

**WHITEFIELD COLLEGE & THEOLOGICAL
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THE WHITEFIELD PAPERS

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“Reformed Systematic Theology”

NOTES

on

Rev. George Whitefield’s *A Letter To The Rev. Mr. John Wesley In Answer to His
Sermon entitled “FREE GRACE”*

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INTRODUCTION

In my effort to develop a theology of “Reformed Methodism,”¹ I have for some time now entertained the idea of researching the “Calvinistic Methodist” churches of Wales, which evolved into the present-day Presbyterian Church of Wales.² These churches represent an import link to Methodist Church History, when the broad arms of the Church of England encompassed both Calvinist-leaning and Arminian-leaning evangelicals. In 1729, at Christ Church, Oxford, a group of students formed the “holy club” whose members were described as “Methodists.” The word “Methodist” had to do with their daily spiritual discipline and routines. And included within this group were the leaders of what would become known as the Great Awakening evangelical movement of the 18th century.

This Great Awakening evangelical movement did not attack the Church of England’s Thirty-Nine Articles or its ecclesiastical structure; nor did it directly challenge the British monarchy or the relationship between church and state. Instead, the “Methodist” movement sought to save men’s and women’s souls and to encourage them to live in holiness— i.e., to bring the elect of God to salvation through the preaching of the word. Unlike the 17th-century Puritans of colonial New England, this new “Methodist” movement started no new colonies in British North America. And there were no existing colonies within the British empire that came under Methodist control, since the Methodist movement was considered to be simply an evangelical, moral Anglican movement from within the Church of England. They sought spiritual revival and renewal from within the Church of England. Its foremost leaders—George Whitefield (1714 – 1770), John Wesley (1703 – 1791), and Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)—were priests within the Church

¹ Reformed Methodism is an Anglican Church theology mediates the conflict between Calvinism and Wesleyan-Arminianism with Augustinian theology. Although “Reformed Methodism” rejects Calvin’s idea of “double predestination” in favor of St. Augustine of Hippo’s theology as stated in *On Grace and Free Will*, it does embrace several key elements of Calvin’s theology on ecclesiology, law, church and state, as stated in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

² “Calvinistic Methodists were born out of the 18th-century Welsh Methodist revival and survive as a body of Christians now forming the Presbyterian Church of Wales. Calvinistic Methodism became a major denomination in Wales, growing rapidly in the 19th century, and taking a leadership role in the Welsh Religious Revival of 1904-5. Calvinistic Methodism claims to be the only denomination in Wales to be of purely Welsh origin, owing no influence in its formation to Scottish Presbyterianism. It is also the only denomination to make use of the title Calvinistic (after John Calvin) in its name. **In 18th-century England Calvinistic Methodism was represented by the followers of George Whitefield as opposed to those of John and Charles Wesley, although all the early Methodists in England and Wales worked together, regardless of Calvinist or Arminian (or Wesleyan) theology, for many years.**” Wikipedia Article, “Calvinistic Methodists”
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calvinistic_Methodists#:~:text=Calvinistic%20Methodism%20claims%20to%20be,John%20Calvin\)%20in%20its%20name.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calvinistic_Methodists#:~:text=Calvinistic%20Methodism%20claims%20to%20be,John%20Calvin)%20in%20its%20name.)

of England, bound by the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. And, like the Baptists churches, some of the Methodists were Calvinistic, while others were Arminian in theology.

Rev. George Whitefield (1714 – 1770) dwelt among the Methodists but he himself was a Calvinist, whereas his Methodist brothers Rev. John Wesley (1703-1791) and Rev. Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788) were Arminian. (In fact, the very first Methodists were Calvinists, and especially the Methodists of Wales). Accordingly, Whitefield and the Wesley brothers disagreed on various theological points. As previously alluded to, they had met at Oxford during the early 1700s and each belonged to the same holy club, led by Rev. J. Wesley; they each became co-equal partners and founding fathers of the Great Awakening Movement, which swept across England and America during the mid 1700s; but Rev. J. Wesley and Rev. Whitefield fell out over differences regarding “justifying grace,” and which had grown out from a split from within the Dutch Reformed Church when Jacobus Arminius had begun to challenge certain aspects of Calvinist orthodox theology.³ See Appendix A, Analogy of Faith- Conflict Within the Ranks of Reformed Clergy (“Wesley v. Whitefield”). Hitherto, the Calvinist-leaning Methodists, led by Whitefield, had worked alongside, and in cooperation with, the Arminian-leaning Methodists, led by John Wesley. Unfortunately, the two Methodist sects never reconciled, although J. Wesley and Whitefield did set aside their differences. In the United States, where religious liberty was championed and enshrined within the state and federal constitutions, it was unnecessary for these two sects to do anything more except co-exist in peace with one another—this was the extent of the conflict between them in America.

This paper explores in detail the Rev. George Whitefield’s apology and defense of Calvinism, titled *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley in Answer to His Sermon entitled “Free Grace.”* (For additional background regarding Rev. John Wesley’s criticism of Calvinism, see “Whitefield Paper #3: Rev. John Wesley’s Predestination Calmly Considered.”) It should be noted here that, as Anglican priests, both Whitefield and Wesley were fundamentally debating not simply the Sacred Scriptures but they were also engaged in a vicious struggle to definition and meaning the Church of England’s *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*. To put this

³ Wikipedia On-Line Encyclopedia, “Jacobus Arminius,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacobus_Arminius.

historical debate into its proper perspective, the following historical background on the Thirty-Nine Articles is presented, as follows:

Thirty-nine Articles, the doctrinal statement of the Church of England. With the Book of Common Prayer, they present the liturgy and doctrine of that church. The Thirty-nine Articles developed from the Forty-two Articles, written by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in 1553 “for the avoiding of controversy in opinions.” These had been partly derived from the Thirteen Articles of 1538, designed as the basis of an agreement between Henry VIII and the German Lutheran princes, which had been influenced by the Lutheran Augsburg Confession (1530).

The Forty-two Articles were eliminated when Mary I became queen (1553) and restored Roman Catholicism. After Elizabeth I became queen (1558), a new statement of doctrine was needed. In 1563 the Canterbury Convocation (the periodic assembly of clergy of the province of Canterbury) drastically revised the Forty-two Articles, and additional changes were made at Elizabeth’s request. A final revision by convocation in 1571 produced the Thirty-nine Articles, which were approved by both convocation and Parliament, though Elizabeth had wanted to issue them under her own authority. Only the clergy had to subscribe to them.

