

LADY HUNTINGDON, RELIGION AND RACE

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Selina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon (1707-1791), was, as one biographer styled her, “Queen of the Methodists.”¹ She was the benefactor and guiding hand behind the Calvinistic wing of eighteenth-century Methodism, who exercised a wide religious influence in England through her “Connexion” of sixty-eight chapels and preaching posts. Stretching her rights under peerage nearly to the breaking point, she employed “domestic chaplains,” like the transatlantic evangelist George Whitefield (1714-1770), and appointed them to public ministry. She was a close acquaintance of the Wesley brothers; initially she was a friend to both, but she subsequently emerged as a confidante to Charles Wesley² and a rival and worthy opponent of John.³

Like the Wesleys and Whitefield, Lady Huntingdon’s piety was both Anglican and evangelical. Her evangelical conversion, while not directly mentioned in her voluminous correspondence, seems to have occurred in late 1739, as is evident from her letters, which begin to bristle with religious activity and interest in late 1739 and early 1740. One of her letters, dated September 14, 1776, indicates that she believed her authentic Christian life had begun with a prayer of utter consecration she had uttered in the autumn of 1739.⁴ Justification by faith alone was her cardinal doctrine, and it figured prominently in her personal renovation as well in her many reformatory ventures.⁵ When she became convinced—wrongly—that John Wesley had veered away from that doctrine, during the Minutes Controversy of the 1770s, she turned against him and attacked him through her preachers.⁶ She was a staunch daughter of the Church of England, who only left that communion when it seemed, in 1780, that her life’s work was about to be swallowed up by the Church. She allowed several preachers in Connexion with

¹ Boyd Stanley Schlenter, *Queen of the Methodists: The Countess of Huntingdon and the Eighteenth-Century Crisis of Faith and Society* (Durham: Durham Academic Press, 1997).

² John R. Tyson, *Assist Me To Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 124-134.

³ Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 146-147.

⁴ Lady Huntingdon to Charles Wesley, 1766, in the Countess of Huntingdon Folio, located at the Methodist Archives, John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester, Manchester, England, where it is item #103. [Here after CHF].

⁵ John R. Tyson, “Lady Huntingdon’s Reformation,” *Church History* 64.4 (December, 1995): 580-593.

⁶ W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of “Love Divine”* (Nashville: Kingswood Press, 1989), “Conditional Election,” and Appendix A: “The Minutes Controversy,” 227-280.

her to be ordained as Dissenters; by 1785 she had tacitly established a new denomination with its own by-laws, hymnal and *Articles of Faith*.⁷

Lady Huntingdon is well remembered as a strong religious leader. Her illustrious chaplain George Whitefield described her as a “Methodist Archbishop.”⁸ By the end of her life she had taken the jibe about her being a *de facto* Methodist bishop and turned it into a joke among her preachers. In a letter dated June 9, 1791, for example, Lady Huntingdon reported that “Dear Mr. Jones must indulge this bishop with his presence.”⁹ She was also a benefactor to the poor. Her friend, the Dissenting minister and hymn writer, Phillip Dodderidge, described her as “. . . quite a mother to the poor, she visits them and prays with them in their sickness, and they leave their children to her for a legacy when they die and she takes care of them.”¹⁰ Selina Hastings knew well the plight of poor people because she visited them in their affliction and offered them the gospel as well as making provision for their care. Sunday seemed to have been her day of visitation; in one of her letters to Charles Wesley (dated July 13, 1742), she reports: “Spent on Sunday some hours with poor women. Found them very simple and joyful at the glad tidings of the gospel. We all rejoiced and gave much glory to God.”¹¹ Hence, her earliest biographer and relative, Aaron Seymour, described her as “Lady Bountiful” who was famous for her many philanthropic works.¹²

To ask about Selina Hastings’ views on race and racial prejudice is anachronistic, to ask a contemporary question of a non-contemporary person. Yet there is some value in asking these questions of Lady Huntingdon, both because of the scope of influence of her various ministries, and because of the way in which she struggled with the prejudice against female leadership in the church. Unfortunately Lady Huntingdon did not address herself directly to the question of race; hence, her views on this topic must be deduced from her actions.

