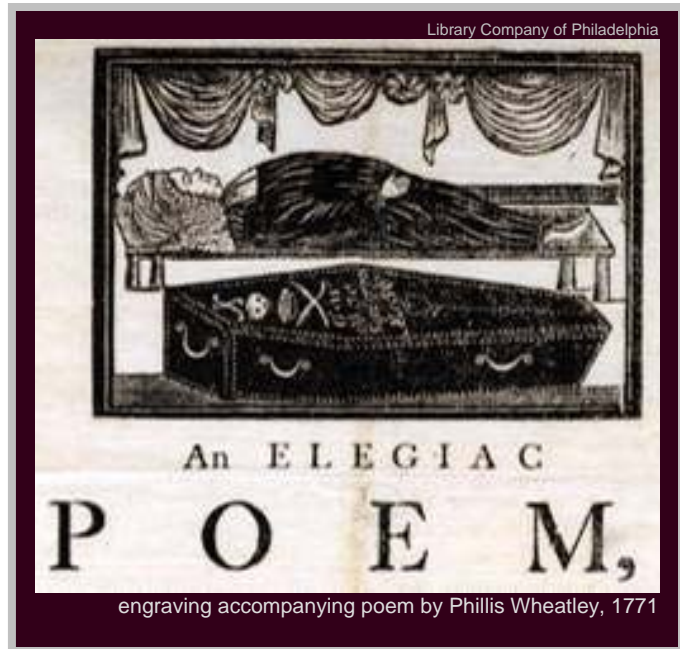




POEMS

on the revivalists of the Great Awakening

It is not hyperbole to describe George Whitefield, the English clergyman who riveted colonists with his dramatic evangelical preaching, as a star celebrity. In our day he would have appeared on the covers of *People and Time* and been interviewed on *60 Minutes* and *Good Morning, America*. He was the “Grand Itinerant,” the traveling preacher with no home church (a troublesome point for American clergy) who toured the colonies seven times from the 1730s to the 1760s, delivering open-air sermons that left his huge audiences spellbound, penitent, and with souls “awakened” (thus the term “Great Awakening”). His core question was that of all evangelicals — *What must I do to be saved?* — and his answer conformed with the prevalent Calvinist doctrine of predestination: that one’s eternal fate (salvation or damnation) was determined by God before creation and manifested by a conversion experience, i.e., repentance and “rebirth.”



Laymen often fashioned their responses to public events as poems, to be read in literary clubs, sent to newspapers, or published as pamphlets. Presented here are three published poems on the evangelists of the Great Awakening. Two are laudatory poems on Whitefield — one published anonymously during his first American tour and the second written by Phillis Wheatley after his death in 1770. The third is a scathing call to repentance by Sarah Parsons Moorhead, directed at the evangelist James Davenport whose fanatic excesses led to his censure and deportation (back to New York) by the Connecticut colonial assembly. How does expressing one’s opinion in verse rather than prose affect its delivery? its reception?

“Juventus” [anonymous poet], *New-York Weekly Journal*, 26 November 1739

WHITEFIELD! That Great, that pleasing Name
 Has all my Soul possesseth:
 For sure some Seraph from above
 Inspires his Godlike Breast.
 He comes commission’d from on High,
 The Gospel to proclaim;
 And thro’ the wide extended World
 To spread the Saviour’s Name.
 See! See! He comes, the Heav’nly Sound
 Flows from his charming Tongue’
 Rebellious Men are seiz’d with Fear,
 With deep Conviction stung.
 List’ning we stand with vast Surprise,
 While Rapture chains our powers,

Charm’d with the Musick of his Voice;
 Not know the passing Hours,
 Blasphemers hear the dreadful Sound,
 Inspir’d with trembling Awe;
 While he declares their crimson Guilt,
 And loud proclaims the Law.
 While, WHITEFIELD, to thy sacred Strain,
 Surpriz’d we listen still,
 Immortal heights we seem to reach,
 Celestial Transports feel.
 Approach ye Mortals here below,
 And flock around the Song;
 With Pleasure hear the Saviour’s Name
 Sound from a Mortal Tongue.