In form they deal briefly with the doctrines accepted by Roman Catholics and Protestants alike and more fully with points of controversy. The articles on the sacraments reflect a Calvinist tone, while other parts intimate Lutheran or Catholic positions. They are often studiously ambiguous, however, because the Elizabethan government wished to make the national church as inclusive of different viewpoints as possible.

The status of the Thirty-nine Articles varies in the several churches of the Anglican Communion. Since 1865 Church of England clergy have had to declare only that the doctrine in the articles is “agreeable to the Word of God.” In the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, where the articles were revised in 1801 to remove references to royal supremacy, neither clergy nor laity is required formally to subscribe to them.

Thus, during the days of Rev. Whitefield and Rev. Wesley, there was within the Church of England elements of Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Arminianism—all fully operational and co-existing within one ecclesiastical roof. The most significant articles that undergird Wesley’s and Whitefield’s controversy included the following articles IX, X, XI and XVII, as follows:

CHURCH OF ENGLAND THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES OF RELIGION

IX. Of Original or Birth-Sin.

Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk;) but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek, φρονημα σαρκος, (which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire, of the flesh), is not subject to the Law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized; yet the Apostle doth confess, that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin.

X. Of Free-Will.

The condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith; and calling upon God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

XI. Of the Justification of Man.

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.

XVII. Of Predestination and Election.

Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore, they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due season: they through Grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.

As the godly consideration of Predestination, and our Election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit

of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal Salvation to be enjoyed through Christ as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: So, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchlessness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation.

Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in Holy Scripture: and, in our doings, that Will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the Word of God.

Rev. Whitefield's position was that his theology upheld the established position of the Church of England and that Rev. Wesley's Arminian position did not. Thus, Rev. Whitefield's rebuttal letter, *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley*,⁴ was rooted in an argument that the Calvinist "doctrine of election" had upheld both the letter and text of the Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. Whitefield felt that Rev. Wesley's Arminian theology on "free grace" was not in alignment with the Thirty-Nine Articles.

As the plain text of Article 17 states, Rev. Whitefield affirmed that the effects of the doctrine of election was to instill a sense of comfort while "mortifying the works of the flesh" and "drawing up their minds to high and heavenly things." This is what Rev. Whitefield preached, but what Rev. Wesley explicitly denied. For, as Rev. Whitefield argued: "[t]his is the established doctrine of scripture, and acknowledged as such in the 17th article of the church of England, as Bishop Burnet himself confesses; yet dear Mr. Wesley absolutely denies it."⁵

Rev. Whitefield's point is well taken, the Thirty-Nine Articles, Article 17, does expressly establish "predestination and election" as fundamental tenets within the Church of England, but nowhere within that article, as Rev. Wesley holds, is there any description of Calvinistic "irresistible grace" or Calvinistic "irresistible reprobation." On the other hand, the genre of "predestination and election" described in Article 17 is seemingly more analogous to the theology of St. Augustine's *On Grace and Free Will*, which is closer to the theological positions

⁴ Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the 18th Century Revival* (East Peoria, IL: Versa Press, Inc., 2019).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 556.

of Martin Luther and John Wesley. (Interestingly, it was Rev. Whitefield’s belief that Martin Luther expressed no position on the doctrine of election or predestination).⁶ Indeed, there were Anglican theologians and clergymen who held a wide range of views on each of the Thirty-Nine Articles. Some of these views were very orthodox and Roman Catholic; while others were more liberal, Lutheran, Calvinist, Arminian, or Independent. The conflict within the Church of England’s Methodist movement—between the Calvinistic Methodists and the Wesleyan-Arminian Methodists—reflected this diversity of theological views.

The source of division between these two Methodist sects lay in subtle differences in the extent to which the Church of England wished to reject certain aspects of Roman Catholic liturgical practice, beliefs, and theology. For instance, the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation included the doctrine of “merit” which retained the doctrine of “free will.” In fact, the Roman Catholic Church promoted human merit in a systematic way. See, e.g., the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “Merit”⁷; “Cardinal Virtues”⁸ “Prudence,”⁹ “Justice,”¹⁰ “Fortitude,”¹¹ and “Temperance”¹²; “Theological Virtues,”¹³ “Faith,”¹⁴ “Hope,”¹⁵ and “Charity.”¹⁶ See, Table 1, below:

Table 1. Roman Catholic Church on “Grace, Justification, and Merit”¹⁷

Grace	Human beings’ evil qualities can be overcome through the redemptive power of <i>God’s grace</i> : Human beings need the redemptive power of Christ’s crucifixion and must be truly “born again.”
Justification	
Protestants’ Agree on “Grace and Justification”	

⁶ Ibid., p. 563.

⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1995), p. 541.

⁸ Ibid., p. 495-496,

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 498-503.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

<p>Merit</p> <p>Most Protestants Christians disagree with the doctrine of “Merit”</p>	<p>Next, upon receiving God’s grace, human beings’ evil qualities can be absolved or alleviated through <i>human merit</i>: four cardinal virtues; three theological virtues; plus, education, cultivation, moral hygiene, and the pursuit of excellence and moral virtue.</p>

The Calvinists thus wished to reject altogether the whole Roman Catholic system of “merits.” They vehemently rejected any and all theological doctrines that even hinted at, or looked like, or resembled this Roman Catholic system of “merits.” Arminian doctrine resembled this system of “merits,” and so the Calvinists rejected Arminianism as a form of Pelagianism. And so, within the Methodist movement, when Rev. John Wesley embraced and espoused Arminian theology, the Calvinist-leaning Rev. George Whitefield publically admonished Wesley. According to Whitefield, not only was Wesley’s doctrines not aligned with Article 17 of the Thirty-Nine Articles, but it allegedly espoused a doctrine of “free grace” that was unbiblical. Other aspects of the theological differences between Whitefield and Wesley are briefly outlined in Table 2, below.

