

“BLESSED WHITEFIELD”:
GEORGE WHITEFIELD’S IMPACT UPON
THE TRANSATLANTIC BAPTIST COMMUNITY

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The CBC Massey Lectures tour this October features a series of five talks by Adrienne Clarkson on “Belonging: The Paradox of Citizenship.” In the print version of these lectures, which has already been published, Clarkson emphasizes that none of us are

totally self-sufficient. ...we need the stability we find only in society—especially in people with whom we have relationships. ...It is critical that we acknowledge our existence in the context of other people. Life at its best exists in cooperative, sharing, and balanced relationships with other lives. This is the interdependence we call belonging.

The eighteenth-century evangelist George Whitefield (1714–1770) would have concurred to some degree with this emphasis. In his own person—both his evangelism of town after town from one end of the English-speaking world to the other and his extensive correspondence with people throughout his itinerant ministry—he helped bind together the various strands of revival that deeply impacted the Celtic nations of Wales and Scotland, his own native England and the American colonies across the Atlantic. Time and again he stressed the way that Christians in

these diverse geographical contexts were interconnected and belonged to one another. In one vignette that he frequently used, he pretended to engage Abraham in conversation:

Father Abraham, whom have you in heaven? Any Episcopalians? No! Any Presbyterians? No! Have you any Independents or Seceders? Have you any Methodists? No, No, No! Whom have you there? We don't know those names here. All who are here are Christians.

His sermon "The Good Shepherd" equally downplayed denominationalism when it stated: "It is very remarkable, there are but two sorts of people mentioned in Scripture: it does not say the Baptists and Independents, nor the Methodists and Presbyterians, no Jesus Christ divides the whole world into but two classes, sheep and goats." And yet, it bears remembering that Whitefield never forgot that he was an Anglican.

He had been ordained as a deacon and priest within the Church of England in 1736 and 1739 respectively and he never ceased to love her Reformed theology as found in *The Thirty-Nine Articles* and her liturgical style of worship. As he said on one occasion about the Church of England: "I am a friend to her Articles [*The Thirty-Nine Articles*],...I am a friend to her liturgy." If Whitefield never forget his Anglican colours and roots, nor did the English and Welsh Dissenters among

whom he often preached. These Dissenters had been forced out of the state church in the previous century and had been brutally persecuted by Anglicans between 1660 and 1688, before the advent of religious toleration in the reign of William III and his wife Mary II. One of these Dissenting communities, the Particular or Calvinistic Baptists, had flourished despite this persecution; but after the Act of Toleration was passed May 24, 1689, they, like other Dissenters, began to slowly stagnate and, in some places, decline. When it came to self-definition, far too many of them defined themselves over against Anglicanism and obviously such Anglican ministers as Whitefield.

For example, the most significant English Baptist theologian at the turn of the eighteenth century was the prolific Benjamin Keach. He argued against the Quakers, those seventeenth-century counterparts of modern-day radical Pentecostals and charismatics. He wrote allegories, now long forgotten, that in his day rivaled those of John Bunyan in popularity and sales. He was a pioneer in the congregational singing of hymns in a day when singing was limited to the Psalter. And he published a number of lengthy collections of sermons, including *A Golden Mine Opened* (1694) and *Gospel Mysteries Unveiled* (1701), which remain invaluable treasures for the study of seventeenth-century Baptist thought. His ecclesiological convictions are typical of the beliefs that prevailed in the Particular Baptist community for much of

the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century. In one of his sermons, for instance, Keach unequivocally stated vis-à-vis Ezekiel 34:14 that this text implies that God's people

shall wander no more on the mountains of error and heresy; Christ leads them out of all idolatry and superstition, out of Babylon and all false worship; they shall no more be defiled...by the pollution of false churches, or with harlot worship; the church of Rome is called the mother of harlots. Are there no false churches but the Romish church? Yea, there are, no doubt; she hath whorish daughters, though not such vile and beastly harlots as the mother is; all churches that sprang from her, or all of the like nature, in respect of their constitution, and that retain many of her superstitious names, garbs, rites, and ceremonies, no doubt they are her daughters. Were the gospel churches national, or did they receive into those churches profane persons? No, no, they were a separate people, and a congregational and a holy community, being not conformable to this world; and into such a church Jesus Christ brings his sheep. And from hence it followeth, that he carries his lost sheep when he hath found them into his own fold, or into some true gospel church.