National Humanities Center, 2009: nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/. (1) “Juventus” in David A. Copeland, *Debating the Issues in Colonial Newspapers* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), p. 103; permission pending. (2) Moorhead, “To the Reverend Mr. James Davenport,” accessed through Early American Imprints online, American Antiquarian Society; permission pending. (3) Wheatley, “An Elegiac Poem,” digital image of broadside, Library Company of Philadelphia; permission pending. Complete image credits at nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/becomingamer/imagecredits.htm.

_ _ P H I L L I S W H E A T L E Y _ _

"An Elegiac Poem on the Death of that Celebrated Divine, and Eminent Servant of Jesus Christ, the late Reverend and Pious George Whitefield. . . By PHILLIS, A Servant Girl of Seventeen Years of Age, belonging to Mr. J. WHEATLEY of Boston: She has been but Nine Years in this country from *Africa*," 1771

HAIL, happy Saint, on thine immortal throne!
To thee complaints of grievance are unknown;
We hear no more the music of thy tongue,
Thy wonted auditories cease to throng.
Thy lessons in unequal'd accents flow'd!
While emulation in each bosom glow'd;
Thou didst, in strains of eloquence refin'd,
Inflame the soul, and captivate the mind.
Unhappy we, the setting Sun deplore!
Which once was splendid, but it shines no more;
He leaves this earth for Heaven's unmeasur'd height;
And worlds unknown, receive him from our sight.
There WHITEFIELD wings, with rapid course
his way,
And sails to Zion, through vast seas of day.

When his AMERICANS were burden'd sore,
When streets were crimson'd with their guiltless gore!
Unrival'd friendship in his breast now strove:
The fruit thereof was charity and love
Towards *America* —— couldst thou do more
Than leave thy native home, the *British* shore,
To cross the great Atlantic's wat'ry road,
To see *America's* distress'd abode?
Thy prayers, great Saint, and thy incessant cries,
Have pierc'd the bosom of thy native skies!
Thou moon hast seen, and ye bright stars of light
Have witness been of his requests by night!
He pray'd that grace in every heart might dwell:
He long'd to see *America* excell;
He charg'd its youth to let the grace divine
Arise, and in their future actions shine;
He offer'd THAT he did himself receive,
A greater gift not GOD himself can give:

He urg'd the need of HIM to every one;
It was no less than GOD's co-equal SON!
Take HIM ye wretched for your only good;
Take HIM ye starving souls to be your food.
Ye thirsty, come to this life giving stream:
Ye Preachers, take him for your joyful theme:
Take HIM, "my dear AMERICANS," he said,
Be your complaints in his kind bosom laid:
Take HIM ye *Africans*, he longs for you;
Impartial SAVIOUR, is his title due;
If you will chuse to walk in grace's road,
You shall be sons, and kings, and priests to GOD.

Great COUNTESS!¹ we *Americans* revere
Thy name, and thus condole thy grief sincere:
We mourn with thee, that TOMB obscurely plac'd,
In which thy Chaplain undisturb'd doth rest.
New-England sure, doth feel the ORPHAN's smart;
Reveals the true sensations of his heart:
Since this fair Sun, withdraws his golden rays,
No more to brighten these distressful days!
His lonely *Tabernacle*, sees no more
A WHITEFIELD landing on the *British* shore:
Then let us view him in yon azure skies:
Let every mind with this lov'd object rise.
No more can he exert his lab'ring breath,
Seiz'd by the cruel messenger of death.
What can his dear AMERICA return?
But drop a tear upon his happy urn,
Thou tomb, shalt safe retain thy sacred trust,
Till life divine re-animate his dust.

¹ The Countess of Huntingdon was a family friend of the Wheatleys and later financed the publication of Wheatley's volume of poems. Whitefield had been her personal chaplain in England.

