

**Whitefield, Franklin and the Business
of Revival - Part II**

Lead: In the middle of the Great Awakening a religious revival in 18th Century Colonial America, two men formed a strange alliance. George Whitefield needed publicity for his revival meetings, Benjamin Franklin was out for profits.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The two men at the opposite ends of the religious spectrum. Franklin was a deist, whose skepticism about matters religious was

widely known. For the publisher of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and *Poor Richard's Almanac*, at best, religion was ethics and promoted hard work and civic morality. Whitefield was an Anglican priest caught up in the religious ferment of the 1700s, an itinerant evangelist whose preaching missions in England and America drew vast crowds to hear his message of the "new birth" in Jesus Christ and the need to go beyond mere agreement with doctrine.

At first reluctant, under the guidance of his press agent William Seward, who made a fortune selling stock on the London market, Whitefield soon embraced the concept of advertising to promote his books

and increase his crowds. He would consider whatever it took to get people to hear the gospel and at that point he had something in common with the skeptic Benjamin Franklin. To the Philadelphia printer, Whitefield was a powerful salesman, holding out the possibility of powerful profits.

Franklin reported Whitefield's arrival in America in November 1739 and kept up a steady drumbeat of glowing stories about the evangelist's tour of the colonies. This helped stimulate sales of Whitefield's journals, books, sermons and pamphlets which by agreement Franklin was publishing at an ever-increasing rate. Also by printing the opinions of Whitefield's opponents,

Franklin kept the pot of religious controversy boiling and, of course, his profits rising.

Essayist Frank Lambert points out that the two, the skeptic and the evangelist used each other. Franklin found that religion could be very profitable. Whitefield, through a strategy of print and preach could get his message to a much wider audience. Franklin made money, Whitefield made converts. The preacher and the printer: an odd alliance that was mutually profitable.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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Resources

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