

# Dear Mr. Whitefield

## SYNOPSIS

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It's 1751 and Selina Hastings, the widowed, wealthy Countess of Huntingdon, is on a mission to reform the religious establishment of England and transform it into an uplifting voice for the destitute and downtrodden. A mutually agreeable alliance with the crafty Earl of Chesterfield and the prickly Viscount Bolingbroke has proven disappointing, netting few positive returns, so the Countess recognizes that more drastic steps are in order. These steps lead her to George Whitefield, an infamous, rabble-rousing preacher, so detested for his condemnation of lords and prelates alike (and, generally speaking, all forms of social respectability) that his face is only safely seen in self-imposed exile in America, where he runs an orphanage. Bereft of money for his orphans, a desperate Whitefield has returned to England, seeking funds from his motley crew of followers, when the Countess corners him through a mutual acquaintance – Welsh preacher Howell Harris, one of the Countess's many religious projects – and promises to supply funds for Whitefield's orphans, if the man himself will preach to the nobles in her popular soirees and attempt to convert them from their wayward views.

At first, Whitefield resists the Countess's alliance, scarred by a lifetime of condemnation and rejection and desperately, if silently, conscious of his own faults and wretchedness – but the Countess, seeing the hidden greatness in Whitefield, refuses to give up on him and eventually convinces him to join with her in partnership. The partnership is an imbalanced one, however, with the rather controlling Countess, in an excess of caution, leaving most of Whitefield's more emotional appeals on the cutting room floor – and that's not the only concern. Shortly before premiering Whitefield in her well-attended soirees, the Countess loses the only political card she has ever played – namely, her friendship with the heir to the English throne, the Prince of Wales, who dies suddenly and unexpectedly.

Abandoned by the opportunistic Chesterfield, as well as by her headstrong son Francis and her Welsh preacher Harris - all of whom, for different reasons, cannot accept any association with the infamous Whitefield - the Countess finds herself isolated. Still, she refuses to throw Whitefield to the wolves - and Whitefield, in turn, amazed by this interminable faith, especially when contrasted against years upon years of misfortune and rejection, finds within himself the better man long hidden from public view.

In time, the day arrives to introduce Whitefield to society... but, with the Countess now persona non grata and Whitefield still detested by the "better sort," will anyone even be around to hear him preach?