⁷ John R. Tyson, with Boyd S. Schlenker, eds. “Lady Huntingdon’s Connexion,” *In the Midst of Early Methodism: Lady Huntingdon and Her Correspondence* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 273-293.

⁸ George Whitefield, *The Works of George Whitefield, M.A.* (London: 1771: 2:380-81).

⁹ Lady Huntingdon to Thomas Charles (June 9, 1791), manuscript C-15, located at John Wesley’s Chapel, Wesley’s New Room, Bristol. It was addressed to “Mr. Charles” at Bath, from Spa Fields Chapel.

¹⁰ Dodderidge’s letter to his wife (July 30, 1748), published in J. D. Humphreys, ed. *Correspondence of Philip Dodderidge*, vol. 5, 72.

¹¹ Lady Huntingdon to Charles Wesley (July 13, 1742), in the Countess of Huntingdon Folio, located at the Methodist Archives, John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester, Manchester, England, where it is item #85 [Hereafter CHF].

¹² Aaron Seymour, *The Life and Times of Selina Countess of Huntingdon* 2 Vol. (London: 1844), I:10. The term “Lady Bountiful” is based on a character from Farquhar’s *Beau Stratagem* (1707). It was commonly used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to describe the philanthropy of aristocratic women. The pattern of paternalism and social deference which Jessica Gerard observed in “Lady Bountiful: Women of the Landed Classes and Rural Philanthropy,” *Victorian Studies*, 30 (1987): 185-209, does not seem to have been as central to Lady Huntingdon’s philanthropy of almost a century earlier.

Native American People

Among her more grandiose schemes for ministry was a proposed missionary work among Native American people in which she hoped “to introduce the benevolent religion of our blessed Redeemer amongst Heathen and Savage Nations, to lead them from violence and barbarity, to the duties of humanity and the acts of a civil life; to provide a refuge for pious, industrious people who wish to withdraw themselves from scenes of violence and irreligion, to a country where they may spend their days in the pursuits of honest industry, and in the practice of religion and virtue.”¹³ Behind the pious paternalism of eighteenth-century evangelicalism one can discern Lady Huntingdon’s genuine concern for establishing a safe home for Native people in the western lands. President George Washington must have heard this as a genuine concern as well, because he carried on a correspondence of at least three letters with Selina Hastings about the project, even though he certainly knew the plan, as she had envisioned it from England, was not feasible given the actual situation in America.¹⁴ Washington’s last letter to her, dated June 30, 1785, indicates that he had placed the request before “Mr. Henry the governor of this state” [Virginia], who had laid it before Congress “in a clear and ample manner, but his private opinion of the matter was that under the pressure of debt to which this fund was to be appropriated, and the diversity of sentiments respecting the mode of raising it, that no discrimination would, or indeed could be made in favor of emigrants of any description whatever.”¹⁵ While her plan for a major missionary work among Native Americans did not come to fruition, the concern remained close to her heart. In one of her last letters, written eight days before her death, Lady Huntingdon reported, “I am weak and low and enmeshed in the business of preparing positions for the South Seas and Indian Nations in America. I wish to die at work in my dear and Blessed Master’s business.”¹⁶

The Georgia Orphan House and Slavery

In 1738, George Whitefield responded to John Wesley’s plea for ministerial assistance in Savannah, Georgia, and found so many orphans and poor people’s children that he became determined to establish an orphanage, called Bethesda, about twelve miles west of town. As Frank Lambert points out: “Bethesda was more than an act of faith. The orphanage plunged Whitefield deep into the Atlantic commercial world, requiring him to de-

¹³ Letter to George Washington (March 20, 1784), Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., George Washington Papers, microfilm roll No. 94 [Hereafter Washington Papers].

¹⁴ Cheshunt Manuscript Collection, Cheshunt College Foundation Archives at Westminster College, Cambridge, U.K. [Hereafter Cheshunt Ms.]. Cheshunt Manuscript #A 4/5/16., Cheshunt Ms. #A 3/12/33A, Washington Papers, No. 94, Cheshunt Ms. #A 4/4/22, Cheshunt Ms. #A 3/12/31.