The Church of Rome is here denominated as the mother of false worship. And though Keach did not explicitly mention the Church of England by name, surely he had in mind this body of churches when he talked about this community being a “whorish daughter” who has “many of her [i.e. Rome's] superstitious names, garbs, rites, and ceremonies.”

Similarly, the leading Baptist theologian during the mid-eighteenth century, John Gill of London, could state without any equivocation: “The Church of England has neither the form nor matter of a true church, nor is the Word of God purely preached in it.” A resolution passed by St. Mary’s Baptist Church, Norwich, in 1754 revealed the same attitude. In the minute book for that year we read that “it is unlawful for any...to attend the meetings of the Methodists, or to join in any worship which is contrary to the doctrines and ordinances of our Lord Jesus.” And in London, a weaver and his wife by the name of Cricket were disfellowshipped by a Baptist church for going to regularly hear Whitefield preach.

Not surprisingly many Particular Baptists had deep reservations about the revival since it was uniformly led by Anglicans. A few of these Anglican preachers were Arminian in theology, like the Wesley brothers, and thus definitely beyond the pale for the Calvinistic Particular Baptists. However, Whitefield was a Calvinist. Yet, he was still an Anglican. In addition, the fervency of his evangelism and his passionate urging of the lost to embrace Christ prompted a number of Baptist critics—whose heightened Calvinism caused them to question the wisdom of Whitefield’s evangelistic strategies—to complain of what they termed his “Arminian accent”!

A good number of eighteenth-century Particular Baptists were thus adamant in their refusal to regard the Evangelical Revival as a genuine work of God. From their perspective, it simply did not issue in “true gospel churches.” These Baptists seem to have assumed that a revival could only be considered genuine if it preserved and promoted the proper form of the local church. For many Particular Baptists of the first six or seven decades of the eighteenth century, outward form and inward revival went hand in hand. Their chief preoccupation was the preservation of what they considered the proper New Testament form of church. In their minds, when God brought revival it would have to issue in true gospel churches like theirs.

The dilemma facing these Baptists was not an easy one. They rightly felt constrained to emphasize the New Testament idea of the local church as a congregation of visible saints and assert that the concept of a state church is antithetical to the whole tenor of the new covenant. Moreover, these were truths for which their forebears in the previous century had suffered greatly. To abandon them would have been unthinkable. But what then was to be made of the ministry of men like Whitefield?

One possible solution would have been for the eighteenth-century Particular Baptists to have viewed the ministry of Whitefield and other

Anglican Calvinists in the way that their seventeenth-century forebears viewed the labours of the sixteenth-century Reformers. The latter did not reject the ministry of the Reformers because they were not Baptists. Rather, they recognized that the Reformers had been greatly used by God to bring the church out of the stygian ignorance of the late mediæval era. Yet, though the Reformers did well, they failed to apply all that the Scriptures taught. As Benjamin Keach said with regard to the Particular Baptist community's recovery of key New Testament principles in the wake of the Reformation: "Must we content ourselves with the light which the Church had in respect of this and other gospel-truths at the beginning of the Reformation,—since God hath brought forth greater (to the praise of his own rich grace) in our days?" Similarly, in the eighteenth century, the Particular Baptists could have recognized that God was indeed at work in Whitefield's remarkable ministry and that of the other leaders of the Revival, but that there were certain areas—in particular, those dealing with ecclesiology—where Whitefield and these other remarkable preachers needed greater light.

Whitefield and the English Baptists

Thankfully, there were some noteworthy exceptions, men and women who were prepared to risk a certain degree of ostracism from their own Baptist community to fellowship with Whitefield. In the Baptist cause in Leominster, for instance, there was John Oulton, who appears to

have gotten to know Whitefield in April 1742 when he invited the Anglican evangelist to preach to his Baptist congregation. Whitefield was unable to accept this particular invitation; in his letter, though, he encouraged Oulton: “My dear brother, I rejoice to hear you are helped in your work. Let this encourage you; go on, go on; the more we do, the more we may do for Jesus.” This correspondence led to a friendship and in 1743 Whitefield was able to preach twice in Leomintser at Oulton’s request. Oulton later moved to pastor a work in Liverpool, where John Newton heard him preach. Newton went to hear Oulton because Whitefield had especially recommended him “as an excellent humble man.” Newton profited from Oulton’s preaching, as he did from that of another Baptist minister in Liverpool, the eccentric hyper-Calvinist John Johnson. Later, however, Newton told Whitefield that though these two Liverpool Baptist ministers were “useful to their own people (I trust, through grace, to me also), yet they seem not calculated for general usefulness.”

