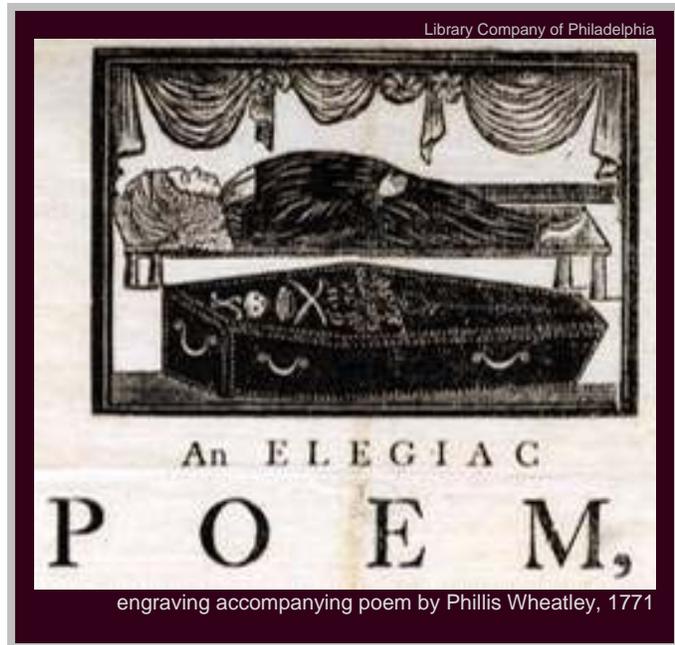




POEMS

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.

-- 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
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.