Table 2. “Calvinism and Wesleyanism”¹⁸

CALVINISM- “TUPLIP”	WESLEYANISM- “ACURA”
1. Total depravity	1. All are sinful
2. Unconditional election	2. Conditional election
3. Limited Atonement	3. Unlimited atonement
4. Irresistible grace	4. Resistible grace
5. Perseverance of the saints	5. Assurance of salvation

The Great Awakening in England and British North America thus emphasized the evangelical “born-again” regeneration, new birth and conversion experience—under both Calvinist and Wesleyan/Armenian auspices. Rev. Whitefield and the Wesley brothers worked together—Whitefield preached and

¹⁸ Don Thorsen, *Calvin vs. Wesley: Bringing Belief in Line with Practice* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), p.139.

planted, while the Wesley brothers' pastoral care held the newly-converted into organized churches. Meanwhile, Rev. Whitefield and Rev. J. Wesley continued to disagree over the doctrine of predestination, but Rev. J. Wesley assumed leadership over the Methodist movement. According to modern-day Calvinists, Rev. J. Wesley's leadership occurred under controversial circumstances that challenge John Wesley's legendary reputation in church history. For instance, in his book *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the 18th Century Revival*, Arnold Dallimore says that Wesley essentially usurped Whitefield's authority and leadership,¹⁹ and that Whitefield deserves, much more than Wesley, the title "founder of Methodism."²⁰ Rev. Whitefield was the first leader of what became known as the Methodist movement, and John Wesley simply followed him into that movement.²¹ When Rev. Whitefield travelled to British North America, he turned leadership of that Methodist movement over to Wesley, but Whitefield's preaching certainly planted the essential seeds of that great movement.²² This paper thus memorializes the history of Calvinist leadership and theology that influenced the Methodist movement during the 18th century.

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¹⁹ Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the 18th Century Revival* (East Peoria, IL: Versa Press, Inc., 2019), pp. 19 – 54.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

SECTION ONE:

Introduction to George Whitefield's *A Letter To The Rev. Mr. John Wesley In Answer To His Sermon entitled "FREE GRACE"*

This paper analyzes Rev. George Whitefield's rebuttal to Rev. John Wesley's sermon titled "Free Grace." By the year 1739, Rev. Whitefield had become the undisputed leader of the new Methodist Movement. Up to that time, "Whitefield sometimes referred to himself as 'a Methodist' and the people took it up and applied the word to the movement and Whitefield was known as 'the leader and founder of Methodism.'"²³ Rev. Whitefield had introduced Rev. Wesley to both this new Methodist movement and to field preaching. When in August 1739, Rev. Whitefield left England to tour British North America, he turned the Methodist movement over to Rev. Wesley. While Rev. Whitefield was in America, during the Fall of 1739, Rev. Wesley preached and published sermon titled "Free Grace," in which he espoused an Arminian view of justification and grace. This sermon slowly split the Methodist movement into two camps, those who supported Rev. Whitefield's Calvinist-leaning view; and those who supported Rev. Wesley's Arminian-leaning view. Up to this point, in 1740, the Methodist movement was both Calvinist and Arminian, but Rev. Wesley fully took the help of the Methodist leadership in Britain during that same year. This was the natural result of things, because Rev. John Wesley, an Oxford fellow and ordained Anglican priest, had in addition to these qualifications a natural gift at government administration—more so that Rev. Whitefield, who was then in America.

The friction and eventual split between Rev. Whitefield and the Wesley brothers did not come easy—for there was between them not only a mutual respect but also a mutual love. Rev. Whitefield said so in his writings. But by 1741, Rev. Whitefield could keep quiet no longer. He write and published his rebuttal to Rev. Wesley's Arminian theology titled, *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley in Answer to his Sermon Entitled "Free Grace."*²⁴

This paper analyzes in detail Rev. Whitefield's theological rebuttals.

²³ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 55.

SECTION TWO

DISCUSSION

Discussion 1. Armenian Doctrine Reconsidered

Rev. John Wesley seemed absolutely certain that the Calvinist “doctrine of election” would cause Christians to embrace lax moral standards and abandon holy living, thus resting upon a false assumption that their immutable, unchangeable “elect” status alone would guarantee them eternal salvation. In 1741, Rev. Whitefield took up his pen to write his letter in rebuttal to Wesley’s position. That rebuttal is analyzed in detail in the following “Discussion” sections that follow. But in this Discussion One, a word describing the root causes of the conflict is fully appropriated.

The conflict between Whitefield and Wesley was deeply-rooted in church history that predated their births, and that church history revolved around ecclesiology. Ecclesiology—*the separation of the laity from clergy*—the seven sacraments, and the power over the “keys to the Kingdom of God” were at the very heart of the Protestant Reformation. Why did the Roman Catholic and High-Church Anglican clerical hierarchy have so much power over the souls of other human beings? Is it because Christians had the power to choose between God and Satan; were susceptible to falling into temptation; and needed pastors to guide them to safety and to ultimate salvation? John Calvin and the Calvin answered these questions in the negative.

On the other hand, was the institutional, visible Church also the “true Church” on earth, and therefore authorized to condemn souls to hell? Was not Christ’s true Church truly invisible? Did not God already determine, from the beginning of time, who shall be saved and who shall be lost? Can any man come to Christ, without God himself drawing him to Christ? Were not all Christians priests, organized within a body of Christ as a “priesthood of all believers?” John Calvin and the Calvinist answered these questions in the affirmative.

For this reason, the Calvinists strongly rejected all theological doctrines that hinted at giving any human being—whether pastor, priest, or pope—the power

over the “keys to the Kingdom of God.” Only God has the power to save souls or to condemn souls. God’s sovereignty had already eternally decreed “final salvation” and “final condemnation,” such that no human being here on earth has any voice, any deliberative choice, any power of accepting or rejecting salvation—that ultimate power belongs to God alone.

It is for this reason that George Whitefield (1714- 1770) embraced Calvinism and rejected Armenianism. Wesleyan-Armenianism embraced a Roman Catholic/High-Church Anglican theological view of “free will,” contending that, while human beings absolutely could do nothing good without God’s grace, that all human beings possessed within the an inherent power of “choice” between accepting or rejecting God’s grace. Thus, it is perhaps more appropriate to state that the Wesleyan-Arminian theological point of view held that human beings had “freedom of choice” between salvation and eternal damnation. Once the “choice” of salvation is made, there is the possibility of drawing back into temptation; however, Christ’s grace (i.e., “divine assistance from the Holy Spirit”) would aid the new Christian, enabling steady growth in spiritual maturity through a process of “perfection” or “sanctification.” The Calvinist thus jealously guarded against the slightest of openings of the door to “free will.” Since Wesleyan-Arminianism—albeit a very conservative theological doctrine on “free choice”—opened the door to “free will” within human beings, the Calvinists rejected it.

