

***Elegy on Whitefield (1771)***<sup>1</sup>

[Baker list, #326]

**Editorial Introduction:**

George Whitefield, long-time associate of the Wesley brothers, died on September 30, 1770, in Newburyport, Massachusetts, while on another of his preaching tours in the American colonies. John Wesley honored his fallen colleague with *A Sermon on the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield*, published in late November of that year. Charles Wesley added a brief funeral hymn to that sermon—see “Hymn on the Death of Whitefield” (1770).

Charles followed this brief hymn with a much longer elegy, which he completed and published in February 1771.

**Editions:**

Charles Wesley. *An Elegy on the late Reverend George Whitefield, M.A.* .... Bristol: Pine, 1771.  
Dublin: Kidd, 1771.

---

<sup>1</sup>This document was produced by the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition under the editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the diligent assistance of Aileen F. Maddox.  
Last updated: Feb. 4, 2008.

**AN  
ELEGY  
ON THE DEATH OF  
THE REV. MR. GEORGE WHITEFIELD.**

And is my Whitefield entered into rest,  
With sudden death, with sudden glory blest?  
Left for a few sad moments here behind,  
I bear his image on my faithful mind;  
To future times the fair example tell  
Of one who lived, of one who died, so well,  
Pay the last office of fraternal love,  
And then embrace my happier friend above.

O thou who didst, in our degenerate days,  
This chosen vessel for thy glory raise,  
My heart with my companion's zeal inspire,  
And touch *my* lips with the celestial fire,

That while thy servant's labours I record,  
Sinners may see, and magnify his Lord,  
Bow to the saving name, and thankful own  
The good on earth performed is wrought by God alone.

His sovereign grace vouchsafed a worm to choose,  
The vessel fitting for the Master's use:  
God from the womb set for himself apart  
A pastor fashioned after his own heart; 20  
Infused the infant-wish, the warm desire,  
To minister like that angelic choir,  
And bade his simple soul to heaven aspire.

Awed, and delighted with a God unknown,  
By glimpses of his face led gently on,  
The powerful, sweet attraction he pursued,  
And feared the crowd, and sighed for solitude;  
His sins and wants in secret to declare,  
Or wait for blessings in the house of prayer,  
Devotion by the altar-fire to raise, 30  
And join the first-born church in solemn songs of praise.

But now the Lord, who sends by whom he will,  
Ready his own great purpose to fulfil,

Inclined the creature's heart as passive clay,  
And pointed out his providential way  
To learning's seats, for piety designed,  
For knowledge sound, with pure religion joined,  
Schools of the prophets' sons, and well employed,  
When training servants for the courts of God.

'Twas there he dared his father's God pursue, 40  
Associating with the derided few,  
(Who, newly started in the Christian race,  
Were blindly following after righteousness,  
Outcasts of men, and fools for Jesus' sake!)  
He longed their glorious scandal to partake,  
Courageously took up the shameful cross,  
And suffering all things in the Saviour's cause,  
Vowed to renounce the world, himself deny,  
And following on with them, with them to live and die.

Can I the memorable day forget, 50  
When first we by divine appointment met?  
Where undisturbed the thoughtful student roves,  
In search of truth, through academic groves,

A modest, pensive youth, who mused alone,  
Industrious the frequented path to shun,  
An Israelite without disguise or art  
I saw, I loved, and clasped him to my heart,  
A stranger as my bosom-friend caressed,<sup>2</sup>  
And unawares received an angel-guest.

Marked for an angel of the church below, 60  
Must he not first severe temptation know,  
Fly from the flaming mount with guilty awe,  
And quake to hear the thunders of the law,  
Th' accuser's cruel buffetings sustain,  
Still of unconquerable sin complain,  
With cries, and tears that seemed to flow in vain?  
Long in the fire, long in the desert tried,  
He daily languished, and he daily died,  
Long by the spirit of fear in prison bound,  
Groaned for relief, yet no deliverance found; 70  
Till quite forsaken both of man and God,  
And fainting underneath corruption's load,  
His fastings, prayers, and struggles he gave o'er,  
Sunk in despair, and gasped for help no more.