In London, Andrew Gifford had an extremely fruitful ministry as pastor of Eagle Street Baptist Church from 1735 till his death. A number of years prior to his death in 1780 some six hundred people had been converted under his preaching and eleven men sent into the pastorate from the congregation. He was an enthusiastic supporter of Whitefield’s ministry and preached for him at Whitefield’s Tottenham

Court Road Tabernacle. Gifford's love of Whitefield's preaching led him to revise *Eighteen Sermons Preached by the late Rev. George Whitefield* for publication in 1771, the year after Whitefield's death. The volume was dedicated to Selina Hastings and Gifford expressed the hope that the sermons would continue to instruct despite the death of the one who had preached them, even as the sun, 'the glorious luminary of the heavens,... seems visible, even after it is set, by the refraction of its resplendent rays.'

There was also an immense number of converts to the Particular Baptist churches from the 1740s onwards, who received their first real understanding of the gospel through the voice of Whitefield. For example, William Nash Clarke, pastor of Unicorn Yard Baptist Church in London in the 1770s and early 1780s, had been converted under Whitefield's ministry when he was but ten years of age. Mary Andrews, a prominent member of Olney Baptist Church, owed her first lasting convictions of the Christian Faith to a sermon she heard Whitefield preach when she was but three or four years of age. The conversion of Samuel Medley, pastor of Byrom Street Baptist Church in Liverpool, in 1760 was owing both to the ministry of Whitefield and Andrew Gifford. John Fawcett, Sr. was fifteen when he first heard Whitefield preach in Yorkshire on John 3:14 in 1755. Fawcett had gone to church regularly, but he had never heard preaching like this

before. By this one sermon alone he was given a clear view of “God reconciled” to sinners “through the atonement of a suffering Saviour.” Fawcett’s “unbelieving fears” were dispelled and he was filled with “joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” For the rest of his life Fawcett kept a portrait of Whitefield in his study and, according to his son, the very mention of his name would prompt “grateful remembrance.”

John Ryland, Sr., often wrongly accused of being a hyper-Calvinist because of remarks he made to a young William Carey, first heard Whitefield preach in Bristol in April 1744 when he was a student at the Baptist Academy there. At the close of the following decade, when Ryland had been called to serve as the Baptist pastor of College Lane Meeting-House, Northampton, he was corresponding with the Anglican evangelist. There is at least one extant letter from Whitefield to Ryland, dated December 14, 1759, in which Whitefield apologized for not replying sooner to a now-lost letter of Ryland. “Preaching, busyness, building, but all for Jesus Xt the best of masters, hath prevented my answering your kind letter,” Whitefield wrote from London. The letter closed with an encouragement for Ryland to remember Whitefield in his prayers. Eight years later, in early September 1767, Whitefield visited Ryland in Northampton, and preached the oldest Dissenting church in the town, Castle Hill, at eight

o'clock in the morning of Tuesday, September 8, from Isa. 61:10.¹ Ryland's son, John Ryland, Jr., noted in his diary that it was "a most affecting discourse, to a crowded congregation. I wish'd he could have held on till midnight." In 1768 and 1769 both of the Rylands heard Whitefield preach again, these times in London. The elder Ryland reckoned that Whitefield was "the greatest preacher in all England."