But George Whitefield and his Calvinist-leaning brothers rejected this doctrine of “free choice,” “perfection,” and “sanctification.” They believed that it opened to door to Pelagianism. Pelagianism held that God had given men free will to do good or to do evil; and that men held within themselves the inherent power to do virtuous, holy, and good works sufficient to attain God’s eternal grace and salvation. This theological system opened the door to the ordination of superior theological teaches and colleges—such as the Roman Catholic magisterial college of bishops—thus vesting them with divine authority and divine rights. But, perhaps as equally ominous, Pelagianism opened the door to secular humanism—placing “man” and “free will” at the center of the universe, displacing “God” and “eternal law.”

Even though the great Doctor of the Western Church Augustine of Hippo had rejected Pelagianism in his classic work *On Grace and Free Will*, as did the official position of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England, the Calvinists nevertheless insisted that Arminianism, Wesleyan-Arminianism, High-

Church Anglicanism, and Roman Catholicism constituted forms of Pelagianism, thus eventually opening the door to unholy secular humanism—not having God in their knowledge, thus turning over to reprobate thinking.

It is within this context that Rev. George Whitefield rejected Arminian theology and criticized Rev. John Wesley’s sermon on “Free Grace.” For Whitefield, there was no such thing as “free” grace. “But passing by this, as also your equivocal definition of the word *grace*, and your false definition of the word *free*, and that I may be as short as possible,” wrote Whitefield, “I frankly acknowledge, I believe the doctrine of reprobation, in this view, that God intends to give saving grace, through Jesus Christ, only to a certain number, and that the rest of mankind, after the fall of Adam, being justly left of God to continue in sin, will at last suffer that eternal death which is its proper wages.”²⁵

Whitefield thus rejected the Arminian doctrine of universal election for the Calvinist doctrine of limited election and double predestination.

²⁵ Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the 18th Century Revival* (East Peoria, IL: Versa Press, Inc., 2019), p. 556.

Discussion 2. Was God Just in Imputing Adam's Sin on his Posterity?

Yes, according to Rev. Whitefield's biblical analysis and exegesis.

According to Whitefield, when Adam fell, so did his posterity in him. Adam's seed lost its perfection and it born naturally sinful.²⁶

This is the reason that all men are "reprobate." Whitefield asks, "Do not they who believe God's dooming men to everlasting burnings, also believe, that God looked upon them as men fallen in Adam?"²⁷

For this reason, Whitefield rejected John Wesley's charge that Calvinism taught "that thousands and millions of men, without any preceding offence or fault of theirs, were unchangeably doomed to everlasting burnings...." Whitefield felt that this charge was unbiblical, because the doctrine of Original Sin had imputed fault upon all human beings—that sentence is death.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 564.

²⁷ Ibid.

Discussion 3. Does Original Sin make All Men Reprobate?

Yes, according to Rev. Whitefield's biblical analysis and exegesis.

When Adam and Eve fell, so did all of their posterity. And so, all human beings are born reprobate.

This view is universally held throughout the universal church.

**Discussion 4. Would God Be Just in Condemning ALL
Reprobates to eternal damnation?**

Yes, according to Rev. Whitefield's biblical analysis and exegesis.

Because of Adam and Eve's Original Sin, God has in fact justly condemned the entire world unto eternal damnation—death. The entire world is thus "reprobate." Indeed, for as the Scriptures state, there is none good, no not one:

"Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually."
Genesis 6:5

"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one...." Roman 3:10

"They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Psalm 14:3

Discussion 5. Would God Be Unjust in Saving SOME, but not ALL Reprobates?

Yes, according to Rev. Whitefield's biblical analysis and exegesis.

The example of Noah is a case in point. (Genesis 6:11 – 9:19). The ark prefigured the Church; the flood prefigured God's final judgment; and those person who were lost in the flood prefigured the eternally damned. For, indeed, as the Lord Christ himself says in Matthew 24: 37-39:

³⁷ But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

³⁸ For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

³⁹ And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

Discussion 6. Did Christ's Redemption save ALL Reprobates?

No, according to Rev. Whitefield's biblical analysis and exegesis.

In order to understand Whitefield's Calvinist exegesis, one must start at the end of time: Christ's Last Judgment.

At the Final or Last Judgment: there will be two camps—the sheep (those who are “finally saved”) and the goats (those who are “finally lost”). Here, in our present world, emphasis must be placed upon the words “finally lost” and “finally saved.” See, e.g. Matthew 25: 31-46

Whitefield's theological system works like this: all “reprobates” in the present world are “finally lost” from eternity; and all of the “elect” in the present world are who are “finally saved” from eternity.

In the present world, however, we do not know who are “reprobate” and who are the “elect,” and so the regenerating work of Christ must be carried forth through preaching throughout the entire world. The sole and primary function of this universal preaching to the whole world is only and simply to call those whom God alone has chosen to be his “elect.” Man does not do the choosing—only God.

We may then deduce that, according Whitefield's Calvinist theology, Christ came to save *only those* whom God alone has chosen.

Christ himself says, in the Sacred Scriptures that: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:44)

Discussion 7. Did Christ's Redemption save only SOME Reprobates?

No, according to Rev. Whitefield's biblical analysis and exegesis.

But why? According to Whitefield's Calvinist theology, the answer to this question surpasses our ability of comprehension.

In classic Calvinism, God chooses whom he chooses; has mercy upon whom he will have mercy; and hardens whom he hardens. See, e.g. Romans 9:8. Politically, this cuts off the power of the papacy. Theologically, it renders the Armenian doctrine somewhat untenable.

