

Sacred Satire

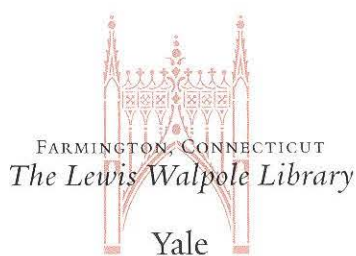
Lampooning Religious Belief in Eighteenth-Century Britain

The Lewis Walpole Library



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Eighteenth-Century Britain



September 2011



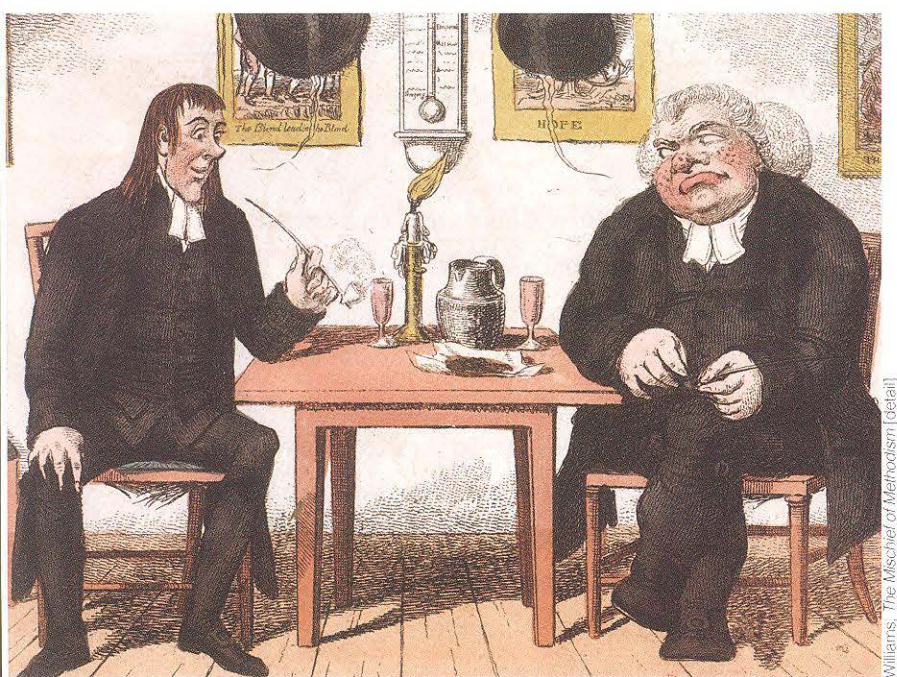
Sacred Satire

Lamprooning Religious Belief in
Eighteenth-Century Britain

Religious beliefs and practices provided ample subject matter for the irreverent printmakers producing graphic satire in eighteenth-century Britain. While clerical satire is an ancient mode, eighteenth-century British artists seized on it with fresh vigor. Satirists appropriated centuries-old themes such as corruption, hypocrisy, and greed, but updated them with contemporary concerns about the role of religion in the age of enlightenment. The visual rhetoric of these prints illustrates some of the ways in which eighteenth-century Britons were renegotiating their relationship to religious practice and belief.

The prints in this exhibition reflect a tension between a vision of religion as part of traditional life and the emergence of modern Christianity as a collection of new movements, practices, and ideas about belief. Was religion primarily about connections to the past and thus at odds with modernity, or was it flourishing within modern culture? These questions had no simple answer. As the Anglican church became more closely associated with liturgical orthodoxy and a commitment to national stability, other denominational and para-denominational efforts focused on populist practices such as field preaching, contemporary or “human” hymn singing, and lay preaching, all of which encouraged involvement across classes, genders, and national borders. Forms of social activism such as missionary societies, the Magdalen House for penitent prostitutes, orphan hospitals, and charity schools also raised questions about what kind of role religion would play in the modern public sphere. The prints *Old*

Orthodox and *The Mischief of Methodism* illustrate the tension between religious traditions and religious innovation in eighteenth-century Britain. The first refers ironically to a young evangelical clergyman as “old” orthodoxy, while the second contrasts the bright-eyed young Methodist with a rather unimpressive example of orthodox Anglicanism.



Some of the satiric prints on view here reflect the altered relationship of local churches to everyday life that resulted from changes in the British economy. Over the course of the century, the parish system began to break down as the collective forces of banking, colonialism, and industrialization gave shape and

substance to modern capitalism. Wage labor, the geographic mobility afforded to workers by new shipping routes, roadways, and turnpikes, and the tremendous growth of London meant that people were no longer as tied to their villages or counties of origin — and thus to the forms of community and caregiving supported by the Anglican church through tithes. Conversely, parishes, particularly in more urban areas, were not always able to determine who their constituents were. This picture was further complicated by public fundraising campaigns, like the one for George Whitefield's orphan house in Georgia, which funneled money to projects that donors might never see. With the tie between parish and local population broken, the old tithe and living systems generated some cynicism and resentment, dispositions reflected in *The Pluralist*, *The Wet Parsons and Dry Quaker*, as well as the various iterations of *The Tythe Pig*.

