



George WHITEFIELD

*God's Anointed Servant in the
Great Revival of the Eighteenth Century*

ARNOLD A. DALLIMORE

George Whitefield: God's Anointed Servant in the Great Revival of the Eighteenth Century. Adapted, rewritten and abridged from the two-volume work published previously under the title: *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteen-Century Revival.*

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Introduction

I am thankful for the reception accorded my two-volume work, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival*. Although each volume of this work amounts to six hundred pages, it has had several printings and has been widely read. Readers in various countries have expressed their gratitude for the information and fascination these books provided. For instance, Dr. Cornelius Van Til of Princeton and Westminster Seminaries in reviewing Volume One stated,

Read this book. You may forget to talk to your wife (or husband); you may forget to go to work; but it's worth a few sacrifices.

Why do I go to such extremes? To talk like that is surely abnormal. Yes, it is. But I did get into an unusually abnormal state of mind when I read the book. Besides, I am even now, weeks later, still abnormal.

Notwithstanding the large circulation these books have received, many potential readers, lacking a realization of the interest they would find in them, have told themselves, "Two such large volumes would be too much for me."

Accordingly I have condensed the two volumes into one of less than three hundred pages. This book, though brief and simple, reports many of the memorable and exciting matters of Whitefield's life, and I have endeavored to write in a style that I hope will prove abundantly interesting, even to many who are not in the habit of reading.

I trust, however, that readers of this one-volume work, gaining instruction and blessing from its pages, will be influenced to read the two-volume record of the life and times of George Whitefield, the greatest evangelist since the Apostle Paul.

Arnold A. Dallimore
Cottam, Ontario,
Canada, NOR 1B0

Missionary to Georgia

While *The Whitaker*, carrying Whitefield to America, was waiting to sail out of the port of Deal, *The Samuel*, bringing John Wesley from America, sailed in.

Wesley had gone to America with one supreme purpose: "My chief motive is the hope of saving my soul." He had assumed that salvation would come by way of the Holy Club type of discipline, and he believed that such practices, assisted by enduring the privations of the New World, would largely accomplish that end.

But he returned to England with these hopes shattered by the realization that salvation was not to be gained by any process of human effort. Now he knew that he must be changed inwardly, and he confessed, "What have I learned? Why, what I least of all suspected, that I who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God."

Wesley had learned this truth from the Moravians. These were a German people, a small party of whom had been aboard the vessel that carried him to America. He noticed their willingness to perform menial tasks for other passengers, but his chief surprise came when the vessel encountered a violent storm. A raging sea broke over the ship, and although "A terrible screaming began among the English," these German people—men, women, and children—calmly sang a hymn of trust and praise. But Wesley himself confessed that during the storm, "I was afraid to die!"¹

During his days in Georgia, Wesley had further associations with the Moravians. They testified concerning a certainty of salvation, and he realized that scholar and clergyman though he was, he was ignorant of the assurance of which they spoke. These were his first contacts with evangelical Christianity, and they had a lasting effect.

John found little but difficulty in Georgia. His days there were brought to a close by an innocent but unwise love affair. He was sued for £1000 for defamation of character and escaped to Charleston, South Carolina, from whence he sailed to England.

Upon landing at Deal John learned that Whitefield's vessel was near at hand. Feeling responsible for having urged Whitefield to go to Georgia, he cast a lot (that is, he wrote the several options on slips of paper and selected one of the papers at random). The lot read, "Let him return to London." He sent him word to this effect, and Whitefield replied stating he could not do so.² John then set out for London, and Whitefield set sail for Georgia. The date was February 2, 1738.

Although Wesley says nothing about this, upon reaching London he undoubtedly met with the effects of Whitefield's ministry. He could not but have heard of the tremendous congregations that had flocked to Whitefield's services, of the several nobility who were always in his audiences, of his declaration of the necessity of the new birth, and of the many who had entered that experience under his ministry. And despite his dejection Wesley undoubtedly determined that some measure of such success would yet be his.