At some point, as the following *Sacred Scriptures* reveal, we mortal human beings have got to submit to the fact that God is wholly comprehensible to the human mind.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord.
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55: 8-9)

“Behold, God is exalted, and we do not know Him;
The number of His years is unsearchable.” (Job 36:26)

“It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of
kings is to search out a matter. (Proverbs 25:2)

“Do you not know? Have you not heard?
The Everlasting God, the Lord,
the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or
tired. His understanding is inscrutable.” (Isaiah 40:28)

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord.
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,

So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

“Behold, God is exalted, and we do not know Him;
The number of His years is unsearchable. (Job 36:26)

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things
revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may
observe all the words of this law.” (Deuteronomy 29:29)

“Who does great and unsearchable things,
Wonders without number.” (Job 5:9)

“Can you discover the depths of God?
Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? (Job 11:7)

“Behold, God is exalted in His power;
Who is a teacher like Him?
“Who has appointed Him His way,
And who has said, ‘You have done wrong’? (Job 36: 22-23)

“For the choir director. A Psalm of David.
O Lord, You have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
You understand my thought from afar.
You scrutinize my path and my lying down,
And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.” (Psalm
139:1-6)

“It is the glory of God to conceal a matter,
But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.” (Proverbs
25:2)

“Do you not know? Have you not heard?
The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the
earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is
inscrutable.” (Isaiah 40:28)

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge
of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and

unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? (Romans 11: 33-34)

For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 2:11)

For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:16)

He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

How and why God “elects” some for eternal salvation but leaves others in a state of reprobation has not been conclusively explained in revealed Scripture. The doctrine of election is, nevertheless, a matter of faith within Calvinist theological doctrine.

Discussion 8. Does “Christ’s Redemption” and “Final Salvation” have the same meaning?

Yes, according to Rev. Whitefield’s biblical analysis and exegesis.

The Providence of God is firm, certain, and triumphant. For this reason, the Calvinists rejected the theological idea of a weak God who was not wholly and completely in control of all events—even the human choice, human will, and human will-power.

Accordingly, when God chose certain men and women to be numbered amongst the elect, his determination was certain and unchangeable. The “elect” man or woman should be reassured of ultimate salvation and, as such, he or she should live life boldly for Christ.

ELECTION = FINAL SALVATION

For Rev. Whitefield and other Calvinists, this “assurance” was most sweet and comforting, as he thus explained to Rev. Wesley:

This, dear Sir, is the triumphant language of every soul that has attained a full assurance of faith. And this assurance can only arise from a belief of God’s electing everlasting love. That many have an assurance they are in Christ to-day, but take no thought for, or are not assured they shall be in him tomorrow, nay to all eternity, is rather their imperfection and unhappiness, than their privilege. I pray God to bring all such to a sense of his eternal love, that they may no longer build upon their own faithfulness, but on the unchangeableness of that God whose gifts and callings are without repentance. For those whom God has once justified, he also will glorify.²⁸

Hence, there is a “doctrine of assurance” within Calvinism which comforts the “elect” during their present pilgrimage in this lifetime. It is, as Whitefield called it, “a comfortable assurance of eternal salvation.”²⁹

²⁸ Ibid., p. 562.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 561.

The Calvinist calls true believers to consider this: if God calls a man or woman to be amongst “elect,” then there is absolutely no other force in existence that can separate such a person from the love of God, or prevent such a person from attaining an ultimate final salvation. This “irresistible grace” must then result within the heart and soul of the “elect” a very firm assurance that, regardless of what happens in this present world, such as turmoil, hardship, and instability-- that there will be an “ultimate justice” of all events and occurrences, because God’s omnipotent will shall ultimately prevail. This is that Providence of God that assures all Christians in the ultimate justice of things.

Because of this Calvinist “doctrine of assurance,” George Whitefield rejected the Wesleyan-Arminian theological system, because it allowed for the possibility of “falling away” of the “elect.”

To the Calvinists, this was simply not how the Providence of God worked: in Calvinism, once God justifies, he saves everlasting and for all time. Nor within Calvinism is there a “testing ground” or any form of temptation that is so great that it may cause the “elect” to fall away from God, or to grow fearful, or to turn away and be lost to final salvation. Under Calvinist doctrine, this is simply not how God’s Providence works.

Discussion 9. Are ALL persons whom Christ has redeemed the “elect” of God?

Yes, according to Rev. Whitefield’s biblical analysis and exegesis.

What is important to note here is the timelessness of this “election.” God’s election of the “elect” has occurred outside of time and space, through eternity before this world began; God’s election is also “immutable”; and God’s election is wholly and completely God’s own origin, cause, and will—and originating in the will of human beings.

Christ’s redemption must also be viewed as irresistibly working upon and drawing into the kingdom of God *only those* whom God has already elected. As Whitefield explains: “But, blessed be God, our Lord knew for whom he died. There was an eternal compact between the Father and the Son. A certain number was then given him, as the purchase and reward of his obedience and death.”³⁰ This is also the substance of Calvinist predestination, working in tandem with the “doctrine of assurance,” such that all things work together of those who love God. See, e.g., Romans 8:28-31.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 568..

**Discussion 10. Were SOME persons who are “Finally Lost”
once a part of the “elect” who were redeemed by
Christ**

No, according to Rev. Whitefield’s biblical analysis and exegesis.

This is frightening, because within Calvinism there is no special category of “elect” persons who are growing in the grace of God but who may, due to Satan’s temptations, fall away from grace. In Calvinism, such persons who start of in the Christian faith, but who later fall away, were never “elect” to begin with. Such persons may been deceived into thinking that they are a part of the “elect” when in reality they are not. There reason is because the essential meaning of “election” means predestined by an immutable God for eternal salvation—guaranteed, as expressed by the following equation:

ELECTION = FINAL SALVATION

For this reason, Rev. Whitefield rejected John Wesley’s theology on “prevenient grace” and “universal atonement,” meaning that God offers his “free grace” to all of humanity. “For how can all be universally redeemed,” asks Whitefield, “if all are not finally saved?” The reason behind Whitefield’s question is a distinctions within the definitions of “redeemed” and “election.” The Calvinist believes that those words are finalized and completed by God in eternity, even before the foundation of the word. Whereas the Wesleyan-Arminians would agree in basic principle, they also insist that “God’s grace” extends to every one, allowing each individual to choose between good and evil. Here, again, the Calvinist rejected this aspect of Arminianism as opening the door to secular humanism and Pelagianism.

Discussion 11. Does God’s grace grant human beings the power to choose whether they will be “finally saved” or “finally lost”?

No, according to Rev. Whitefield’s biblical analysis and exegesis.

