷ Stout, 60

of "newness" on the mission of taking the Gospel to new places. All sorts of new "social places" were emerging in 18th century England and America. The nascent Industrial Revolution was enlarging the working and middle classes, with the result that the "mass public" and "public spaces" were beginning to replace the aristocracy and elite institutions as the arbiter of social values. Moreover, the increased production of goods was creating what has been termed a "consumer revolution," with the result that the modern marketplace was beginning to overshadow more local, traditional communities as the place of social interaction.⁸

An innovator could spend his energy on devising new ways to get the new public to come to church. But the best innovators tune themselves to the broader forces in their contexts. Whitefield correctly discerned that the social transformations underway meant that the traditional places were no longer fully effective in reaching people for the Gospel. The average Anglican church catered to the upper class and the local parish church in general was part of the traditional order being eclipsed by the marketplace. Whitefield's innovations were powerful because he sought to take the Gospel to the new places, rather than just creating better ways to gather people into the old places.

Starting in 1739, Whitefield began the practice of outdoor preaching that would trigger the Great Awakening. Once again, his development followed the classic patterns of the innovator. In his constant lookout for new methods, he had in 1737 heard about a Welsh preacher named Howell Harris who, as Whitefield wrote in his journal, "discourses generally in a field, but at other times in a house, from a wall, a table or any thing else." Their meeting in 1739 was a synergistic exchange between two mission-driven innovators: "When I first saw him, my heart was knit closely to him. I wanted to catch some of his fire, and gave him the right hand of fellowship with my whole heart... we spent the remainder of the evening in taking sweet counsel together." The next day, they preached together several times -- once in the Town Hall -- with Whitefield reporting that "I think I never spoke with greater freedom and power, and never saw a congregation more melted down."⁹ As he did with some of Wesley's innovations, Whitefield extended this practice with greater power and imagination than Harris ever did. Whereas Harris had preached mostly in the fields of Wales, Whitefield

...scheduled preaching regularly on weekend afternoons in London's great public parks such as Hyde Park, Moorfields, and Kennington Common. He also preached at tracks on days of horse races, delivering one sermon from the 'weighing-chair on the horse-course.' London's crowded shopping districts provided opportunities to address large numbers of people. Upon one occasion, 'finding 2-or-3 thousand people in the street, he preach'd to them from the Shop-Window.' Just as consumer goods were displayed and advertised for sale, Whitefield transformed himself and his message into commodities and offered them to a mass audience.¹⁰

⁸ Frank Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, (New Jersey, 1994), 6-7

⁹ George Whitefield, *Third Journal*, in ed. Iain Murray, 228-231

¹⁰ Lambert, 64

In short, Whitefield took the Gospel in bold new ways straight on to the turf of the new consumer public and the emerging marketplace.

In order to attract this new consumer public, Whitefield freely borrowed the new tools of the marketplace. In fact, as usual, he sharpened the cutting edge of those new tools. For his revivals, Whitefield oversaw the creation of the most extensive publicity apparatus yet witnessed: pamphlets, newspaper articles and advertising, testimonials, endorsements, advance publicity agents, and more. He created an extensive product line of his sermons, journals, books that he wrote or recommended, his own revival magazine (called the *Weekly History*), even busts of his likeness. No merchant could match the breadth of his distribution network across the 13 colonies and the Atlantic Ocean, nor its sophistication as he employed "merchandising devices such as quantity discounts, prepayment incentives, serial publication, convenience packaging, and home delivery."¹¹ It is difficult to overestimate just how revolutionary Whitefield was in his self promotion and marketing. With his public image, he invented himself as the first citizen-celebrity in the Anglo American world.