Perhaps the most common (and arguably the oldest) form of clerical satire targets the sexual proclivities of those in religious orders. *Wolves in Sheeps Clothing*, for instance, shows a group of clergymen assembled for an evening revel with buxom women on their laps. The relationship of sexual to religious enthusiasm became a popular theme for eighteenth-century satirists, who made jokes about inward movements of the spirit as sexual desire. As the Quakers and Catholics had been before them, Methodists became easy marks for satirists using this strategy. The language of being inwardly moved and their "Love Feasts," evening prayer meetings which bore a temptingly suggestive

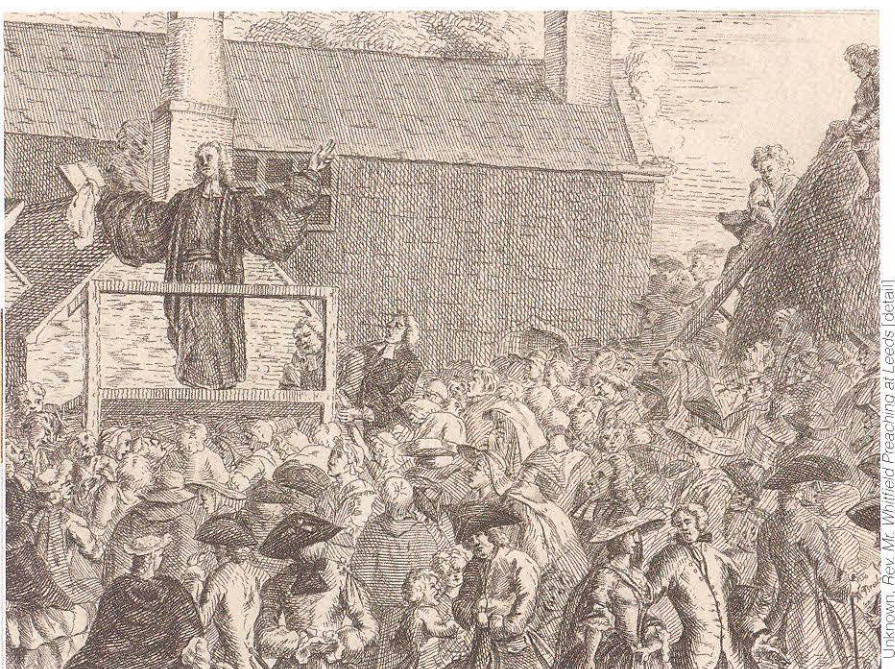
name, were common themes. Charismatic preachers – including George Whitefield, John Wesley, Charles Wesley, and Martin Madan – and the large numbers of women who participated in the movement made the attractions of Methodism seem suspiciously erotic to outsiders. Their successes provide a test case for the overlapping divine and secular connotations of the term charisma, as either holy gift or personal attractiveness, a theme illustrated in *Enthusiasm Display'd*, in which a young Whitefield preens amid a group of adoring female figures. The substantive philosophical question that lies beneath the bawdy jokes of satirists explores how sexuality, as an expression of authentic self, begins to occupy the territory previously accorded to the soul in a more religiously unified past.

The inward turn of evangelical “heart religion” proclaimed a return to what John Wesley called “primitive religion,” but the movement depended, paradoxically, on the technologies of modern mass media. Even the group’s name, “Methodist,” was the result of Wesley using print to claim the term, which had been a taunt at Oxford, as the name for the nationally identifiable evangelical movement with pieces like “The Character of a Methodist” (1742) and “Advice to the People Called Methodists” (1745). Finally, devotional writing, sermons, hymnbooks, and religious tracts constituted the largest share of the British print marketplace. Modern religion was, in this sense, a media event, an irony that pervades images like *The Revd Mr. Whitefield Preaching at Leeds* and *Methodism or the*



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Religious Humbugg, which juxtapose the inward responses of individuals with the public sphere in which they express themselves. The further complication, however, is that these prints, even when produced for the purpose of mocking religious enthusiasm or nonconformity, also made the transcendental ecstasies of these ministers and their flocks visible. These images brought religious belief into the domain of observable phenomena and thus became part of the record of religious feelings, responses, and practices in the age of reason.