While sailing the ocean, Whitefield was chaplain to all who were aboard the *Whitaker*. Besides the crew, there were twenty or so women and children and about one hundred soldiers. This vessel and two other ships that accompanied it were sailing first for Gibraltar, where more soldiers were to be taken aboard. All were then to sail for Georgia, where the soldiers would serve in defending the Colony from the Spaniards in Florida.

On his first morning on board Whitefield declared his intention "to know nothing among them, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." This brought ridicule from the soldiers and the sailors and their captains.

'The first Lord's Day,' he wrote, 'nothing was to be seen but cards and little heard but cursing and swearing. I could do no more than, whilst I was writing, now and then turn my head by way of reproof to a lieutenant who swore as though he was born of a swearing constitution. Now and then he would take my hint, return my nod with a "Doctor, I ask your pardon" and then return to his swearing and cards again.'³

In the face of this unpromising situation, Whitefield began his attempt to reach all on board with the gospel. His tact and zeal are well-expressed in his statement, "Oh, that I may catch them with a holy guile!"

The living conditions on such a vessel were undoubtedly wretched. Whitefield had brought with him many tasty items of food and several medicines, and since there was much sickness among the passengers, he went among them every day dispensing of his supply and giving encouragement. Each morning and evening he read prayers on the open deck, although for the time being he did not attempt to preach, lest he deter the people from attending.

After four days, however, he began a catechism class for the soldiers. Only six or seven were present on the first morning, but the number steadily increased until in a week's time the attendance mounted to twenty, and he added to the study an exposition of the Lord's Prayer. Then, finding this was accepted, he began to preach whenever he read prayers.

To these public efforts Whitefield added personal associations. He "breakfasted with some of the gentlemen" and reported an hour's conversation with another "on our fall in Adam and the necessity of the new birth." He walked at night on the deck in order to talk to the chief mate, and on another occasion "About eleven at night [he] sat down with the sailors in the steerage, and reasoned with them about righteousness, temperance and judgement to come."

Steadily gaining the goodwill of all on board, Whitefield began a daily catechism class for the women and soon added a Bible study. He also had James Habersham, a man he had brought with him, give instruction in elementary education for the children, and he invited any soldiers or sailors who wished to learn to read to attend.

While having "a dish of coffee" with the captain of the soldiers, Whitefield suggested that he would like to bring a short message to the captain and the other gentlemen in the great cabin. The captain shortly agreed and "expressed his appreciation of the good [he] was doing" among his men. Then the captain of the sailors ordered that chairs be set out on the deck and planks laid across them, thus making the deck of the *Whitaker* into a sort of floating chapel. Whitefield had also arranged "to meet any soldiers who could sing by note, to join in Divine Psalmody every day," thereby undoubtedly supplying

his meeting with a male choir. And daily he preached to almost all on board.

The ship docked first at Gibraltar, and the change on board was widely noticeable. Although but seven weeks earlier the men had been a scornful, cursing company, they now "stood forth like little children to say their Catechism," many read their Bibles regularly, and almost all attended services both morning and evening. Such were the fruits of Whitefield's labor in that short period of time. And when he left Gibraltar "many came to him, weeping, telling him what God had done for their souls," and bringing him gifts.

As the journey to Georgia continued, two vessels sailing with the *Whitaker* frequently drew close, and Whitefield preached to the companies on all three ships. What a sight this must have been—the three decks ablaze with the red coats of the soldiers, and the young chaplain standing with the naval and military captains at his side as he declared the Word of God to all.

Before Georgia was reached, an epidemic of fever swept over the ship. For many days and nights Whitefield visited the several sick ones; but, as was to be expected, he contracted the disease himself. He lay at the doors of death for some days, but from this extremity God brought him back. "He saw I was not yet ripe for glory," he wrote, "and therefore in mercy spared me."

Finally, four months after leaving England, the vessel dropped anchor on the coast of Georgia.

At this date—May 17, 1738—the Colony was but six years old. The one chief settlement was Savannah, but Colonel Oglethorpe soon arrived and commenced another—Frederica, about one hundred miles further south. The total population of the Colony was approximately one thousand, and it was to minister among this small company that Whitefield had left his crowds in London.