-- SARAH PARSONS MOORHEAD --

"To the Reverend Mr. James Davenport, on his Departure from Boston, by Way of a Dream,
With a Line to the *Scoffers* at Religion, who make an ill Improvement of his
naming out our worthy Ministers, by a Female Friend," 1742, excerpts.

ASSIST celestial Powers my grieved Heart
For Love and Sorrow bear an equal Part;
I love the Zeal that fires good DAVENPORT's Breast,
But his harsh Censures give my Soul no rest;
Our worthy *Guides* whom GOD has much inflam'd,
As unexperienc'd Souls, alas, he nam'd;
Hence giddy Youth a wo[e]ful License take,
A [obscured] of reverend hoary Heads they make,
Despise the blest Instructions of their Tongue,
Conversion is become the Drunkard's Song:
GOD's glorious Work, which sweetly did arise,
By this unguarded sad Imprudence dies;
Contention spreads her Harpy Claws around,
In every Church her hateful Stings are found
But as these Thoughts my troubled Mind opprest,
Sleep sweet Cessation instantly refresh'd,
My Tumults calm, and new-born Pleasure rise,
A charming VISION swims before my Eyes.

...

[In her "vision," angels appear before Rev. Davenport
and "whisper in his Head."]

"Favourite of Heaven! How came it in thy Mind?
That Grace was so much to thy self confin'd;
Crush the proud Thought, and kill it in the Bud;
Too long you have in this sad Error stood;
Let Charity uncloseth thy drowsy Eyes;
You'll see a Train of faithful Pastors rise,
Thousands of happy Souls surround their Feet,
Which you in Realms of Glory soon shall meet;
The timorous Christian to his great Surprise,
Sees himself there, tho' he himself despis'd:
So the censorious Wonders when he views
Souls there he thought GOD surely would refuse:
What, has the Enemy provok'd you, too?
Success is not confin'd, dear Man, to you,
O let not Fancy turn thy Zeal aside,
Free Grace in others must not be deny'd;
No more attempt to touch the Judgment Throne,
Soul Secrets to the LORD alone are known."

[Rev. Davenport realizes the error of his preaching
and "Wrings his Hands in penitential Woe."]

"FATHER, he cries, Creator of my Peace,
Forgive my Guilt, I'll censure so no more,
Thy Pardon on my Knees I here implore;
Unite the Churches I have rashly rent,
To heal the Breaches, O let some be sent;
My Error in my Mind I ever keep,
Unhappy Shepherd thus to scatter Sheep;
COLMAN and SEWALL² I in haste expresst,
I clasp as first rank Worthies to my Breast;
Now all I've wrong'd, or have too rashly nam'd
Freely forgive, and myself have blam'd:"
In folded arms of Love the Prophets meet,
GOD's Work goes on by Unity most sweet.

Round him again his heavenly Guardians fly,
With Love and Pleasure sparkling in each Eye;
In Language here too sweet to be express'd
They still the Self-Reflections of his Breast;
One holds before a burnish'd golden Shield,
One graves his Love and Zeal upon the Field,
One from the living Greens which ever spread,
Twists up a Laurel for his sacred Head,
One holds the fainting Hero in his Arms
With heav'nly Cordials his blest Bosom warms;
And all by turns their golden Harps employ
To banish Sorrow and increase his Joy:
No more, blest Man, do thou thy self upbraid,
Atoning Blood has Reparation made;
The glorious SAVIOUR shows the Crimson Flood,
And bids him welcome to his smiling GOD:
Now joyful Thoughts in blissful Torrents roll,
And fill with Raptures his dear labouring Soul:
The Vision ends, pleas'd and refresh'd I wake,
And long my Rev'rend Friend the *Hint* should take.³

² Benjamin Colman and Samuel Sewall: Puritan clergymen.

³ *Hint*, i.e., to repent and change his preaching, which he did.