---

<sup>2</sup>Ori., "carest"; but Wesley clearly means "to caress" rather than "to care."

Then in the last extreme of hopeless grief,  
Jesus *appeared!* And helped his unbelief,  
Infused the faith which did his sins remove,  
Assured his heart of God's forgiving love,  
And filled with glorious joy, the joy of saints above.

Who but the souls that savingly believe, 80  
The raptures of a faithful soul conceive?  
The joy unspeakable, the love unknown,  
The peace he felt is understood by none,  
By none but those who know their sins forgiven  
Through God the Holy Ghost come down from heaven.

Born of the Spirit now, divinely led,  
He hastes in his dear Saviour's steps to tread,  
Eager his faith's sincerity to prove  
By all the works of piety and love;  
Fruits of repentance first, and legal fear, 90  
They now the genuine marks of grace appear,  
Their own superior principle maintain,  
And justify his faith to God and man;  
While list'ning to forlorn affliction's cries,  
Swift to assist on wings of love he flies,

Help to the sick, and needy prisoners gives,  
And more than their external wants relieves;  
Alarms the souls that sleep secure in sin,  
Till urged the one great business they begin,  
Instructs them how to 'scape the judgment nigh, 100  
“Ye must be born again, or dead forever die!”

Nor let the scrup'lous sons of Levi fear  
He thus invades the sacred character:  
Thus every candidate should first be tried,  
In doing good, in Jesus' steps abide,  
Then exercise aright the deacon's powers,  
Son to his church, as Whitefield was to ours.

Moved by the Holy Ghost to minister,  
And serve his altar, in the house of prayer,  
Though long resolved for God alone to live, 110  
The outward call he trembled to receive,  
Shrunk from the awful charge, so well prepared,  
The gift by apostolic hands conferred,  
And cried, with deep unfeigned humility,  
“Send, Lord, by whom thou wilt, but send not me.”

Yet soon he bows before the will divine  
Clearly demonstrating its own design,  
Called by a prelate good, no more delays  
T' accept with awe the consecrating grace,  
And offers up, through the Redeemer's blood, 120  
His body, spirit, soul, a sacrifice to God.

He now begins, from every weight set free,  
To make full trial of his ministry,  
Breaks forth on every side, and runs, and flies,  
Like kindling flames that from the stubble rise,  
Where'er the ministerial Spirit leads,  
From house to house the heavenly fire he spreads,  
Ranges through all the city-lanes and streets,  
And seizes every prodigal he meets.

Who shall the will and work divine oppose? 130  
His strength with his increasing labour grows:  
Workman and work th' Almighty hath prepared,  
And sent of God, the servant must be heard,  
Rush through the opening door, on sinners call,  
Proclaim the truth, and offer Christ to all.

“Sound an alarm, the gospel-trumpet blow,  
Let all their time of visitation know;  
The Saviour comes! (You hear his herald cry)  
Go forth and meet the friend of sinners nigh!”  
Roused from the sleep of death, a countless crowd, 140  
(Whose hearts like trees before the wind are bowed,  
As a thick cloud, that darkens all the sky,  
As flocking doves, that to their windows fly.)  
Press to the hallowed courts, with eager strife,  
Catch the convincing word, and hear for life.  
Parties and sects their endless feuds forget  
And fall, and tremble at the preacher’s feet,  
Pricked at the heart, with one consent inquire  
What must we do t’ escape the never-dying fire?

Made apt to teach he points them out the way, 150  
And willing multitudes the truth obey;  
He lets his light on all impartial shine,  
And strenuously asserts the birth divine;  
The Spirit freely given to all who claim  
That promised Comforter in Jesus’ name;

The pardon bought so dear, by grace bestowed,  
Received through faith in the atoning blood.  
While yet he speaks, the Lord himself comes down,  
Applies and proves the gracious word his own,  
The Holy Ghost to thirsty souls imparts, 160  
And writes forgiveness on the broken hearts.

