



## Foreword

Two of the most remarkable figures of the eighteenth century and both together in this excellent study of a segment of their lives: who could ask for a better read! George Whitefield, regarded as the preaching wonder of his day, and John Newton, one of the leading spiritual guides of the movement that Whitefield had a significant hand in creating, Evangelicalism, are perennially interesting figures. Whitefield's winsomeness, his transparency of heart, and his devotion to Christ are deeply encouraging in our day of glittering image and little substance when Christ's name and message are trashed (though the latter was true in Whitefield's day as well). And Newton, equally winsome, refreshingly catholic in his embrace of all who truly loved the Lord Jesus, and a truly wise man, is also a tonic in our day of division—ironic since we have the social media that theoretically should help overcome such divisions. These lives, intertwined as this study of a portion of those lives reveals, speak across the centuries to our day. History matters in its own right, and it should not be distorted to fit modern agendas (a great tendency in our illiberal day when people take offence at anything but their own views). On the other hand, one reason for the study of the past is to learn wisdom for the present. And these two marvelous characters have much to teach contemporary Christians. To top it off, Dr. Gordon has a wonderful gift for detailed analysis and for displaying the broader historical context and contours, and then pointing out the take-away lessons from the past. So this turns out to be a great read for both the professional historian and the thoughtful Christian.

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I express my gratitude to my wife Margaret for her encouragement and patience, as well as reading my various instalments and providing feedback during the final phase of this book. I dedicate this book to her.





## Abbreviations and Symbols

- \* A single asterisk indicates spelling in the original.
- [ ] Material or comments in square brackets have been added by the editor.
- Aitken, *Newton* Jonathan Aitken, *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace* (Wheaton, 2007).
- An Authentic Narrative* *An Authentic Narrative of Some Remarkable and Interesting Particulars in the Life of\*\*\*\*\* Communicated in a Series of Letters the Rev. Mr. Haweis, Rector of Aldwinckle, Northamptonshire and by Him (at the request of Friends) Now Made Public* (1764). This has been published under various names. Reprinted in Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Life and Spirituality of John Newton* (Vancouver, 1998), 11- 95. The pagination is from this work.
- Bull, *Newton* Bull, Josiah, *Now I See: The Life of John Newton* (Edinburgh reprint, 1998). First published as *John Newton of Olney and St. Mary Woolnoth* (1868).
- Cecil/Rouse, *Newton* Richard Cecil; ed. Marylynn Rouse, *The Life of John Newton* (Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, Ross-shire, 2000).
- Dallimore, *Whitefield*, 1, 2 *George Whitefield*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh; American Edition 1980).
- Dallimore, *Whitefield* Dallimore, Arnold, *George Whitefield: God's Anointed Servant in the Great Revival of the Eighteenth Century* (Westchester, Ill., 1990).





## A GREAT BLESSING TO ME

- DEB D. M. Lewis, ed., *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography, 1730–1860*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1995; Peabody, Mass., reprint, 2004).
- Diary [1] Newton diary (22 Dec. 1751–5 June 1756) in Firestone Library, Princeton University.
- Diary [2] Newton diary (23 Sept. 1756– 31 Dec. 1773), in The Morgan Museum and Library, New York.
- Diary [3] Newton diary (1 Jan. 1773–21 Mar. 1805) in Firestone Library, Princeton University.
- Diary [1767] Newton diary (1 Jan. 1767–31 Dec. 1767) in Lambeth Palace, London.
- Gillies, *Whitefield* John Gillies, *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. George Whitefield* (London, 1772).
- Gillies, *Whitefield Works* John Gillies, *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London, 1771–1772).
- Gordon, *Wise Counsel* Grant Gordon, ed., *Wise Counsel: The Letters of John Newton to John Ryland Jr.* (Edinburgh, 2009).
- Hindmarsh, *Newton* Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition* (Oxford, 1996).
- Johnston, *Whitefield* E. A. Johnston, *George Whitefield: A Definitive Biography*, 2 vols. (Stoke-on-Trent, 2008).
- Newton (Clunie) John Newton, *The Christian Correspondent; or a series of religious letters, written by John Newton ...to Alex. Clunie* (Hull, 1790).
- ODNB Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (1994; also online edition, 2010).
- Philip, *Whitefield* Robert Philip, *The Life and Times of George Whitefield* (1837; Edinburgh reprint, 2009).
- Tyerman, *Whitefield Works* Luke Tyerman, *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield*, 2 vols. (New York, 1877).
- John Newton, *The Works of John Newton*, 6 vols. (1820, Edinburgh reprint, 1985).