Whitefield's friendship with Anne Dutton

It is fascinating that George Whitefield also found a spiritual friend in a Baptist woman by the name of Anne Dutton. Anne had been born in the early 1690s and become a Particular Baptist around 1713. She was married to a fellow Baptist named Thomas Cattell in 1715, who died quite suddenly four years later. She subsequently married Benjamin Dutton, probably in the summer of 1720. Her husband accepted a call to the pastorate of the Baptist cause in Great Gransden, Huntingdonshire (now Cambridgeshire), in the summer of 1731, where he labored till a trip to America in the mid-1740s. This journey to America involved both preaching and the promotion of his wife's books, but on the return voyage in 1747 he was tragically drowned when the ship sank in the Atlantic. By the time of Benjamin's death, Anne was well on her way to becoming a well-known author on both

¹ "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

sides of the Atlantic. She had been writing for a number of years before her husband's demise. After his death a steady stream of tracts and treatises, collections of selected correspondence, and poems poured forth from her pen, making her, in the judgment of Michael D. Sciretti, who has written a doctoral thesis on Dutton, "probably the most prolific woman writer in the eighteenth century, Baptist or otherwise."

Among her numerous correspondents were George Whitefield as well as Howel Harris, Selina Hastings, John Wesley, and William Seward. Sciretti has noted that in her letters to preachers like Harris and Whitefield she would attempt to inspire them "by infusing them with confidence, intention, steadfastness, and courage, boldly urging them to greater service and devotion to Christ and the gospel." William Seward, Whitefield's co-worker and confidant, had begun writing to Dutton early in 1739, for instance. When he read a letter she wrote to him in May, 1739, for instance, he found it "full of such comforts and direct answers to what I had been writing that it filled my eyes with tears of joy."

The correspondence that we have from Whitefield to Dutton and vice versa span the early years of Whitefield's ministry, from 1739 to 1744. But this was a critical period as well, for it was in this period that Whitefield was forming his doctrinal convictions about

Calvinism. Dutton first heard of Whitefield in 1739 and was filled with joy at “such a great work [being] done in the world by him.” By the time that the second extant letter that we have from Whitefield to Dutton came to be written in February 1741, the evangelist clearly considered Dutton a close friend. As he wrote to her: “Help me by your prayers. It is an ease thus to unbosom one’s self to a friend, and an instance of my confidence in you.” A few months later, Whitefield visited Dutton and said after their meeting, “her conversation is as weighty as her letters.” Whitefield encouraged her to write a number of his friends in South Carolina, including a Baptist pastor by the name of Isaac Chanler, the pastor of Ashley River Baptist Church. “You will excuse this freedom,” remarked Whitefield about this encouragement to Dutton undertake a trans-Atlantic correspondence, “I am willing your usefulness should be as extensive as may be. May the Lord bless you ever, more and more.” As Thomas Kidd has noted in his 2014 biography of Whitefield, Dutton played a key role in helping Whitefield build a transatlantic network of Calvinistic evangelicals.

In one of her letters to Whitefield, she reminded the evangelist why his position in the 1740s debate with the Wesleys over Christian perfection was a biblical one. In little more than twelve hundred words, she provides a tightly and biblically reasoned argument as to

why sinless perfection was not at all correct. Here we see why Whitefield considered Dutton's letters to be weighty and how Dutton helped the great evangelist to think through this issue biblically and stand firm in his convictions. From 1 John 3:2, for example, she maintained that

our imperfection in holiness, which arises from the being and working of sin in our corrupt nature, is necessarily implied,...[for] the Apostle says, 'When he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.' He doth not say we are like him;... but we shall be like him. And [he] gives the great cause of this great effect: for we shall see him as he is. Sight of Christ is the cause of likeness to him. Sight of Christ partial in this life produceth partial likeness. Sight of Christ total in the life to come will produce total likeness to him. First in our souls, during a separate state, and then in our whole persons after the resurrection of the just. Then, and not till then, shall we be perfectly like Christ, in holiness and glory. Holiness, which is the glory of the soul, is the effect of us beholding the glory of the Lord, as 2 Cor 3:18. But we all with open face, beholding 'as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed in the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.' Whence we may likewise note, that the change of the soul into the image of God, is imperfect, with respect to degrees, and a progressive work while in this life: it is from glory to glory. The New Testament saints, if compared with the Old, have an open-faced view of the glory of God in Christ; and a more glorious change into his image. But if compared with that vision of God which we shall have in glory, we see but darkly.