But lo! An ampler field appears in view,  
And calls his champion forth to conquests new:  
Nor toils, nor dangers can his zeal repress,  
Nor crowds detain him by his own success:  
In vain his children tempt him to delay,  
With prayers and tears invite his longer stay,  
Or ask, as sharers of his weal or woe,  
To earth's remotest bounds with him to go:  
He leaves them all behind, at Jesus' word, 170  
He finds them all again in his beloved Lord.

See, where he flies! As if by heaven designed,  
T' awake and draw our whole apostate kind!  
He takes the eagle's with the morning's wings,  
To other worlds the great salvation brings,

As sent, with joyful news of sins forgiven,  
To every ransomed soul on this side heaven!

With ready mind th' Americans receive  
Their angel-friend, and his report believe,  
So soon the servant's heavenly call they find, 180  
So soon they hear the Master's feet behind:  
He comes—to wound, and heal! At his descent  
The mountains flow, the rocky hearts are rent;  
Numbers acknowledging their gracious day  
Turn to the Lord, and cast their sins away,  
And faint and sink, beneath their guilty load,  
Into the arms of a forgiving God.  
His Son revealed, they now exult to know,  
And after a despised Redeemer go,  
In all the works prepared their faith to prove, 190  
In patient hope, and fervency of love.

How blest the messenger whom Jesus owns,  
How swift with the commissioned word he runs!  
The sacred fire shut up within his breast  
Breaks out again, the weary cannot rest,

Cannot consent his feeble flesh to spare,  
But rushes on, Jehovah's harbinger:  
His one delightful work, and steadfast aim  
To pluck poor souls as brands out of the flame,  
To scatter the good seed on every side, 200  
To spread the knowledge of the crucified,  
From a small spark a mighty fire to raise,  
And fill the continent with Jesus' praise.

What recompense for all his endless toil?  
The Master pays him with a constant smile,  
With peace, and power, and comforts from above,  
Grace upon grace, and floods of rapt'rous love.  
When often spent and spiritless he lies,  
Jesus beholds him with propitious eyes,  
And looks him back his strength, and bids arise, 210  
Sends him again to run the lengthened race,  
Prosper his work, and shines on all his ways.

The man of God, whom God delights t' approve  
In his great labours of parental love,  
Love of the little ones—for these he cares,  
The lambs, the orphans, in his bosom bears;

Knowing in whom he trusts, provides a place,  
And spreads a table in the wilderness,  
A father of the fatherless, supplies  
Their daily wants—with manna from the skies,                    220  
In answer to his prayer so strangely given,  
His fervent prayer of faith that opens heaven.

What mighty works the prayer of faith can do!  
The good of souls, and Jesus in his view,  
He sees the basis sure, which cannot fail,  
Laid by the true divine Zerubbabel;  
The rising house built up by swift degrees,  
The crowning-stone brought forth with shouts he sees:  
The Lord hath finished what his hands begun,  
Ascribe the gracious work to grace alone.                    230

The house is built; and shall not God provide?  
Plentiful help pours in on every side,  
From hearts inclined the hungry lambs to feed  
By him, who satisfies the poor with bread;  
Whose blessing makes the earth her riches yield,  
The wilderness become a fruitful field,

Bids golden harvests round his house arise,  
And turns a waste into a paradise.

With heart enlarged, with confidence increased,  
In all his purposes and labours bless'd, 240  
The steward wise, and faithful to his trust,  
Gives God the praise, and sinks into the dust,  
And cries, o'erwhelmed his Master's smile to see,  
"O when shall I begin to live for thee!"

More grace is on the humble man bestowed,  
More work on him that loves to work for God;  
By whose supreme decree, and kind command  
He now returns, to bless his native land,  
(Nor dreads the threat'nings of the wat'ry<sup>3</sup> deep, 250  
Or all its storms, with Jesus in the ship)  
To see how the belov'd disciples fare,  
Fruits of his toil, and children of his prayer,  
A second gospel-benefit t' impart,  
And comfort, and confirm the faithful heart.