If the crowds came to hear the "famous George Whitfied" because he invented that fame, they also came because he invented interest. The middle 18th century witnessed an explosion in print journalism; in 1700 there were no American newspapers, but by the time of Whitefield's first visit to Philadelphia in 1739, there were 11.¹² Whitefield correctly perceived that the consumers and producers of this new media were most hungry for controversy. He sowed the necessary controversy by regularly attacking the Anglican hierarchy in print. While some of his attacks undoubtedly stemmed from his genuine commitment to the New Birth vis a vis the established Anglican rationalism, he also deliberately played to the American affection for the rebel.¹³

While Whitefield's self promotion and marketing inventions certainly are ripe for much theological and ethical debate, they were indisputably crucial to the Great Awakening. Moreover, they highlight two more lessons about innovation. First, one's pre-ministry (and especially pre-Christian) experiences frequently serve as the tap root of the most effective ministry innovations. Whitefield grew up working in his family's working class pub, the Bell Inn. In that thoroughly marketplace setting, he gained plenty of experience in retail as he sold wine, listened to traveling merchants, and advertised in the press. His brother James was one of the pioneers in extending the transatlantic commercial network.¹⁴ Unlike most of his Anglican colleagues who came from upper class backgrounds sheltered from such developments, Whitefield could speak the language of the new public and understand the dynamics of the marketplace. Second, in

¹¹ Lambert, 9

¹² Lambert, 33

¹³ Stout, 97

¹⁴ Lambert, 37-47

their impulse to "push the edge of the envelope," the best innovators inevitably will go too far. Innovators thus need to realize this tendency and, very importantly, receive special grace for their mistakes. For example, Whitefield's attacks on the established clerical order eventually caused great disunity and disorder in some of the local churches. By 1745, Whitefield faced considerable critical backlash. He responded by issuing public apologies to numerous parties. The generally forgiving response freed up Whitefield to continue his revivals.¹⁵

Lessons In Innovation

As the reader may already recognize, I have a special affinity for innovators and innovation. I believe they must occupy a special place in my own college ministry. The edge of most social transformations cuts its first teeth on the university campus. Social change also cuts quicker, as we receive each new generation carried along the rapidly moving cultural currents of media and technology. And finally, change is biting deep, as the university is already in the midst of the epochal shift to post-modernity. While this is not the place to fully describe all these transformations, suffice to say that ministry models and methods can quickly become obsolete. We need people with the ability to discern the changing contexts, and the boldness to respond with new strategies. *Innovate or die* has already become the mantra of many of the most effective corporate institutions and it must become so for our most effective campus ministries.

As an innovator, I am especially challenged by how Whitefield so powerfully brought this impulse into the service of mission. Like Whitefield, I too face a context where social transformations have created all sorts of new "public places." The World Wide Web is but one of such new marketplaces. And this generation of students -- the most non-churched, non-culturally Christianized generation in American history -- reside in these places and are not too interested in the traditional religious places like church. The Gospel must be brought on to these new places of non-believers. Yet, like many innovators, I find myself easily distracted by many interesting but tangential projects. I must relentlessly focus my innovation in the service of that mission.

Moreover, as a developer of future leaders of the Church, I will need to identify the next generation of ministry innovators. Whitefield's example instructs me especially to look for recent converts who have been immersed in the secular social transformations. They will be the ones who will most readily think "outside the lines" of traditional campus ministry. They will also be the ones who will most effectively speak the language and appreciate the forces operating in these new places.

As I identify them, I must give them special and careful treatment. Like Whitefield, they will require a difficult balance of influence. They will need to be mentored lavishly, yet with an expectation that they will

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probably strain and eventually outgrow my influence fairly quickly. This is a potentially painful and ego-bruising process for the mentor, which can easily be handled in a way that either squashes the innovator or drives her away prematurely. I will need to bring the innovator into "learning communities," while at the same time listening to her need to continually discover and learn from new settings and people. Finally, I must readily extend grace to the innovator. She will undoubtedly push too far, too hard and get into trouble. As long as she demonstrates humility and repentance, I want to do all I can to protect that underlying innovative spirit.

Whitefield the Preacher

As important as Whitefield's new mission and marketing strategies were, his unique preaching style stood out as his core innovation. Crowds might have initially gathered because of his strategies, but they only wept in repentance because of the words they heard proclaimed. Whitefield recounted one of the initial reactions to his unique preaching -- a reaction which was repeated throughout his career -- when he wrote in his journal, "I felt a freedom in my spirit, and was enabled to preach with power to near two thousand people. Many were convicted. One was drowned in tears... Several servants of God said they never saw the like before."¹⁶ By age 24, he had already attained the status of a preaching sensation in England, a fame which would continue to grow to international dimensions until his death.