¹⁵ Cheshunt Ms. #A 3/12/31.

¹⁶ Lady Huntingdon to Thomas Charles (June 9, 1791), manuscript C-15, located at John Wesley’s Chapel, Wesley’s New Room, Bristol. It was addressed to “Mr. Charles” at Bath, from Spa Fields Chapel.

velop many of the entrepreneurial skills demanded of merchants engaged in far-flung trade.”¹⁷ The commercial ventures which Whitefield used to provide economic support for the orphanage soon enmeshed him in the vile business of chattel slavery.

During his first missionary journey to America Whitefield had seen the evils of slavery first hand, and in 1739 he published an open letter “to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia & South Carolina [*sic*]” which lamented its abuses. By 1751, however, Whitefield had changed his mind about slavery and was operating a plantation in South Carolina and employing slave labor to support his philanthropic work at Bethesda. Since slavery was illegal in the colony of Georgia at that time, he had also begun to lobby the Georgia trustees for a reversal of that decision.¹⁸ These actions drew stinging rebukes from some of Whitefield’s evangelical friends (notably the Wesleys), and he published an open letter to John Wesley in support of slavery in 1751.

Whitefield’s second “open letter” marshals a combination of biblical examples and economic arguments in support of slavery. He even mused that some of Jesus’ apostles had been involved in slavery: “As for the lawfulness of keeping slaves, I have no doubt, since I hear that some that were bought with Abraham’s money and some that were born in his house. I also cannot help thinking that some of those servants mentioned by the apostles in their epistles were, or had been slaves.”¹⁹ The grand itinerant was also of the opinion that Georgia would never be an economic success without slavery: “. . . [I]t is plain to a demonstration that hot countries cannot be cultivated without Negroes. What a flourishing county might Georgia have been had the use of them been permitted years ago!”²⁰ Whitefield intended to use slave labor on his Georgia property both for domestic help and as field hands to raise cash crops (like rice and lumber) for sale in the Caribbean. As Frank Lambert put it, “. . . slave labor represented for Whitefield a market solution, not a moral dilemma.”²¹

What had changed Whitefield’s mind about slavery? This is a difficult question to answer, but there seems to be a combination of several influences that moved him in that direction. Among these were the pressing economic conditions at Bethesda, which was chronically short of funds, and Whitefield’s belief that he could improve the conditions of his slaves by introducing them to Christianity and treating them well. Two other less obvious reasons are also suggested. Anthony Benezet (1713-1784), a Philadelphia Quaker and ardent abolitionist, tried to lobby Whitefield towards an abolitionist position.

¹⁷ Frank Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994), 58.

¹⁸ Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, 204-208, “Whitefield’s paradox of slavery and freedom.”

¹⁹ Irv Brendlinger, “Wesley, Whitefield, a Philadelphia Quaker, and Slavery,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36.2 (Fall, 2001): 167. The full text of Whitefield’s letter is available in Brendlinger’s article and in David Thompason, *John Wesley as a Social Reformer* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1898): 43-45.

²⁰ Brendlinger, “Wesley, Whitefield, a Philadelphia Quaker, and Slavery,” 167.

²¹ Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, 207.

When that failed, Bezenet's assessment was that ". . . through continued exposure to slavery, Whitefield, like so many others, became accustomed to and accepting of what had previously been abhorrent to him. He became attenuated to this moral evil."²² Pointing to an incident, in January, 1740, when Whitefield stumbled upon a clandestine slave meeting in South Carolina, Stephen Stein suggests that fear of slave violence and rebellion was also a factor in changing his views on slavery.²³ Stein reported: "In both South Carolina and Bermuda fear was a motive of Whitefield's actions. He preached to the blacks and prayed with them, but he avoided them in the night and refused to nurture their hopes for freedom in this world. Carefully, he formulated a homiletical method which enabled him to steer between the Scyllia of condoning brutality by the masters and the Charbydis of inciting rebellion by the blacks."²⁴