This power of human choice, of human being having some independent judgment to select Christ over eternal salvation is a temptation which the Calvinists would admonish all Christians to abandon—it is a deceptive trick of the devil. Whitefield and the Calvinist held that this religious posture of “free will” or even “free choice,” held by Rev. Wesley and others leads to a lack of reliance upon God. The Wesleyan-Arminian doctrine of general atonement allows for every person to be saved, if only they would willingly accept God’s grace—i.e., “free choice.” The Calvinists, however, rejected this power of “free choice.” Human beings do not have this power to choose between their own “eternal damnation” or “eternal salvation.” For, as Rev. Whitefield says:

Whereas universal redemption is a notion sadly adapted to keep the soul in its lethargic sleepy condition, and therefore so many natural men admire and applaud it...³¹

Infidels of all kinds are one [Rev. John Wesley’s] side of the question [of the doctrine of election, limited atonement, and free will]. Deists, Arians, Socinians, arraign God’s sovereignty, and stand up for universal redemption.³²

But in fairness to Rev. John Wesley, I do not think that Wesley ever used the words “universal redemption,” but instead he used the words “free grace,” meaning “God’s covenantal offer of universal redemption”—this does not imply “a guarantee of universal salvation of every human being,” but rather “an offer of salvation to every human being who believes in Christ.”

But, even thus, the Calvinists still reject the Arminian doctrine of universal “free choice” between Christ and eternal damnation. Whether “choice of Christ’s redemption” and “ability to actually act upon that choice of Christ’s redemption” should be elaborated upon has seldom been discussed. But I think

³¹ Ibid., p. 560.

³² Ibid., p 565.

that clearly this is the fundamental difference, because all Christians agree on this fundamental point: only God's grace allows men to have the ability to actually act upon his choice of Christ's redemption." But St. Augustine's *The City of God* teaches us that God has given individual human beings voluntary "wills," to will what is good, or to will what is evil. Though the Calvinists claim not to refute Augustine on this point, their view of the doctrine of election does not appear to be in perfect alignment with Augustine's theology.

Discussion 12. Do human beings—including the saints—know who shall be “finally saved” or “finally lost”?

No, according to Rev. Whitefield’s biblical analysis and exegesis.

This is a fundamental aspect of the doctrine of election, says Rev. Whitefield. This propels the Calvinists to live holy lives, since no man can know for certain as to whether he is numbered among the “elect.” This causes the “elect” to cleave to holiness, and not, as Rev. Wesley criticized, cause them to rest on their oars, to cease striving for both inward and outward holiness and righteousness. But quite the contrary, as explained Rev. Whitefield:

In answer to this, let me observe, that none living, especially none who are desirous of salvation, can know that they are not of the number of God’s elect.... But, is not this doubting a good means to make their calling and their election sure? This is one reason among many others, why I admire the doctrine of election, and am convinced that it should have a place in gospel ministrations, and should be insisted on with faithfulness and care. It has a natural tendency to rouse the soul out of its carnal security. And therefore many carnal men cry out against it....³³

I shall only say, it is the doctrine of election that most presses me to abound in good works. I am willing to suffer all things for the elect’s sake. This makes me preach with comfort, because I know salvation does not depend on man’s free will, but the Lord makes willing in the day of his power, and can make use of me to bring some of his elect home, when and where he pleases.³⁴

In other words, the “doctrine of election” does not, as Rev. Wesley misunderstood it to do, create a sense of complacency within Christians. Instead, this doctrine creates meaningful self-reflection and instills the “fear of God” within them, thus motivating them to live holy and righteous lives.

³³ Ibid., p. 560.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 564-565.

Discussion 13. What is the “doctrine of election”?

The Calvinist “doctrine of election,” espoused by Rev. Whitefield and others, holds that all men and women were born reprobate as a direct result of Original Sin and the Fall of Adam and Eve. Hence, all of humankind are justly under a sentence of death, because God forewarned Adam and Eve that if they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, then they would surely die. This is God’s eternal decree: the wages of sin is death. This death sentence has been imputed to all of Adam’s seed (i.e., his posterity).

The Calvinist “doctrine of election” also holds that only a select number of men and women has been immutably and irresistibly called, chosen, and predestined by God for eternal salvation. These persons are unknown within the present world, but they have certain identifiable marks, such as outward and inward holiness. Moreover, as Rev. Whitefield holds, it is impossible for individuals to know with certainty as to whether or not they are members of the elect and must through prayer and supplication seek and strive for righteousness and holiness. See, e.g., Discussion # 12 above.

Discussion 14. Does the “doctrine of election” cause the “elect” to relapse into ungodliness and unholy living?

No, according to Rev. Whitefield’s biblical analysis and exegesis.

Since no man or woman can know in this lifetime whether or not they are members of God’s “elect,” they have motivation enough to strive for inward and outward holiness and righteousness. This discourages spiritual back-sliding and relapsing into sinful living. See, e.g., Discussion # 12.

It should be noted here, that Rev. Whitefield’s position on the substance, nature, and affect of the “doctrine of election” was taken substantially from the plain text of Article XVII, “Predestination and Election” of the Church of England’s Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, which inter alia states:

As the godly consideration of Predestination, and our Election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal Salvation to be enjoyed through Christ as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: So, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchedness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation.

Thus, Rev. Whitefield’s rebuttal to Rev. Wesley was rooted in an argument that Whitefield’s position the “doctrine of election” had upheld both the letter and text of the Church of England’s Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, whereas Wesley’s theology on “free grace” had not. As the plain text of article XVII states, Rev. Whitefield affirmed that the effects of the doctrine of election was instill a sense of comfort while “mortifying the works of the flesh” and “drawing up their minds to high and heavenly things.” This is what Rev. Whitefield preached, but what Rev. Wesley explicitly denied. For, as Rev. Whitefield argued: “[t]his is the established doctrine of scripture, and acknowledged as such in the 17th article of the church of

England, as Bishop Burnet himself confesses; yet dear Mr. Wesley absolutely denies it.”³⁵

Rev. Whitefield’s point is well taken, the Thirty-Nine Articles, Article 17, does expressly establish “predestination and election” as fundamental tenets within the Church of England, but nowhere within that article, as Rev. Wesley holds, is there any description of Calvinistic “irresistible grace” or Calvinistic “irresistible reprobation.” On the other hand, the genre of “predestination and election” described in Article 17 is seemingly more analogous to the theology of St. Augustine’s *On Grace and Free Will*, which is closer to the theological positions of Martin Luther and John Wesley.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 556.

