



A Great Awakening: The Movie

“George Whitefield was the revolution,” Benjamin Franklin tells his grandson during the 1787 Constitutional Convention then being held in Franklin’s hometown of Philadelphia. It was Whitefield — the most important preacher of the Great Awakening — that united the Colonies of the British Empire in the concept that liberty is a gift of God. This is the theme of the movie *A Great Awakening*, a theme that is certainly supported by the historical evidence.

The film opens with the convention degenerating into irreconcilable factions, and the man presiding in the chair, George Washington, clearly despondent of the convention’s success. Washington visits Franklin at his print shop, pleading with him to speak up at the convention and say something to bring the delegates together.

Franklin, suffering from gout and barely able to walk, had been unusually silent during the deliberations, explaining to Alexander Hamilton, “He that speaks much is much mistaken.”

Franklin’s Inspiration

When Franklin’s grandson discovers some articles about Whitefield that Ben had published years earlier along with Whitefield’s journals, Franklin is inspired to deliver his famous motion at the convention the next day, calling for prayer to ask God for help in crafting a Constitution. Despite his earlier flirtation with deism — the belief that God created the universe, but does not otherwise interfere in the affairs of mankind — Franklin now asserts that God does, indeed, intervene in human history.

“I have lived, Sir, a long time and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth — that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings that ‘except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it,’” Franklin tells the convention.

Although not adopted immediately, this motion did lead to daily prayer, asking God to save the convention. This is the conclusion of the movie — a movie that is unabashedly Christian and patriotic without being “cheesy.”

Early Lives

The movie has flashbacks to the early lives of both Franklin and Whitefield, leading up to their meeting in Philadelphia. Franklin is the man who demands evidence, and he cannot believe that Whitefield could actually be heard by 20,000 to 30,000 people at one time. But after he calculates the distance of the crowds listening to the English preacher, he is convinced that it is true.



Sight & Sound/YouTube



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on March 31, 2026

After being recommended for Oxford, Whitefield works his way through by being a “servitor” to most of the elite young men that he had to clean up after. They mock him for his lower-class background, and his “squinty eye,” a handicap of a bad, smoky-looking eye. Whitefield did not go to Oxford to become a preacher — he wanted to be an actor on the English stage. But while there he befriends the Wesley brothers — John and Charles. They are “Methodists,” a sect within the Church of England that the worldly college students mock as “the Holy Club.”

Following his conversion, Whitefield gives up his dream of being a stage actor to be a minister of the Gospel. But his acting training — and his ability to project his voice because of that training — serve him well as a preacher. When the Church of England largely rejects him, he goes to coal mines to preach, places untouched by the haughty ministers within that church so consumed by the ideas of the Enlightenment.

Finally, he makes the first of seven trips to the Colonies, where Franklin solicits his printing business and the two agree to a business relationship. Whitefield declares that it was “Providence” that brought them together, while Franklin jokingly responds, “It was a deal made in a print shop.” Franklin clearly likes Whitefield, but also sees great profit in printing the works of the preacher. Once, when asked what he was going to “make” of Whitefield’s sermon that day in Philadelphia, Franklin joyfully responded, “I intend to make a lot from it.”

A Story Worth Telling, and Worth Watching

The music in the movie is inspiring, and the acting is universally first-class. John Paul Sneed plays Whitefield, while Jonathan Blair is Franklin.

As with all historically based movies, there are dramatizations and guesses as to what was said behind closed doors, but the picture sticks close to the known facts of the times. This is a story that deserves to be told on the big screen, and from the screenwriting to the acting to the directing, it is told well.



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