To understand the power in his style, it is helpful to examine more closely a typical Whitefield sermon, "Abraham's Offering Up His Son Isaac."¹⁷ The sermon epitomizes Whitefield's preference for the narrative genre: he not only frequently chose stories as the subject matter, but structured his sermons as a retelling of the story. This format contrasted sharply with the prevailing rationalism of most Anglican preachers, which emphasized explication of principles and dogma.

The narrative format unleashed Whitefield's considerable dramatic talents. Early on in the retelling of the Abraham and Isaac story, he depicted the main character, "Methinks I see the good old man walking with his dear child in his hand, and now and then looking upon him, loving him, and then turning aside to weep." Undoubtedly, Whitefield would physically recreate the bent over shuffle and the loving facial expression as he spoke. More often, though, he would verbally paint the scene, inviting the audience to envision it for themselves. Note the appeal to the imaginative/visual faculties as Whitefield moves to the scene at the altar:

And here let us pause awhile, and by faith take a view of the place where the father has laid him... Fancy that you saw the altar erected before you, and the wood laid in order, and the beloved Isaac bound upon it: Fancy that you saw the aged parent standing by

¹⁶ George Whitefield, in ed. Iain Murray, 253

¹⁷ All quotes from this sermon are taken from George Whitefield, "Abraham's Offering Up His Son Isaac" in John Gilles, *Memoirs of Reverend George Whitefield*, (New Haven, 1834), 339-350.

weeping... methinks I see the tears trickle down the patriarch Abraham's cheeks... I see Isaac at the same time meekly resigning himself."

Like any good dramatist, Whitefield sought to draw the audience into the story. Thus, he would mix such calls to "fancy" and "see" with himself suddenly stepping into the role of the character of Abraham, "Adieu, adieu, my son; the Lord gave thee to me, and the Lord calls thee away; blessed be the name of the Lord; adieu, my Isaac, my only son, whom I love as my own soul; adieu, adieu." Whitefield's power lay in moving the audience to imagine the scene, and then even to perceive it as occurring right before them as a living story. His sermons consistently seek to blur the line between audience and story, between past and present, between story teller and story character.

The appeal to the imaginative faculty was intimately linked with the appeal to the emotions. His trademark phrases such as, "Methinks I see..." and "Fancy that you saw.." were almost always used to evoke what 18th century dramatic training termed, "the passions."¹⁸ One gets the strong sense that Whitefield closely scanned the Biblical text the way an actor scanned the script for details that would point to underlying emotional realities. And where the text itself did not explicitly provide them, he took dramatic license to create those emotions. For instance, he portrays Abraham as responding to Isaac's question, "Where is the lamb for the offering?" with "...at length, with tears in his eyes, and the utmost affection in his heart, cried out 'Thou art to be the lamb, my son'" -- even though Genesis 22:7-8 includes no such account. Imagined details and dialogue that evoke the feelings involved litter Whitefield's sermons. A contemporary commentator noted that "he shines brightest with a long text, on which fancy has scope to play, and the mind has liberty to range." Another noticed that his sermons were "...not without great pathos. He was very ready at that kind of painting."¹⁹

His goal was for audiences to identify emotionally with the characters in the Biblical story. Whitefield blurred the lines such that his listeners *became* the characters in the unfolding drama. One historian reports how a nineteen year old woman "declared his message was so powerful that ' when that minister spoke of the Prodigals going into a far country, I thought that he was exactly describing me.'"²⁰ Adult listeners would have heard Whitefield combine his dramatic performance of Abraham with the invitation "Come, all ye tender-hearted parents, who know what it is to look over a dying child." The recorded text of this sermon testifies to his usual success: "I see your hearts affected, I see your eyes weep, (and indeed, who can refrain weeping at the relation of such a story?)"