When George Whitefield died on September 30, 1770 (in Newburyport, Massachusetts), his American holdings at Bethesda and in South Carolina reverted to Lady Huntingdon, through his will.²⁵ Among the properties she inherited from her illustrious chaplain were more than fifty slaves. She also seems to have inherited Whitefield's ambiguous attitude towards slavery. During her tenure as chief operating officer of Bethesda (while remaining in England), Selina spent several thousand pounds of her own money; ". . . during eight years never had the return of a shilling." Much of that money had been spent on purchasing more slaves to work the fields, in hopes of making Bethesda prosper. During her tenure the number of slaves held increased to nearly 125. One might expect, at least, that the Queen of the Methodists would be (like Whitefield) concerned about the spiritual welfare of her slaves, but as Boyd Schlenker points out, "Lady Huntingdon's concern even for the salvation of slaves was strangely muted, certainly when compared with all her other missionary projects."²⁶ She did send a converted African, David Margate, as a minister to her slaves. But that plan back-fired when Margate combined philandering and veiled calls for social liberation with his gospel work.²⁷

In the absence of any direct discussion of slavery from Lady Huntingdon, her biographers are forced to surmise her point of view from her actions.

²² Bendlinger, "Whitefield, Wesley and a Philadelphia Quaker on Slavery," 170.

²³ Stephen J. Stein, "George Whitefield on Slavery: Some New Evidence," *Church History* 42.2 (June, 1973): 246-248.

²⁴ Stein, "George Whitefield on Slavery," 248.

²⁵ His will stipulated: "In respect to my outward American concerns which I have engaged simply and solely for His great name sake, I leave that building commonly called the Orphan-House at Bethesda in the Province of Georgia together with all the other buildings lately erected thereon, and likewise all other buildings, lands, Negroes, books, furniture, and every other thing whatsoever which I now stand possess'd of in the Province of Georgia aforesaid to that Elect Lady, that Mother in Israel, that Mirror of true and undefiled religion, the right Honourable Selina Countess Dowager of Huntingdon . . ." John Rylands University Library, Manchester, U.K. Rylands Ms. PLP, 113.1.23.

²⁶ Schlenker, *Queen of the Methodists*, 91.

²⁷ William Piercy to Lady Huntingdon, n.d. Cheshunt Ms. #A4/2/16.

Edwin Welch, for example, reports: “Her attitude toward slavery was similar to that of other evangelicals—since the future life was more important than the present one, it was better to keep slaves in a comfortable and Christian setting than to release them into a harsh pagan world. Unfortunately this did not take account of the managers of Bethesda, who were accused of selling them or depriving them of clothes and food.”²⁸ This was more than “unfortunate” for her slaves, since William Piercy, the on-site manager of Bethesda, was accused of whipping them “for mere trifles almost every day.”²⁹ Faith Cook reports: “In common with Whitefield and many others of her generation the Countess’s attitude toward slavery was ambivalent. Although she later modified her view as the endeavours of men like Wilberforce heightened the issue in the national conscience, in the early 1770s, she felt that if the slaves had Christian owners their lot would be improved and they would have opportunities to hear the gospel.”³⁰ The first half of Cook’s comment is well phrased; Lady Huntingdon’s views on slavery were ambivalent at best. But the second half of her comment, regarding any modification of her views, is made without any evidence in the primary sources.

One might wonder how much of Whitefield and the Elect Lady’s posture on slavery was influenced by their staunch Calvinism: those who are predestined by God to their earthly stations and eternal futures require significantly less liberty than those who must (like the Wesleys’s Arminians) choose their life’s direction—with eternal consequences at stake. It is clear that Lady Huntingdon took personal interest in at least one of her American slaves, since she gave direct orders to have a young woman purchased and named “Selina”—after herself.³¹ But even that step smacks more of paternalism than genuine concern since no particular care seems to have been given to the black Selina’s education or Christianization.