Whitefield and the American Baptists

George Whitefield crossed the Atlantic thirteen times and preached in virtually every major town on the Atlantic seaboard and numerous American Baptists came to openly support the ministry of the English preacher. In the South Carolina low country, Isaac Chanler invited Whitefield to address overflowing crowds at his church in July of 1740. And in a sermon that Chanler delivered that same year, he prayed for Whitefield by name: “May blessed Whitefield long live an extensive blessing to the Church of God!” Oliver Hart was not slow to speak about the enormous benefits that he had derived from listening to Whitefield’s sermons, both in his native Pennsylvania and in South Carolina where he pastored First Baptist Church in Charleston from 1750 to 1780. And when Euhaw Baptist Church began worshipping in a new meeting-house in March, 1752, Whitefield was asked to give the first sermon in the building.

In Pennsylvania, during Whitefield’s first trip to America in 1739, Whitefield developed a friendship with Jenkin Jones, a Welsh Baptist who was pastoring First Baptist Church in Philadelphia at the time and whom Whitefield considered to be “a spiritual man.” Whitefield was deeply impressed with some of the members of his church, who, he noted in his diary, “loved the Lord Jesus in sincerity.” When Whitefield heard Jones preach the following year, he commented that

he was the only minister in Philadelphia “who speaks feelingly and with authority.”

One of those converted under Whitefield’s preaching during this trip was an African-American woman, who later began to worship with Jenkin Jones in the Philadelphia Baptist meeting-house. On one occasion when Jones was away and another Welsh Baptist was preaching, “the Word came with such power to her heart,” Whitefield recorded in his diary, “that at last she was obliged to cry out; and a great concern fell upon many in the congregation.” Some of those in the meeting-house, thinking her mad and “full of new wine,” told her to be quiet, but she continued to shout out loud expressions of praise. When Whitefield talked to her, what she told him seemed “rational and solid, and I believe in that hour the Lord Jesus took a great possession of her soul.” In fact, Whitefield was sure that when God called a significant number of African-Americans to faith in Christ, “God will highly favour them,...wipe off their reproach, and show that he is no respecter of persons, but that whosoever believeth in him shall be saved.”

Not all American Baptists, however, looked on the impact of Whitefield’s ministry favourably. Ebenezer Kinnersley, a highly respected scientist and tutor at the College of Philadelphia, as well as

friend of Benjamin Franklin, was also a Baptist lay preacher and an assistant pastor with Jenkin Jones. According to an account in the *Philadelphia Gazette* of a July 1740 sermon Kinnersley preached at Philadelphia's First Baptist, he was unsparing in his denunciation of Whitefield and those who imitated his affective style of preaching:

What spirit such enthusiastic ravings proceed from, I shall not attempt to determine, but this I am sure of, that they proceed not from the Spirit of God; for our God is a God of order, and not of such confusion...such whining, roaring harangues, big with affected nonsense, have no other tendency, but to operate on the softer passions, and work them up to a warm pitch of enthusiasm.

In New England, reaction among Baptists to Whitefield's itinerant ministry was also divided. For example, the refusal of Jeremiah Condy, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Boston, to support Whitefield led to a schism in his church in 1742 and the eventual formation of the Second Baptist Church. Whitefield's ministry also became the impetus for the emergence of an entire generation of important Baptist leaders, men like Isaac Backus and Shubal Stearns.

The conversion of Robert Robinson

Finally, the story of one Baptist converted under Whitefield's preaching warrants extensive notice. When Robert Robinson first went to hear Whitefield preach his motivation in going was an odd one to

say the least. On Sunday morning, May 24, 1752, he and some friends were out looking for some amusement when they came across an aged woman who claimed to be a fortune-teller. After they had gotten her thoroughly drunk on what was probably cheap gin, they proceeded to have her tell their fortunes. When it came to Robinson, the woman predicted that he would live to see his children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren growing up around him.

Now, what had started as something of a lark was taken quite seriously by Robinson as he made his way home later that day. When he was alone, he thought that if he were indeed to live to such a ripe age, he would probably end up being a burden to his family. There were in those days no such things as social security or welfare. What then could he do? Well, he thought, one way for those who are older to make themselves liked by their grandchildren is to have a good stock of stories to draw upon to entertain them. He thus determined there and then to fill his mind with knowledge and “everything that is rare and wonderful,” which, when he was old, would stand him in good stead and cause him, so he reasoned, to “be respected rather than neglected.”