Discussion 15. Does the “doctrine of election” make preaching unnecessary?

No, according to Rev. Whitefield’s biblical analysis and exegesis.

Once to major criticisms espoused by Rev. John Wesley and others was that, if God has already determined from beginning of time all those who will be saved and all those who will be lost, then there would be no need to preach the word of God to lost souls predestined to remain reprobate or to saved souls predestined for eternal salvation.

But Rev. Whitefield refutes this reasoning. First, it is true that no man knows who the elect are. The terms of existence in our present lifetime are such that the elect and the reprobate are mixed together, especially since all men and women are born reprobate. The preaching of the word, however, causes “regeneration” in God’s chosen elect. Those persons who were born reprobate but nevertheless chosen by God shall be irresistibly drawn to Christ through the preaching of God’s word. Rev. Whitefield and the Calvinists, however, wish to make it clear: man does not perform any saving of human souls, but rather it is God alone who selects and elects those human souls who will ultimately receive the eternal salvation. The Calvinist doctrine is clear: clergymen are to have no authority whatsoever over the “keys to the kingdom of God,” so as to determine which souls shall be lost or which souls shall be saved.

CONCLUSION

This paper reviewed Rev. George Whitefield's *A Letter to Rev. Mr. John Wesley In Answer to His Sermon entitled "Free Grace."* It is a Calvinist apology against Wesleyan-Arminian theology. Here Rev. Whitefield masterfully defends his understanding of Article 17 of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. He insists the Rev. Wesley had misunderstood and misjudged the nature of Original Sin, God's sovereignty and role in justification, and the impact of the "doctrine of election" upon Christian holiness. For Rev. Whitefield and his Calvinist brothers, the grace of God is not "free," because God has foreknown those whom he elected, and only those whom God alone has elected shall receive eternal salvation. Moreover, the Wesleyan-Arminian system opened the door to Roman Catholicism, Pelagianism, and secular humanism—assigning too much free will to human beings. Whereas, as Whitefield argued in his letter, the Calvinist "doctrine of election" provided comfort and support to "elect" Christians that no matter the circumstances their ultimate salvation is assured.

We also noted, significantly, that amongst the Calvinists, Rev. George Whitefield is considered to be the real founder of the evangelical "Great Awakening" revival movement from which the Methodist societies of the 1730s-40s emerged. (This revival movement, however, should be distinguished from the "holy club" which the Wesley brothers formed at Christ Church, Oxford in 1729, and which was later nicknamed "Methodist"). But the Wesley brothers took over the helm of Britain's Methodist societies early in burgeoning stages of the Great Awakening movement. This paper thus reminds us that evangelical Methodism originally included Calvinist elements led by the Rev. George Whitefield. And today, many Calvinist claim Rev. George Whitefield as the founder of Methodism.

THE END

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APPENDIX A.

Analogy of Faith-- A Conflict within the Ranks of Reformed Clergy

“Whitefield vs. Wesley”³⁶

“When George Whitefield left England in 1739, he was the recognized leader of the evangelical awakening, and he entrusted his thousands of followers to John Wesley’s care.

“WHEN HE RETURNED, in early 1741, he found that “many of my spiritual children . . . will neither hear, see, nor give me the least assistance: Yes, some of them send threatening letters that God will speedily destroy me. ”

“What had happened? Wesley had preached and published on two subjects dividing the leaders: predestination (whether God foreordains people’s eternal destiny) and perfection (whether sinlessness is attainable in this life).

“Whitefield met with both Charles and John Wesley in early 1741, but they could not find common ground. Wrote Whitefield, “It would have melted any heart to have heard Mr. Charles Wesley and me weeping, after prayer, that if possible the breach might be prevented.” The movement had been forever divided between the followers of Wesley and the followers of Whitefield.

“Christian History asked J. D. Walsh to explain how Whitefield and Wesley met, how their conflict began, and how their relationship changed.

“The relationship between George Whitefield and John Wesley, the two great leaders of the eighteenth- century revival, cannot be neatly described. Their association passed through very different stages.

“Deference: Oxford Methodists

“Whitefield arrived at Pembroke College, Oxford, in 1732, a raw, provincial youth with a West Country accent. (He never lost it; accounts of his preaching

³⁶ This article, “Whitefield vs. Wesley” is reprinted from the Christian History Institute: <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/wesley-vs-whitefield>

describe his “twang through the nose” and the way he pronounced “Christ” as “Chroist.”) Whitefield had come from the tap—room of the family inn and was working his way through college, waiting on richer students. “As for my quality, I was a poor drawer” [of ale], he wrote.

“Whitefield had heard of the “Holy Club” before he arrived, and after Charles Wesley kindly asked him to breakfast, he was swiftly drawn into the fellowship. It was Charles, open—hearted and emotional, rather than the steely—willed and self-controlled John, who was his chief Oxford mentor.

“Whitefield spoke “with the utmost deference and respect” of the brothers Wesley, who had been to famous boarding schools and were his seniors. During a period of acute distress, Whitefield was sent for advice to John, and thanks to his “excellent advice and management,” Whitefield “was delivered from the wiles of Satan.” This was a somewhat subservient relationship. Whitefield wrote, “From time to time Mr. Wesley permitted me to come to him and instructed me as I was able to bear it.” Whitefield deferred to John Wesley as his “spiritual father in Christ” and his letters addressed Wesley as “Honoured sir.”

“Partnership: Revival Takes Off

“In 1736 John Wesley entrusted the newly ordained Whitefield with the oversight of the Oxford Methodists, while he was away in Georgia. Whitefield soon soared to national fame as “the boy preacher.” Autograph hunters besieged him. A flood of pamphlets attacked him. He was lavishly praised and compared to Moses, to David, and to Wycliffe as the “morning star” of a second Reformation. As Whitefield freely confessed, fame went to his head. He wrote one minister in 1739: “Success, I fear, elated my mind. I did not behave to you, and other ministers of Christ, with that humility which became me.”

“Although Whitefield’s evangelistic success far outstripped that of his former instructor, he showed Wesley deep respect. “I am but a novice; you are acquainted with the great things of God,” he told him in March 1739. Before inviting Wesley to join him in Bristol that year, he told his converts that “there was one coming after him whose shoes’ latchett he was not worthy to unloose.”