So the first missionaries in Jesus' name,  
Went forth, the world's Redeemer to proclaim,

---

<sup>3</sup>Frank Baker notes that all copies he had seen were corrected in a contemporary hand to "wintry."

The crucified, supreme, eternal God,  
The general peace and pardon in his blood;  
From clime to clime the restless heralds run,  
To make their Saviour through the nations known, 260  
Planted in every place, to serve their Lord,  
A living church, and watered by the word,  
While heaven was pleased their ministry to bless,  
And God bestowed the thousand-fold increase.

But shall my partial, fond presumption dare  
A stripling with apostles to compare?  
Their powers miraculous he dared not claim,  
Though still his gospel, and his God the same.  
Commissioned by his God, the word of grace  
(Where'er the Lord an open door displays) 270  
Freely as he receives, he freely gives,  
And daily dying, by the gospel lives;  
Renews his strength, renews his prosperous toil  
In every corner of our favoured isle,  
And publishes salvation to the poor,  
And spreads the joyous news from shore to shore.

For when the rich a proffered Christ reject,  
And spurn the preacher with his odious sect,  
Out of their temples cast, he strait obeys,  
Goes forth to all the hedges and highways, 280  
Arrests the most abandoned slaves of sin,  
And forces the poor vagrants to come in,  
To share the feast for famished souls designed,  
And fill the house enlarged for all the sinful kind.

How beauteous on the mountain-tops appear  
The feet of God's auspicious messenger,  
Who brings good tidings of a world forgiven,  
Who publishes a peace 'twixt earth and heaven,  
And cries to Zion, "He that purged thy stains,  
Thy Saviour-God and King forever reigns!" 290

Soon as he thus lifts up his trumpet-voice,  
Attentive thousands tremble, or rejoice:  
Who faithfully the welcome truth receive,  
Rejoice, and closer to their Saviour cleave:  
Poor Christless sinners, wounded by the word  
(Lively and sharper than a two-edg'd sword,

Spirit and soul almighty to divide)  
Drop, like autumnal leaves, on every side,  
Lamenting after him they crucified!  
While God inspires the comfort, or the dread, 300  
Wider, and wider still the cry is spread,  
Till all perceive the influence from above,  
O'erwhelmed with grief, or swallowed up in love.

What multitudes repent, and then believe,  
When God doth utterance to the preacher give!  
Whether he speaks the words of sober sense,  
Or pours a flood of artless eloquence,  
Ransacks the foul apostate creature's breast,  
And shows the man half devil, and half beast;  
Or warmly pleads his dear Redeemer's cause; 310  
Or pity on the poor and needy draws:  
"The deist scarce from offering can withhold,  
And misers wonder they should part with gold:"  
Opposers struck the powerful word admire  
In speechless awe, the hammer and the fire,  
While Whitefield melts the stubborn rocks, or breaks,  
In consolation, or in thunder speaks,

From strength to strength, our young apostle, goes,  
Pours like a torrent, and the land o'erflows,  
Resistless wins his way with rapid zeal, 320  
Turns the world upside down, and shakes the gates of hell!

Such for a length of years his glorious race  
He ran, nor e'er looked back, or slacked his pace;  
Starting afresh, on this alone intent,  
And straining up the steep of excellent,  
Forgetting still the things already done,  
And reaching forth to those not yet begun,  
Eager he pressed to his high calling's prize,  
By violent faith resolved to scale the skies,  
And apprehend his Lord in paradise. 330

Through his abundant toils, with fixed amaze  
We see revived the work of ancient days;  
In his unspotted life with joy we see  
The fervors of primeval piety:  
A pattern to the flock by Jesus bought,  
A living witness of the truths he taught,  
Meek, lowly, patient, wise above his years,  
Redeemed from earth, with all their hopes and fears,

Not to the vain desires of men he lived,  
Not with delight their high applause received, 340  
But praised the Lord for what his grace had done,  
And simply lived to serve his will alone.