As his first acquisition, he decided to experience one of Whitefield’s sermons. He went to hear him, though, as he later told the famous preacher, with feelings of pity for “the folly of the preacher” and “the

infatuation of the hearers”—those “poor deluded Methodists”—and of abhorrence for Whitefield’s doctrine. Whitefield was preaching that evening at the Tabernacle, his meeting-house in Moorfields, London. His text was Matthew 3:7, John the Baptist’s stern rebuke of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” When, according to Robinson,

Mr. Whitefield described the Sadducean character; this did not touch me, I thought myself as good a Christian as any man in England. From this he went to that of the Pharisees. He described their exterior decency, but observed that the poison of the viper rankled in their hearts. This rather shook me. At length, in the course of his sermon, he abruptly broke off; paused for a few moments; then burst into a flood of tears; lifted up his hands and eyes, and exclaimed, “O my hearers! *the wrath’s to come, the wrath’s to come!*” These words sunk into my heart, like lead in the waters. I wept, and when the sermon was ended, retired alone. For days and weeks I could think of little else. Those awful words would follow me, wherever I went, “*The wrath’s to come, the wrath’s to come!*”!

For over three years Robinson was haunted by these words and Whitefield’s sermon. He regularly attended the preaching at the Tabernacle, and found himself “cut down for sin” and “groaning for deliverance.” Eventually on Tuesday, December 10, 1755, “after having tasted the pains of rebirth,” Robinson “found full and free forgiveness through the precious blood of Jesus Christ.”

About two and a half years after this profession of faith Robinson wrote a hymn long treasured by God's people: 'Come thou Fount of every blessing.' It appears to have been written to commemorate what God did for him when he was saved. In its crucicentrism and emphasis upon divine grace, it is a quintessential Whitefieldian:

Come thou Fount of every blessing!
Tune our hearts to sing Thy grace!
Streams of mercy never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise!
Teach us some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above;
Praise the mount—Oh fix us on it,
Mount of God's unchanging love!

... Oh! to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.

Whitefield later included this hymn in the hymnal he designed for use at the Tabernacle in London, *A Collection of Hymns for Social Worship*, in which he stated that “[a]lthough all acts and exercises of devotion are sweet and delightful, yet we never resemble the blessed

worshippers above more than we are joining together in public devotions and with hearts and lips unfeigned, singing praises to him who sitteth upon the throne forever.”

After a short career as a Methodist preacher, during which time he kept in touch with Whitefield, Robinson went on to build a thriving work at St. Andrew’s Street Baptist Church, Cambridge, where he became known as one of the finest preachers in England. Sadly, though, there is evidence of doctrinal confusion in the final decade of his life, the 1780s.

A reflective coda

Olin C. Robison, in a fine study of the English Particular Baptist community between 1760 and 1820, has stated that “more than any other individual, George Whitefield was responsible for the awakening of Dissent to a spirit of revival in the eighteenth century.” There is little doubt that this is true of that wing of Dissent known as the Particular Baptists. When the doyen of Particular Baptist thinking, John Gill, looked at the state of his denomination in 1750, he could not help but mourn the decline so evident in its midst:

The harvest is great, and faithful and painful ministers are few. There are scarcely any that naturally care for the estate and souls of men, and who are heartily concerned for their spiritual welfare...

And what adds to the sorrow is, that there are so few rising to fill the places of those that are removed; few that come forth with the same spirit, and are zealously attached to the truths of the everlasting gospel. Blessed be God, there is here and there one that promises usefulness, or otherwise the sorrow and grief at the loss of gospel ministers would be insupportable.

Another London Baptist Benjamin Wallin, whose own congregation actually saw an increase in members during his pastorate from 1741 to 1782, frequently made mention of “the universal complaints of the decay of practical and vital godliness.” Wallin was very conscious of living in a “melancholy Day,” a day of “present Declensions” amongst Baptist churches in England and Wales.

Possibly the last place that either Gill or Wallin would have looked for God to provide renewal and revival of their churches was the Church of England, which Gill, at least, did not regard as a true Church. Yet, as the salutary impact of Whitefield upon the transatlantic Baptist community reveals, it was an Anglican that God sent to revive and vivify the Baptist cause.