## Introduction

This book was to be a study of the relation between John Newton (1725-1807) and the two great eighteenth century evangelists, John Wesley (1703-1791) and George Whitefield (1714-1770). But as work progressed it seemed best to publish two separate volumes so that each evangelist could have the attention he deserved. This volume focuses on the relation between Newton and Whitefield, whom Newton met first. Hence, much that relates to John Wesley will be set aside until the second volume.

Sadly today the great English evangelist George Whitefield is not as well known as he deserves to be. Equally unfortunate is that many are unaware of significant details of John Newton's life; other than that he was a former slave-ship captain who became a minister and who wrote the hymn *Amazing Grace*. Further, it will come as a surprise to almost all to learn that Whitefield had a fifteen-year friendship with Newton.

Whitefield's biographers have largely overlooked their connection. John Gillies, who in 1772 was Whitefield's first biographer, includes an excerpt of the sermon Newton preached upon Whitefield's death, but mentions nothing more.<sup>1</sup> Whitefield's early biographies by

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1. Gillies, *Whitefield*, 341-346.



Tyerman (1877, 78) and Philip (1833) mention that Newton admired Whitefield but give little, if any details.<sup>2</sup> Dallimore, in his monumental two-volume biography that drew fresh attention to Whitefield in 1970s, quotes two brief portions of Newton's sermon at Whitefield's death but devotes only a short paragraph to him.<sup>3</sup> Four more recent major studies of Whitefield (probably because of the focus of their study) do not mention Newton at all.<sup>4</sup>

Many of Newton's biographers mention Whitefield, but most give little detail. Josiah Bull, in 1868, was the first Newton biographer to quote from Newton's manuscript diaries and letters. These were passed down to him from his grandfather (Rev. William Bull) who was Newton's personal friend.<sup>5</sup> Drawing from these documents, he fleetingly mentions Whitefield. Bruce Hindmarsh's landmark book *John Newton and the Evangelical Secession* (1996) rekindled attention on Newton, especially on two of these diaries (now at Princeton University). He nicely, though

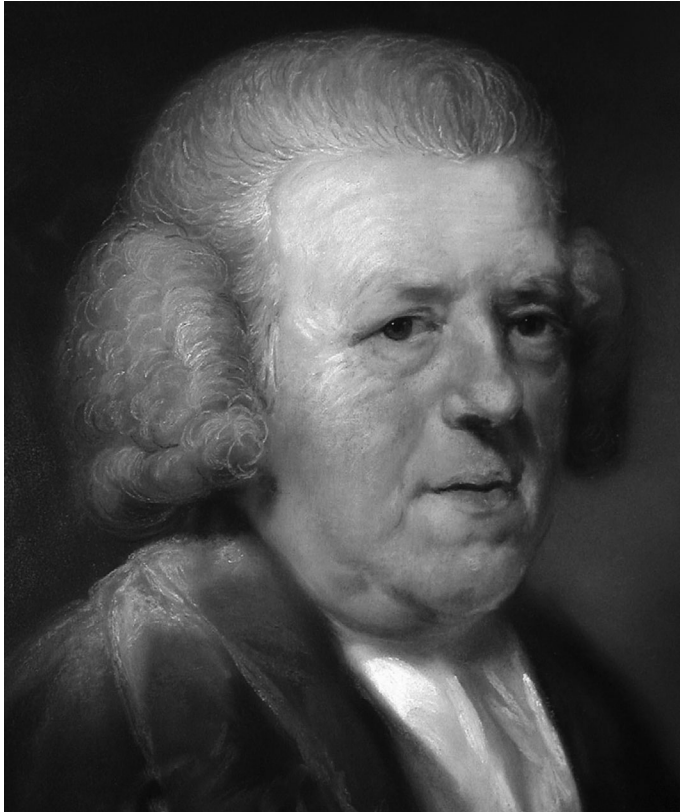
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2. Tyerman, *Whitefield*, 2:624, 625; Philip, *Whitefield*, 511 (who mentions only that Newton preached a sermon in honour of Whitefield).
  3. Dallimore, *Whitefield*, 2:291, 531, 533.
  4. Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven, Conn., 2014); Jerome Dean Mahaffey, *The Accidental Revolutionary: George Whitefield & the Creation of America* (Waco, Tex., 2011), Frank Lambert, 'Pedlar in Divinity': *George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals* (Princeton, N.J., 1994); Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1991).
  5. Bull, *Newton* (1868). In his references to Whitefield, Donald Demaray, *The Innovation of John Newton* (Lewiston, N.Y., 1988) draws from only previously published material, especially Bull.