Lady Huntingdon’s management of Bethesda and tacit endorsement of slavery soon drew a written response from Anthony Benezet (mentioned above). He told her that while the “poor Negroes” will be rewarded by God for their humble and Christian acceptance of their sufferings, their oppressors await a different fate:

... with the poor Negroes the evil of their sufferings will end with this life, and the Merciful Father of the Family of Mankind will look on their deep affliction, and in his boundless mercy, requite them good for their sufferings; and may favour them with the greatest blessings, *humble and contrite hearts*; but with respect to their lordly oppressors, this horrible abuse of their fellowman, will extend its baneful influence even in the regions of eternity; for such is the deprivation and hardness of heart and mind produced by it, that for many, very many of the subjects, it may be feared, Christ will have died in vain.

²⁸ Edwin Welch, *Spiritual Pilgrim: A Reassessment of the Life of the Countess of Huntingdon* (Cardiff: U Wales P, 1995), 145.

²⁹ Schlenther, *Queen of the Methodists*, 91.

³⁰ Faith Cook, *Selina Countess of Huntingdon: Her Pivotal Role in the 18th Century Evangelical Awakening* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 316–317.

³¹ Lady Huntingdon to John Cosson (January 28, 1776). Cheshunt Ms. A4/2/36.

Acknowledging that Selina Hastings now succeeded George Whitefield in the supervision of Bethesda and its accompanying works, Benezet wrote, urging her to put an end to involvement in the slave trade: "I am persuaded if thou art rightly informed of the situation of the slaves in that as well as other South Colonies, thou wilt be engaged to give such direction with respect to their managers there, making any further purchase of slaves, as well as their treatment of those already under their care, as will be agreeable to best wisdom, and thou wilt be willing to grant thy assistance in furthering the good designs of putting an end to this mighty destroyer, *'The Slave Trade.'*"³²

Anthony Benezet was well aware of the arguments that Whitefield and others used to support slavery on moral and humanitarian grounds, but he would hear none of it:

The pretended advantage which is said may arise to the miserable Africans, from their being made acquainted with Christianity, is sometimes made use of as a plea and palliation of their slavery; but not to mention how this and the foregoing please in the mouths of Christians, are only vain pretenses, that the true motive of giving the least encouragement to the trade is a selfish avarice. Let those who make use of the last plea but consider the irreligious (may I not say profane) spirit which rules amongst every people and in all countries, where the trade and practice prevails; this added to the unnatural and cruel slavery, the contempt and derision, with which the Negroes find themselves treated, is much more likely to beget in them the utmost scorn and abhorrence of the very name of Christianity, than cause them to seek an acquaintance with its nature.

Benezet seemed to be speaking of George Whitefield, in his letter to Lady Huntingdon, when he wrote: "There is nothing has made me more sensible of the weakness, the partiality, and deep corruption of the human heart, than to find such as might be truly esteemed good men, who though at first view had expressed their dislike of slavery, yet when in countries and stations where they made gain, and enjoyed the outward comfort by the labour of the Negroes, have palliated the practice, even in a degree are become advocates in its favour."³³

Lady Huntingdon's reply to Anthony Benezet's letter of May 20, 1774, is not extant, but it is clear that she did reply and in a fashion that gave him enough hope to write her again. In Benezet's second letter, dated March 10, 1775, he quoted several salient lines from Lady Huntingdon's reply, which indicated she would be taking no action regarding the institution of slavery. Instead she would let the matter up to God: "God alone, by His Almighty power, who can and will in His own time bring outward, as well as spiritual deliverance to his afflicted and oppressed creatures." Benezet responded by reminding Lady Selina that "it pleased God in all ages to stir up a holy jealousy in the heart of men to labour both by word and deed for the deliverance of their fellow men: from outward as well as spiritual oppression to the subtle workings of selfish principle, so apt imperceptibly to influence the human heart, in things that flatter our humour and interest." Benezet went

³² Anthony Benezet to Lady Huntingdon (May 20, 1774), Cheshunt Ms. #A3/1/33.