“Yet at this critical phase of the revival, young, exuberant, Whitefield took the lead, dragging behind the older, more cautious Wesley. In spring 1739

Whitefield took the momentous step of preaching outdoors— first to the grimy coalminers around Bristol, and then to the street poor of London. This turned methodism outward, from respectable Anglican societies toward the huge unchurched mass. Whitefield now pushed the reluctant Wesleys into following him as field preachers.

“In 1739, as vistas of astonishing evangelistic success opened up, Whitefield and the Wesleys worked in the closest harmony, as brothers and equals. When Whitefield won converts through his amazing oratory, he relied on Wesley to help organize and instruct them.

“Discord: Fight over Grace

“A few months later, however, the two leaders were locked in angry debate. By 1740 the infant Methodist movement was split irrevocably into two camps.

“It was inevitable that the issue of predestination would trouble the movement. The Wesleys were unshakable “Arminians” who denied predestination, yet the revival drew zealous recruits from areas in which Puritan Calvinism was much alive. At first, Whitefield was no predestinarian, but by the time he sailed to America in the summer of 1739, he was reading Calvinist books. Contact with fervent American Calvinists filled out his knowledge.

“Even before Whitefield departed, **John Wesley had decided to attack the Calvinist theory of grace.** In March 1739 he not only preached but published a passionately Arminian sermon entitled *Free Grace*. This step was taken with great unease; only after seeking a sign from heaven and drawing lots twice, did Wesley go into battle.

“John Wesley feared that Calvinism propagated fatalism and discouraged growth in holiness. Charles Wesley feared that predestination (and particularly the idea of reprobation, that God predestined some to damnation) represented a loving God as a God of hate. In his famous hymn *Wrestling Jacob*, he deliberately capitalized the sentence “Pure Universal Love Thou Art.”

“Whitefield, who was always more irenic than John Wesley, demurred before replying. He made it clear he was no follower, but a leader, and in some respects in front of his old adviser: “As God was pleased to send me out first, and to enlighten me first, so I think he still continues to do it.” **Even now, however, he recognized Wesley’s enormous talent for the nurture of souls: “My business seems to be chiefly in planting; if God sends you to water, I praise his name.”**

“Nonetheless, on Christmas Eve 1740 Whitefield wrote his riposte to Wesley, defending the Calvinist doctrine of grace.

“The controversy was fueled when Wesley provocatively published *Free Grace* in America. Whitefield, when invited to preach in Wesley’s headquarters at the London Foundery, scandalized the congregation by preaching “the absolute decrees [of election] in the most peremptory and offensive manner,” while Charles sat beside him, fuming.

“From 1740 the revival moved along parallel lines. Wesley’s “United Societies” were matched by the growth of “Calvinistic Methodist” societies in England and Wales. In London, Whitefield’s followers set up his Tabernacle in the same street as Wesley’s Foundery, and in rivalry with it.

“Cooling: Agreement to Differ

“By 1742 tempers were beginning to cool. Open-hearted evangelist Howell Harris worked to reunite the two parties, but he found this impossible, partly because “neither of the sides can submit to . . . the other head—Mr. Wesley or Mr. Whitefield.” Indeed, the followers of both men often proved more partisan than their champions.

“Far more united the antagonists than ever separated them. Whitefield was a moderate Calvinist; he did not let the doctrine of predestination hinder him from offering grace to all, or from insisting on the need for holiness in believers. John Wesley allowed (for a time) that some souls might be elected to eternal life. When not overheated, both men saw such issues as non-essentials. At the height of the controversy, Whitefield quoted the reformer John Bradford: “Let a man go to the grammar school of faith and repentance, before he goes to the university of election and predestination.”

“No merger of the two camps occurred, but there was at least reconciliation between the leaders. This “closer union in affection” continued with hiccups, but no serious interruption, to Whitefield’s death. In 1755, Charles Wesley could write happily, “Come on, my Whitefield! (since the strife is past) / And friends at first are friends again at last.”

“The relationship was described by one of Wesley’s preachers as “agreement to differ.” Whitefield was welcomed to preach among Wesley’s societies. Wesley lent Whitefield one of his best preachers, Joseph Cownley, for work at the Tabernacle. Whitefield refused to build Calvinistic chapels in places

that already had a Wesleyan society. Wesley agreed to the reverse. More than once Whitefield acted as mediator when the Wesley brothers fell out, notably when Charles sabotaged John's marriage prospects to Grace Murray.

"This friendship continued even though the old split was not forgotten. Writing his *Short History of Methodism* in 1765, John Wesley did not conceal his conviction that Whitefield and the Calvinists had made "the first breach" in the revival. Whitefield felt that the idyllic harmony of early 1739—"heaven on earth" when all were "like little children"—had been broken by Wesley's sermon on *Free Grace*.

"Complementary Gifts

"Ultimately, what eased relations between the two great leaders was **Whitefield's decision, in 1749, to abandon formal leadership of the Calvinistic Methodist societies.** He thus posed no threat to Wesley as chief organizer of the revival.

"Whitefield was certainly not inadequate as a pastor and organizer, but he realized his primary calling lay as a "wayfaring witness." His determination to shuttle continually between England, Scotland, and America meant he could never, like Wesley, provide oversight for a great connection of societies. "An itinerant pilgrim life is that which I choose," he wrote, so he cheerfully let other pastors gather the lost sheep he had found.

"Wesley, in contrast, insisted his converts be organized and built up in the faith. He resolved not to send preachers where he could not form societies, because failure to support new converts was like "begetting children for the murderer." **In Wesley's view, the Great Awakening subsided largely because Whitefield's converts did not receive adequate spiritual oversight.**

"Both Whitefield and Wesley (and the Moravians) deserve credit as Founding Fathers of the great revival. What is most striking is the providential complementarity of the two men's gifts. More than any evangelist before him, Whitefield was given the ability to scatter the seed of God's Word across the world. To Wesley, preeminently, was granted the ability to garner the grain and preserve it.

“In 1770, the year of his death, Whitefield wrote to Charles as “my very dear old friend” and described John as “your honoured brother.” To each he bequeathed a mourning ring, “in token of my indissoluble union with them in heart and Christian affection, notwithstanding our difference in judgment about some particular points of doctrine.” On Whitefield’s death, Charles penned a noble elegy. **And at Whitefield’s request, his funeral sermon was preached by none other than his former opponent, John Wesley.**”

THE END