The heavenly principle of faith within,  
The strong divine antipathy to sin,  
The Spirit's law, the meek ingrafted word,  
The vital knowledge of an heart-felt Lord,  
The nature new, th' incorruptible seed,  
Its power throughout his life and actions spread,  
And showed the man regenerate from above,  
By fraudless innocence, and childlike love. 350

For friendship formed by nature and by grace,  
(His heart made up of truth and tenderness)  
Stranger to guile, unknowing to deceive,  
In anger, malice, or revenge to live,  
He lived, himself on others to bestow,  
A ministerial spirit, while here below,  
Belov'd by all the lovers of his Lord,  
By none but Satan's synagogue abhorred.

Nor did their fierce abhorrence always last:  
When on the right the gospel-net he cast, 360  
The powerful charms of soft persuasion tried,  
And showed them their Redeemer's hands and side,  
Love irresistible they could not bear,  
Or stand against the torrent of his prayer,  
By bleeding love their hatred he o'ercame,  
And seized the lawful spoils, in Jesus' name.

Betwixt the mountain and the multitude,  
His life was spent in prayer and doing good:  
To search the sacred leaves, his soul's delight, 370  
And pray them o'er and o'er by day and night,  
To wrestle on for faith, and faith's increase,  
To follow after peace and holiness,  
At Jesus' feet to catch the quick'ning word,  
And into nothing sink before his Lord.

Though long by following multitudes admired,  
No party for himself he e'er desired,  
His one desire to make the Saviour known,  
To magnify the name of Christ alone:

If others strove who should the greatest be,  
No lover of pre-eminence was he, 380  
Nor envied those his Lord vouchsafed to bless,  
But joyed in theirs as in his own success,  
His friends in honour to himself preferred,  
And least of all in his own eyes appeared.

When crowds for counsel or relief applied,  
No surly rustic he, with cruel pride  
To bid the sorrowful intruders wait,  
Or send the suppliants weeping from his gate;  
But ever list'ning to the wretch's call, 390  
Courteous, and mild, and pitiful to all.  
No prophet smooth to men of high estate,  
No servile flatterer of the rich or great,  
Their faults he dared with freedom to reprove,  
The honest freedom of respectful love,  
And sweetly forced their consciences to own  
He sought not theirs, but them, for Jesus' sake alone.

To all he rendered what to all he owed,  
Whose loyalty from true religion flowed:

The man of one consistent character,  
Who feared his God, he *must* his king revere: 400  
Fixed as a rock, for all assaults prepared,  
No sly seducers found him off his guard,  
But missed their aim to fix the factious brand  
On faithful men, the quiet in the land.

Single his eye, transparently sincere  
His upright heart did in his words appear,  
His cheerful heart did in his visage shine;  
A man of true simplicity divine,  
Not always as the serpent wise, yet love  
Preserved him always harmless as the dove: 410  
Or if into mistake through haste he fell,  
He showed what others labour to conceal;  
Convinced, no palliating excuses sought,  
But freely owned his error, or his fault,  
Nor feared the triumph of ungenerous foes,  
Who humbler from his fall, and stronger rose.

When Satan strove the brethren to divide,  
And turn their zeal to—"Who is on my side?"

One moment warmed with controversial fire,  
He felt the spark as suddenly expire, 420  
He felt revived the pure ethereal flame,  
The love for all that bowed to Jesus' name,  
Nor ever more would for opinions fight  
With men whose life, like his, was in the right.  
His soul disdained to serve the selfish ends  
Of zealots, fierce against his bosom-friends,  
(Who urged him with his bosom-friends to part,  
Might sooner tear the fibres from his heart)  
He now the wiles of the accuser knew,  
And cast him down, and his strongholds o'erthrew, 430  
With each partition-wall by men designed  
To put asunder those whom God had joined.

How have we heard his generous zeal exclaim,  
And load with just reproach the bigot's name!  
The men by sameness of opinion tied,  
Who their own party love, and none beside;  
Or like the Romish sect infallible,  
Secure themselves, and send the rest to hell!

Impartial, as unfeigned, his love o'erflowed  
To all, but chiefly to the house of God; 440  
To those who thought his sentiments amiss—  
O that their hearts were half as right as his,  
Within no narrow party-banks confined,  
But open, and enlarged to all mankind!