briefly, summarises Whitefield's influence on Newton.<sup>6</sup> Since then, other Newton biographers have mentioned Whitefield, though references have often been in bits and pieces.<sup>7</sup>

Newton's relationship with Whitefield deserves to be told in detail, drawing from all known resources. In addition to the two manuscript Newton diaries at Princeton University, the following study will include a third manuscript Newton diary and other letters not available to biographers since 1868, and some not known at all. By including a full transcript of key sections of Newton's diaries we are able to let him speak for himself so that we can see and hear Whitefield through Newton's eyes and ears.

We will also include all known correspondence between them. In particular we will take notice of how Whitefield (directly and indirectly) influenced Newton on his quest for greater understanding of his faith and for clearer direction in his life. In the process, this study will provide an overview of both of their lives. First we will review their lives before their paths crossed.

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6. Hindmarsh, *Newton*, 72-74. Bernard Martin, in *An Ancient Mariner: A Biography of John Newton* (London, 1950) drew from this MS two volume diary when it was housed in England, before it was deposited in Princeton University. But because he used no footnotes it is most difficult to trace his sources. Martin acknowledged that his book was "most un-scholarly" (Martin to Professor N. C. Hannay, 26 Jan. 1951). Copy of letter in possession of author.
  7. Marylynn Rouse in her edited and much expanded reprint of Richard Cecil, *Life of John Newton* (1827; reprint, Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, Ross-shire, 2000), see 90- 94 (hereafter Cecil/Rouse, *Newton*); William E. Phipps, *Amazing Grace in John Newton: Slave Ship Captain, Hymn Writer and Abolitionist* (Macon, Ga., 2001); Aitken, *Newton*.



John Newton, aged sixty-three

Pastel drawing by John Russell RA, in 1788, when Newton was not only a popular pastor and revered writer of spiritual letters, but was in the midst of his campaign against the slave trade. This portrait now hangs in the head office of the Church Mission Society in Oxford to honour him as one of the founders of the CMS in 1799.







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## The Lives of John Newton and George Whitefield till mid-1750s

### John Newton

John Newton was born 24 July 1725 in Wapping, East London, to a pious Congregationalist mother who taught him Isaac Watts' hymns and the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. But she died when Newton was six and his father, a sea captain, soon remarried. When John was eleven, he joined his father at sea and over the next six years made five voyages to the Mediterranean. At seventeen, he visited family friends near London where he met and immediately fell in love with thirteen-year-old Mary Catlett. On one of his later excursions to see her, he was press-ganged and forced into royal naval service on the *H.M.S Harwich*. Soon after he deserted but was caught, brought back to the ship and 'kept a while in irons ... publicly stripped,'<sup>1</sup> whipped and demoted. The ship set sail for the East Indies,<sup>2</sup> a journey that was to last five years. On the way the fleet anchored for supplies at Madeira, an Atlantic island off the coast of Portugal. The day before continuing their journey, he was abruptly awakened from his sleep below the deck to learn that his captain was

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1. Richard Cecil, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton*, in *Works*, 1:10.
  2. This refers to the many islands off the SE coast of Asia, including Sumatra, Java, Borneo, New Guinea and the Philippines.