The stage was then set for the ultimate dramatic move. The move is fueled by the identification already established emotionally: "But let us now draw our eyes from the creature, and do what Abraham, if

¹⁸ Stout, 8-9
¹⁹ Gilles, 283-286
²⁰ Stout, 142

he was present, would direct; I mean, fix them on the Creator, God blessed for evermore." And as the audience looks with Abraham's eyes, Whitefield would proclaim: "But behold, I show you a mystery hid under the sacrifice of Abraham's only son, which, unless your hearts are hardened, must cause you to weep tears of love and that plentifully too. I would willingly hope you even prevent me here, and are ready to say, 'It is the love of God, in giving Jesus Christ to die for our sins. Yes that is it.'" Whitefield then describes the Gospel in terms that parallel the drama they have just entered: a loving Father willing to sacrifice an obedient Son. Once again, the imaginations and emotions evoked serve as the linkages between the ancient Old Testament story, the central Gospel story, and the current story of the listeners:

Did you weep just now when I bid you fancy that you saw the altar, and the wood laid in order, and Isaac laid bound on the altar? Look up by faith, behold the blessed Jesus, our all glorious Immanuel, not bound, but nailed on an accursed tree: see how he hangs crowned with thorns, and had in derision of all that are round him: see how the thorns pierce him, and how the blood in purple streams trickles down his sacred temples

Whitefield almost always sought to ultimately draw his audiences into a immediate and personal encounter with the crucified Christ.

And one must realize that for Whitefield, emotion was not merely a tool to reach this goal. Rather, emotion constituted an inextricable part of the goal itself. Whitefield understood (and had experienced himself) the "New Birth" in Christ's death as an emotional experience. He understood conversion not just as an intellectual assent but as an immediately felt reality. Thus, he concluded his Abraham and Isaac sermon by warning: "But if you are only talking believers, have only a faith of the head, and never felt the power of it in your hearts... unless you get a faith of the heart, a faith working by love, you shall never sit with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or Jesus Christ in the kingdom of heaven."

Lessons in Preaching

In my own preaching, I have developed a personal style that shares many similarities with what I have described of Whitefield's. In the last couple of years, I have also experimented extensively with drama designed to accomplish many of the objectives Whitefield pursued in his sermons. So in analyzing Whitefield, I have felt encouraged that my development and experiments can claim such a rich heritage in church history. The exercise has reassured me that my work falls "within the bounds" and humbled me that there is nothing truly original in it.

While I have experienced success in my preaching and drama (although obviously nothing remotely close to Whitefield's!), I am only recently beginning to wonder how to reproduce this success in others. This seems to be a concern that Whitefield never felt. He left behind no "heir" to his preaching ministry nor did he

ever noticeably mentor any younger preachers. There were probably several reasons for this absence of self-multiplication -- many of which I am also tempted to share.

First of all, one gets the strong impression that George Whitefield, from his early childhood on, loved being "the star."²¹ As one with a similar love, I know that "stars" naturally hesitate to share their secrets. We are reluctant to train understudies lest they take our role or even share the stage in a way that diminishes our uniqueness. Yet, Whitefield demonstrates the cost to the Kingdom of a refusal to train our own replacements, much less those that will exceed us. The Great Awakening essentially ended after Whitefield's death for many reasons, but at least one of them was that there was no one to continue his preaching in an equally powerful manner.

Whitefield's failure to train can also be attributed to how he himself developed his preaching style. He may have gleaned some techniques like extemporaneous and outdoor preaching from others, but the core features of his preaching were uniquely his own creation. Like Whitefield, I too stumbled upon my preaching style instinctively, with very little training from anyone else. I believe that generally speaking, creative people do not naturally form self consciousness about their own creations; they especially refrain from systematically analyzing the creative process itself. It was only out of a conviction that I needed to help train others in preaching that I have in recent years attempted to break down the stages of my sermon composition -- and even then I felt like I was tampering with something "magical." As a rule, innovators do not make good trainers; yet, the church especially needs what is in them. To continue to train others will require even more conscious effort and self awareness on my part.

Even if Whitefield felt convicted to train other preachers in principle, his lack of self awareness would have hindered him in practice. His lack was most evident in his attitude towards the theater. Whitefield's dramatic talents and style stemmed from his childhood immersion in drama. He read plays voraciously, starred in school productions, and was widely acknowledged by his instructors as a prodigy in drama. His innovative emphasis on emotional evocation in preaching exactly paralleled innovations in English theater of that era.²² He even received his first intimation of a calling to ministry while reading a play to his sister.²³ Yet, upon his conversion, he renounced reading plays as a "sin" for the rest of his life.²⁴ And as a preacher, he warred against theater, calling for believers to shun attending plays, and for the general closure of theaters. He initiated a bitter feud with the drama world that would last his entire life. Through it all, he seems to have entirely missed the fact that it was drama that had so powerfully shaped his own preaching. This lack of self awareness would have prevented him from realizing that any successor to