³³ Benezet to Huntingdon (May 20, 1774).

on to chide her late chaplain for his support of slavery on economic and biblical grounds. As to Whitefield's comment that he was "highly favoured" in purchasing a large number of slaves, Benezet observed that the slave trade will continue as long as "those who have been the particular object of the notice of the Nation, as promulgators of the gospel, reason in this manner, instead of bearing any distress." He hoped that "we may in every respect stand quite clear from giving in ring their Christian testimony against this outrageous violation of the rights of Mankind To be silent, where we apprehend it a duty to speak our sense of that which causes us to go mourning in your way, would be criminal."³⁴ After criticizing Lady Huntingdon's beloved Whitefield, Benezet added further irritation to his reply by enclosing a copy of John Wesley's published diatribe against that peculiar institution, *Thoughts on Slavery*.³⁵ By praising Wesley and criticizing Whitefield, in the midst of the animosity of the "Minutes Controversy," Benezet unwittingly compromised the impact of this letter upon Lady Huntingdon's views on slavery at the Georgia Orphan-House, and virtually guaranteed that she would not reply to his appeal.

In June of 1773, Bethesda burned to the ground "by an awful Providence, of which I [James Habersham] have been an eye witness Bethesda College, with the very neat Chapel adjoining it, was totally burnt down, and very little of the furniture, books and other effects in it saved." James Habersham attributed the fire to lightning, but so rife were relations between Bethesda and its workers that arson has always been suspected. A new wing which was still under construction was saved, and Lady Huntingdon was determined to rebuild the rest, but the economic and political conditions swirling around the American War for Independence intervened and made that venture impossible. By July 28 of the same year she wrote to Habersham:

The account is now that the House is almost burnt down. I shall not rebuild it most certainly, and therefore I think as the amazing draft of money that I am called upon for must be for N_____ [*sic*] and with these the estate may be improving, which when sufficient to maintain the whole I may proceed further in my intended plan. As the house is in ashes, the stay of my family there can have no meaning and till I can rebuild I desire to have all those who are not there engaged in the services of the Gospel to return home.³⁶

While Lady Huntingdon had intended to visit Bethesda in person, the fire, her vacillating health and the American Revolution intervened and made that plan untenable. With the interruption of the Revolutionary War, Lady Huntingdon did not receive letters from her Georgia mission for several years. In late 1784 or early 1785 she wrote:

The uselessness of the Orphan House in Georgia in its present situation renders it incapable of answering the late Mr. Whitefield's intentions for it, who by his will has

³⁴ Anthony Benezet to Lady Huntingdon (March 10, 1775), Cheshunt Ms. #A4/7/9.

³⁵ Cf. Thomas Jackson, ed. *The Works of John Wesley, A.M.*, 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan Conference, 1872), XI, 59-79, for the full text of Wesley's treatise.

³⁶ James Habersham to Lady Huntingdon (June 3, 1773), Cheshunt Ms. #A 3/3/3.

given me a right to dispose of it. With an intention of answering his best purposes, I mean to dispose of it and establish his meaning the most effectually by serving the Indian Nations in having a College erected in the neighborhood, on sufficient quantities of land being granted me for that purpose in whatever State that shall be.³⁷

After trying to in vain rebuild the buildings and to re-establish her charter for the Bethesda College and Orphan House, she eventually donated her American estates to the State of Georgia. This step, which formed the basis of the foundation for the University of Georgia, took Lady Huntingdon out of the business of slavery.

Lady Huntingdon and Particular African Americans

Lady Huntingdon showed particular interest in the work of two African Americans, and this at a time when the opinion of the age, even as voiced by progressive philosophers like David Hume, stressed the inferiority of Blacks. In 1748, Hume opined: "I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the Whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even any individual, eminent either in action or speculation."³⁸ Going against the tide of current opinion, even learned opinion, Lady Huntingdon treated particular African Americans with respect and supported their work.

Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784) was one African American in whom Lady Huntingdon took particular interest. In 1761, she arrived in America as a seven-year-old slave who spoke no English. She was purchased by the Wheatley family of Boston as a domestic servant and given the name Phillis after the ship that brought her to the new world. By 1765, Wheatley had written her first poem, and in 1767 she published a poem in the *Newport Mercury*.