Lover of all mankind, his life he gave,  
Christ to exalt, and precious souls to save:  
Nor age, nor sickness could abate his zeal,  
To feed the flock, and serve the Master's will.  
Though spent with pain, and toils that never ceased,  
He laboured on, nor asked to be released; 450  
Though daily waiting for the welcome word,  
Longing to be dissolved, and meet his Lord,  
Yet still he strangely lived, by means unknown,  
In death immortal, till his work was done,  
And wished, for Christ his latest breath to spend,  
That life and labour might together end.

What after God he asks can God deny?  
Ripe for the summons, "Get thee up, and die,"

Mature in grace, and ready to depart,  
The Spirit cries all-powerful in his heart, 460  
“O that to day might close my ministry!  
O that I might to day my Saviour see!”

He speaks—and dies! Transported to resign  
His spotless soul into the hands divine!  
He sinks into his loving Lord’s embrace,  
And sees his dear Redeemer face to face!

O what a God is ours! So true, and just  
To all that in his faithful mercies trust!  
Our kind, omnipotent, eternal friend,  
Who freely loved, and loves us to the end! 470  
He now receives his honoured servant up,  
Nor lets us grieve, as heathen without hope,  
Like them who *lose* their friends at death, like them  
Who never knew our Lord and God supreme;  
With whom the spirits of the righteous rest,  
Till all the church are gathered to his breast.

Ev’n now the cordial hope my sorrow cheers,  
And stops the current of these needless tears:

Shall I a momentary loss deplore,  
Lamenting after him that weeps no more? 480  
What though forbid by the Atlantic wave,  
I cannot share my old companion's grave,  
Yet at the trumpet's call my dust shall rise,  
With his fly up to Jesus in the skies,  
And live with him the life that never dies.

O could I first perform my Master's will,  
Faithful in little, and his work fulfil,  
Like him I mourn, a steward wise and good,  
Pursuing him, as he his Lord pursued!  
O had he dropped his mantle in his flight! 490  
O might his spirit on all the prophets 'light!  
But vain the hope of miracles to come;  
There's no Elisha in Elijah's room.

Yet lo! The Lord our God forever lives,  
And daily by his word the dead revives;  
His Spirit is not restrained, but striving still,  
And carrying on his work by whom he will.

He wills us in our partner's steps to tread;  
And called, and quickened by the speaking dead,  
We trace our shining pattern from afar, 500  
His old associates in the glorious war,  
Resolved to use the utmost strength bestowed,  
Like him to spend, and to be spent for God,  
By holy violence seize the crown so nigh,  
Fight the good fight, our threefold foe defy,  
And more than conquerors in the harness die.

Jesus, preserve, till thou our souls receive,  
And let us in thy servant's spirit live!  
Thy Spirit breathed into his faithful breast,  
Be it in every labourer's life expressed, 510  
In all our works, and words, and tempers seen,  
Unbounded charity to God and men,  
The meek humility, the fervent zeal,  
All-patient hope, and faith invincible,  
Faith in its primitive simplicity,  
Faith to walk on, 'till we depart, in thee.

Through thee approaching now the gracious throne,  
Our instant prayer, an echo of thine own,  
We offer up, with all the faithful race,  
For all the foes, and strangers to thy grace, 520  
The fallen church, in whose defence we stand,  
To ward thy judgments from a guilty land,  
Till wrestling on, the praying few prevail,  
And life and mercy turn the hovering scale.  
O that the prayer of faith might now return!  
O that a nation, of thy Spirit born,  
Might rise thy witnesses in this their day,  
And multitudes of priests the truth obey,  
The last alas, in every age to bring  
Back to their hearts their long-neglected King! 530  
Yet now let all believe, at thy command,  
And spread the gospel-faith through every land,  
Till every heart and tongue thy name confess,  
And the whole earth's renewed in righteousness,  
O'erflowed with love, a paradise restored,  
Forever filled with thee, the GLORY OF THE LORD!