²¹ Stout, 5, 15

²² Stout, 6-8

²³ Whitefield, in ed. Gilles, 42

²⁴ Whitefield, in ed. Gilles, 45

his preaching style would probably have had to possess a dramatic background similar to his own. Indeed, he was probably uniquely gifted to recruit more dramatic talent into the church's ministry. Even actors who were his most bitter opponents could not resist coming to hear him preach. David Garrick, the 18th century star of English theater, attended numerous sermons and once exclaimed, "I would give a hundred guineas if I could say 'Oh!' like Mr. Whitefield."²⁵ The opportunity that Whitefield missed is one I want to seize. If my beliefs about effective communication of the Gospel are correct, it is crucial I look out for dramatic talent and sensibility and draw them into ministry.

However, Whitefield's lack of self awareness alarms me for an even more personal reason. I initially chose him as the topic for this assignment because I struggle with a host of inner issues related to successful preaching. I wrestle with pride, with how to handle the experience of power, and with intoxication with my own rhetoric -- just to mention a few of the complex spiritual dynamics involved in preaching. If anyone would have wisdom to offer on these dynamics, I thought, it would be a man who routinely preached to 30,000 people weeping under the power of his words. Yet, in poring over his journals, I find little or no mention of such personal issues. Probably the longest revelation of his inner struggle is found in one of his earliest journals. Here, he records (rather proudly) that:

The tide of popularity now began to run very high. In a short time, I could no longer walk on foot as usual, but was constrained to go in a coach, from place to place, to avoid the hosannas of the multitude. They grew quite extravagant in their applause; and, had it not been for my compassionate High Priest, popularity would have destroyed me. I used to plead with Him, to take me by the hand and lead me unhurt through this fiery furnace. He heard my request, and gave me to see the vanity of all commendations but His own.²⁶

But, he offers no more wisdom about the nature of this "fiery furnace" or the "pleading" with God for deliverance. Indeed, in this passage written at age 22, he conveys the sense that he was delivered from the temptations of popularity once and for all. Future journals would include even less mention of such inner dynamics. Yet, I find it difficult to believe that a preacher who, by his own account, would preach and "many seemed pricked to the heart, and some so quickened, that they expressed a desire to follow me wherever I should go... I have scarce known a time I have preached anywhere, but I have seen some effect of my doctrine" did not continue to wrestle with pride or power.²⁷ In fact, in later passages, he would still hint that he "had the pleasure of hearing of the success of my discourse yesterday upon many souls."²⁸ The overwhelming bulk of his journals, however, read as action reports: preached to this many thousands, collected this many pounds for charity, traveled these many miles.

One can respond that his journals were composed for public consumption (they were, in fact, regular bestsellers). But that only reinforces the suspicion that his inner life had no setting to express or discover

²⁵ Stout, 237

²⁶ Whitefield, in ed. Gilles, 89

²⁷ Whitefield, in ed. Gilles, 112

²⁸ Whitefield, in ed. Gilles, 235

itself. If the perception of the modern televangelist is one where the pious public image clashes with a tawdry private life, my perception of this original mass evangelist is one where the relentless public self has obliterated the tenuous private self. Although Whitefield's life shows no evidence of scandal or impropriety, it also reveals a nearly total lack of self awareness. His biographer concludes that "he lived his life for the public so exclusively and single-mindedly that his private life shrank into a small and relatively insignificant interlude between big performances."²⁹

Given the way Whitefield structured his life, this shrinking of the private self should not be surprising. He could average 40-50 hours a week *in the pulpit alone*, not counting addresses to smaller groups, individuals, business dealings (which were considerable), and a host of other public activities. He rarely stayed in his self proclaimed "home" in the Georgian orphan house for longer than a few months and spent most of his adult life in inns, guest homes, ships, carriages, and on horseback. His marriage was a loveless affair with none of the "passions" he evoked from the pulpit. He and his wife spent very little time together, for he had resolved that he would not "preach one sermon or travel one day less, in a married than in a single state."³⁰ He had many "friendly" colleagues but few true friends of any intimacy.