A poetic eulogy for George Whitefield, written in 1770 would bring Ms. Wheatley to international attention. She brought the poem to Lady Huntingdon's attention through a letter of October 25, 1770, in which Wheatley wrote:

the occasion of my addressing your Ladyship will I hope, apologize for my boldness in doing it. It is to enclose a few lines on the decease of your worthy chaplain, the Rev. Mr. Whitefield, in the loss of whom I sincerely sympathize with your Ladyship: but your great loss which is his greater gain, will, I hope, meet with infinite reparation, in the presence of God, the Divine Benefactor, whose image you bear by filial imitation.³⁹

A reference to Selina Hastings appeared in the fourth stanza of the poem: "Great Countess, we Americans revere/ Thy name and mingle in thy grief sincere;/ New England deeply feels, the Orphans mourn,/ Their more

³⁷ Lady Huntingdon, to anon. n.d., Cheshunt Ms. #A 3/12/34, a draft copy of a formal letter.

³⁸ Thomas Hill Green, and Thomas Hodge Grose, eds. *David Hume, The Philosophical Works*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam: Scientia Verlag Aalen), vol. 3, p. 252, a footnote to "Of National Character" (1748).

³⁹ Cheshunt Ms. #A 3/1/28, it was addressed from Boston, Massachusetts.

than father will no more return.”⁴⁰ The poem resulted in the Countess of Huntingdon becoming Wheatley’s patron and benefactor in the publication of her works. A letter of June 27, 1773, indicates that Phillis Wheatley had arrived in London and was “disappointed by your [Lady Huntingdon’s] absence, of the honour of waiting upon your Ladyship.” Wheatley’s *Poems on Various Subjects Religious and Moral* was published in London that year, and Lady Huntingdon had suggested that an etching of the author be included in the frontispiece of the book. That the work was published through Huntingdon’s generosity and encouragement was made clear by Wheatley’s closing paragraph:

I conclude with thanking your Ladyship for permitting the Dedication of my Poems to you; and am not insensible, that under the patronage of your Ladyship, not more eminent in the station of life than in your exemplary piety and virtue, my feeble efforts will be shielded from the severe trials of un pitying criticism and being encouraged by your Ladyship’s indulgence, I am more freely resign to the world these juvenile productions, and am Madam with greatest humility, your dutiful humble servant.⁴¹

Arriving in the rainy season, when the roads were not well passable and while Lady Huntingdon was in residence at her college for preachers, Trevecca, in South Wales, caused Wheatley to miss an opportunity to meet Huntingdon. In a letter that is not extant, Lady Huntindon invited Ms. Wheatley to join her at Trevecca, but in a letter dated July 17, 1773. Wheatley declined the invitation, saying:

I received with the mixed sensations of pleasure and disappointment your Ladyship’s message favoured by Mr. Rien acquainting us with your pleasure that my master and I should wait upon you in S. Wales, delighted with your Ladyship’s condescension to them so unworthy of it. Am sorry to acquaint your Ladyship that the Ship is certainly to sail next Thursday on which I must return to America. I long to see my friends there, [I am] extremely reluctant to go without having first seen your Ladyship.

The letter concludes with an ardent thanks for Lady Huntingdon’s patronage and friendship: “It gives me very great satisfaction to hear of an African so worthy, to be honoured with your Ladyship’s approbation and friendship in that fund mental felicity which you cannot but be possessed of, in the consideration of your exceeding great reward.”⁴² With the publication of this book of poetry Phillis Wheatley “almost immediately, became the most famous African on the face of the earth, the Oprah Winfrey of her time.”⁴³ Among the revisions of the second version of this poem was an omission of any reference to “the great Countess” in the body of the poem, suggesting perhaps that Wheatley felt spurned by not being able to meet with the Countess when she visited England.

⁴⁰ Cheshunt Ms. #A 3/1/29.