Although still sick from the fever suffered aboard ship, Whitefield held his first service at 5 the next morning. There were seventeen adults and twenty-five children present. Wesley's chief opponent, Thomas Causton, the chief magistrate, "promised to build him a house and showed him much favour."

In his first letter to Harris of Gloucester he said, "America is not so horrid a place. The heat of the weather, lying on the ground, etc. are mere painted lions in the way, and to a soul filled with divine love are not worth mentioning."

Colonel William Stephens, the secretary of the Colony, made the following entries in his official *Journal*:

June 4. Mr Whitefield's auditors increase daily, and the place of worship is too small to contain the people who seek his doctrine.

June 18. Mr Whitefield went on moving the people with his captivating discourses. A child being brought to church to be baptized, he performed that office by sprinkling, which gave great content to many who had taken great distaste at the form of dipping so obstinately withstood by some parents that they have suffered their children to go without the benefit of the sacrament, till a convenient opportunity could be found of another minister to do that office.

July 2. Mr Whitefield gains more and more on the affections of the people, by his labour and assiduity in the performance of divine offices; to which an open and easy deportment, without show of austerity, or singularity of behaviour in conversation, contribute not a little.⁴

This visit to Georgia, however, had an important effect on Whitefield's life. Several of the settlers had died and had left numerous orphans; they were in a homeless condition, and he determined to return to England and secure a charter and money to establish an Orphan House for them.

In view of this intention, after five months Whitefield brought his ministry in the Colony to a close. Colonel Stephens, in reporting his final service, said, "The congregation was so crowded that a great many stood without the doors and under the windows . . . pleased with nothing more than the assurance he gave of his intention to return as soon as possible."

Whitefield's voyage to England was a long and frightening affair. A great storm soon struck, and the mainsail and tackling were ruined, and the fresh provisions were washed overboard. Another vessel, speedier and well-provisioned, came by and, learning of Whitefield's presence, invited him aboard. But feeling it unfitting for a Christian to escape from danger while others were left to endure it, he declined.

The ship proved a place of hunger and thirst, and above all it became lost on the immensity of the ocean. During the third month there suddenly rang out the cry of, "Land! Land!" They had reached the coast of Ireland, and when a boat went ashore, a great gentleman sent word for Whitefield to spend some days with him recuperating.

But Whitefield had no time to spend resting his physical person and set out across Ireland. Arriving at Limerick, he was made a guest of the mayor, and the bishop had him preach at the Cathedral. At Dublin the bishop invited him to dine, and the archbishop received him with much courtesy.

Finally, on November 30, 1738, he reached the port of Parkgate in England. Eleven months had elapsed since his tearful farewell in London.

"The whole world is now my parish. Wheresoever my Master calls me I am ready to go and preach the everlasting Gospel."

GEORGE WHITEFIELD (1714–1770)

"If ever philanthropy burned in the heart with pure and intense flame, embracing the whole family of man in the spirit of universal charity, it was in the heart of George Whitefield."

SIR JAMES STEPHEN (1883)

"Perhaps the single most inspiring biography published in English in the twentieth century. A masterful work."

Sherwood Eliot Wirt, *founding editor, Decision magazine*

"I feel a permanent debt of gratitude to Dr. Dallimore. His wonderful two-volume study of Whitefield is one of the great biographies of the Christian Church. I share his hope that many more Christians will find this shorter version as enjoyable and stimulating!"

Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Professor of Systematic Theology, Redeemer Seminary, Dallas, Texas*

"This condensation of the author's classic two-volume edition contains twenty-three fast-moving chapters of highly interesting material. A powerful rendering of a life wholly consecrated to God."

G. A. Adams, *Principal Emeritus, Toronto Baptist Seminary*

ARNOLD A. DALLIMORE was editor of *The Evangelical Baptist* and a Baptist pastor for thirty-eight years. A successful biographer of Christian leaders of past centuries, he has authored numerous books, including *Spurgeon* and *A Heart Set Free* (the story of Charles Wesley).

BIOGRAPHY / CHRISTIAN