Whitefield died in the same manner he lived. At age 56, his health worn down by the constant traveling and ministry, he essentially insisted on preaching himself to death. He rejected the strong advice from doctors and friends to rest, and instead embarked on one last speaking tour. On the day of his death, he was observably struggling with breathing and a friend pleaded with him to cease, "Sir, you are more fit to go to bed than to preach." Whitefield replied, "Lord, if I have not yet finished my course, let me go and speak for Thee once more in the fields, seal Thy truth, and come home and die!" He preached a last public sermon, insisted on continuing his journey, gave a final "exhortation" to a crowd of admirers, and then died later that night. The text of his final sermon was, ironically, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in faith."

In death, Whitefield speaks to me a final somber warning. I need to structure my whole life such that my inner life is nurtured. I need to continually place my inner struggles under examination by my wife, my friends, my self, and ultimately by God. For, as a preacher, I am wooed not just by pride or love of power, but by perhaps a more corrosive temptation. I am tempted to live off of my preaching. I am tempted to cling to Preacher as my sole identity, and thus avoid going to the place where Whitefield repeatedly took his listeners: the cross of Christ. At the cross, even my preaching self must be crucified and replaced with the sole identity of the Beloved of God.

²⁹ Stout, xxii

³⁰ Stout, 161

ANNOTATED CRITICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ichak Adizes, *Corporate Life Cycles*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1988).

Adizes provides an excellent explanation of why innovators are so crucial to institutions. His description of corporate life cycles parallels the death and renewal pattern in religious movements that this course has examined.

John Gilles, *Memoirs of Reverend George Whitefield*, (New Haven, 1834)

While Iain Murray's edition of Whitefield's journals is more complete, Gilles' edition is indispensable for his collection of transcribed sermons. In addition to 27 of Whitefield's sermons, there are some very insightful comments by his contemporaries in the appendix.

Stuart Clark Henry, *George Whitefield: Wayfaring Witness*, (Nashville, 1958)

This was for years the standard in Whitefield biographies. It provides an excellent summary of his life (and a helpful chronology in the back), but it suffers from a weak analysis of how broader social forces shaped Whitefield.

Frank Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, (New Jersey, 1994)

Lambert's work is not so much a biography as it is a historical analysis of how the "consumer revolution" interacted with Whitefield's ministry. It uses Whitefield as a case study in the commercialization of religion, and thus provides excellent material on the socio-economic and cultural aspects of Whitefield's life. This is also the best treatment of Whitefield's pre-conversion experiences in trade and retail.

Iain Murray, ed., *George Whitefield's Journals*, (London, 1960)

This edition contains all seven of Whitefield's journals and his "Short Account of God's Dealings." Unfortunately, the journals only cover his first thirty years of his life and thus we have much less material on his thoughts later in life. Moreover, these journals were probably composed for public consumption, so how much they fully reveal the "real" Whitefield is debatable. It also provides some excellent material such as a farmer's account of Whitefield's revival and Whitefield's letter to John Wesley on the issue of predestination.

John Pollack, *George Whitefield and the Great Awakening*, (Garden City, 1972)

Pollack presents Whitefield's life in a dramatized fashion, imagining scenes and filling out dialogue based on journal entries and letters. It reads somewhat like an evangelical hagiography. Frankly, I did not find this work very helpful.

Peter Senge, et. al ed., *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, (New York, 1994).

Senge and his colleagues provide numerous examples of "learning communities" and how they operate.

Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, (Michigan, 1991)

This is probably the best modern biography of Whitefield I have encountered. Stout's main theme is how drama played a central factor in Whitefield's life and ministry. While Stout at times can go too far with this motif and can also fall prey to over psychologizing Whitefield, he nevertheless is very persuasive with his main point. His research is impressive and takes advantage of the most recent scholarship.

Web Sites on George Whitefield

Several sites like <http://dylee.keel....aders/whitfild.htm> and <http://www.biblecl.../bio/whitfield.htm> provide general biographical information on George Whitefield. Others include primary source documents like

Whitefield's letter to John Wesley (<http://www.gty.org/~phil/wesley.htm>) or his conversion experience (<http://www.thechri...mn/whitefield.html>).