⁴¹ Cheshunt Ms. #A 3/5/4. The envelope is addressed “To the Right Honourable, The Countess of Huntingdon, at Talgarth, South Wales.”

⁴² Cheshunt Ms. #A 3/5/5.

⁴³ Henry Louis Gates, *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003), 33.

John Marrant (1755-1791) was a second notable African American for whom Lady Huntingdon served as a patron and advocate. Marrant was born into a free Black family in New York. Following the death of his father and the disintegration of his nuclear family, he was raised in Charleston, South Carolina. Converted as a young man under the preaching ministry of George Whitefield, Marant spent two years living with Native Americans and became an evangelist among the Cherokees. After serving seven years of impressment in the British Navy, John Marrant returned to ministerial service through ordination in the Countess of Huntingdon's connection. After Marrant traveled to England for ordination, his journal reports: "On the 15th day of May, 1785, I was ordained and put into the ministry of the word of God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ. In that day, I was full of the Spirit of God, and felt a willingness to tell the world the love of God in Christ; and preached many sermons in Bath and Bristol, which God was pleased to accompany with his divine power . . ." ⁴⁴ A subsequent journal entry indicates that had embarked upon a mission to the Black loyalist community of Nova Scotia, Canada: "On the 18th day of August, 1785, I left London for America. In the connections of the Right Honorable the Countess of Huntingdon, to go into a strange country; but being filled with zeal and the love of God, and her Ladyship's promises of assistance when there." ⁴⁵ At least one letter from Marrant to Lady Huntingdon is extant. Dated November 24, 1788, it indicates that she continued to be his supporter throughout his mission, and the letter requests payment of a £10 Sterling bill for his care and supplies during a recent illness. The letter concludes with a wish to visit the Connection in Liverpool, United Kingdom: "I hope to go to Liverpool in a few days, to see the people of God, whom I long to see, that the Lord Jesus Christ will be pleased to enable me to go on this journey to the glory of God, and to sing his name in this world, so that I might die in the works of the Gospel. If your Ladyship will be so kind to accept this bill, it will be the means of setting your unworthy servant on his way to the glorious works of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." ⁴⁶

Conclusion

Phillis Wheatley was the first published African American poet, and she was published through the support and patronage of Lady Huntingdon. John Marrant was the first formally ordained Black preacher in North America; he was ordained and his ministry was maintained through the support and friendship of Lady Huntingdon. Lady Huntingdon's religious commitments and sensibilities caused her to manifest a missional support of individual African Americans. In this she went against the tide of popular opinion,

⁴⁴ *Journal of John Marrant*, ms. p. 3. The journal can be accessed at the Black Loyalist's Web Page. <http://blackloyalist.com/canadiandigitalcollection/documents>.

⁴⁵ *Journal of John Marrant*, ms. p. 4.

⁴⁶ The letter is addressed to Lady Huntingdon from "North America." It is published on "The Black Loyalists' Webpage:" http://collections.lc.gc.ca/blackloyalists/documents/letters/marrant_to_huntingdon.htm.

which, as voiced by the eminent philosopher David Hume, saw Blacks as being naturally inferior to Whites. Working from the comfort of her culturally-acceptable role as a philanthropic “Lady Bountiful,” Selina Hastings’ Christian concern caused her to stretch that role to include African and Native American people; yet her religious convictions did not provide her with abolitionist inclinations when it came to the institution of slavery. It seemed that she was able to see individual African Americans as her Christian “neighbors,” worthy of respect and patronage. Yet she did not see slavery as the “inexorable sum of all human villainies” and an example of systemic sin and social injustice as John Wesley did.⁴⁷ In this later failing it might be said that Lady Huntingdon was a product of her social standing and her times, and did no worse than many other landed aristocrats of that age. But it also must be said that when it came to her views on the slavery issue, she fell in line with the *status quo* and the regressive views of her illustrious chaplain, George Whitefield, and did not do as well as her more prophetic religious contemporaries like John Wesley and Anthony Benezet.

⁴⁷ Thomas Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley A.M.*, 14 vols. (London: The Wesleyan Conference, 1872), III:453.