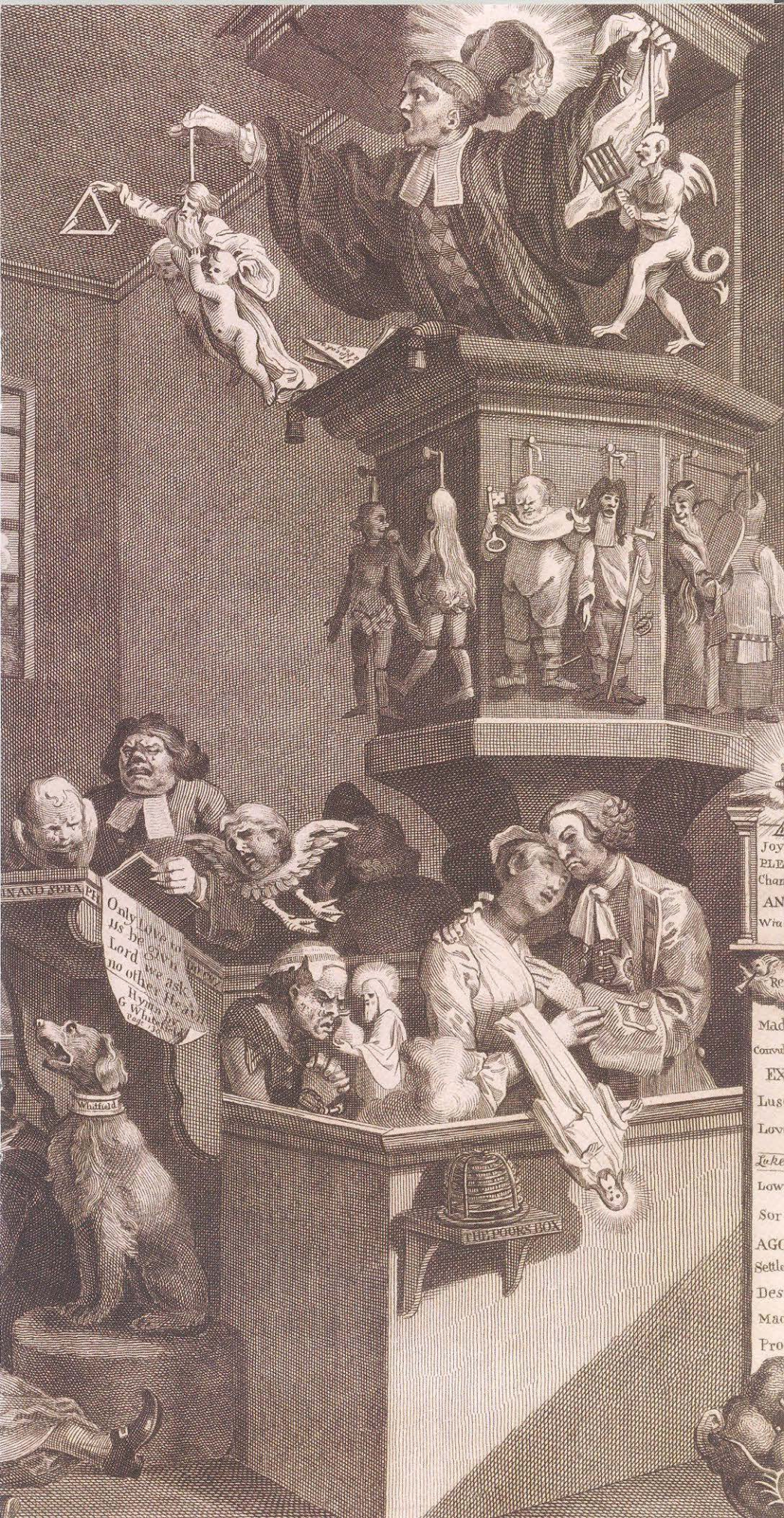
The possibility of visually representing religious experience clashed with the ethos of an increasingly privatized, Protestant

spirituality, exemplified in John Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Locke located the religious experience of conscience in private space, "not being any forced exterior performance, but the voluntary and secret choice of the mind." Other denominations formed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including Quakerism and Methodism, emphasized the inwardness of belief as distinct and even opposed to religious ritual, iconography, and ceremony. But the strong somatic responses of groups like Quakers and Methodists, who wept, quaked, and "fell into fits," became the hallmarks of their inward, private experiences of spiritual intensity. Skeptics, often through graphic satires, literally illustrated the problem: to be able to see religious expression, to be able to translate it into "exterior performance," was at odds with a modern definition of religious authenticity as an inward, private matter. It is in this context that Horace Walpole accused Methodists of creeping "Papism" that, he feared, would become a threat to the "future improvement" of the arts. His complaint connects the Methodists' focus on the blood of Christ and the spectacle of the Passion with more familiar anxieties about transubstantiation and embodiment in Roman Catholicism to suggest that both movements are associated with anti-modern forces threatening modern Britain.

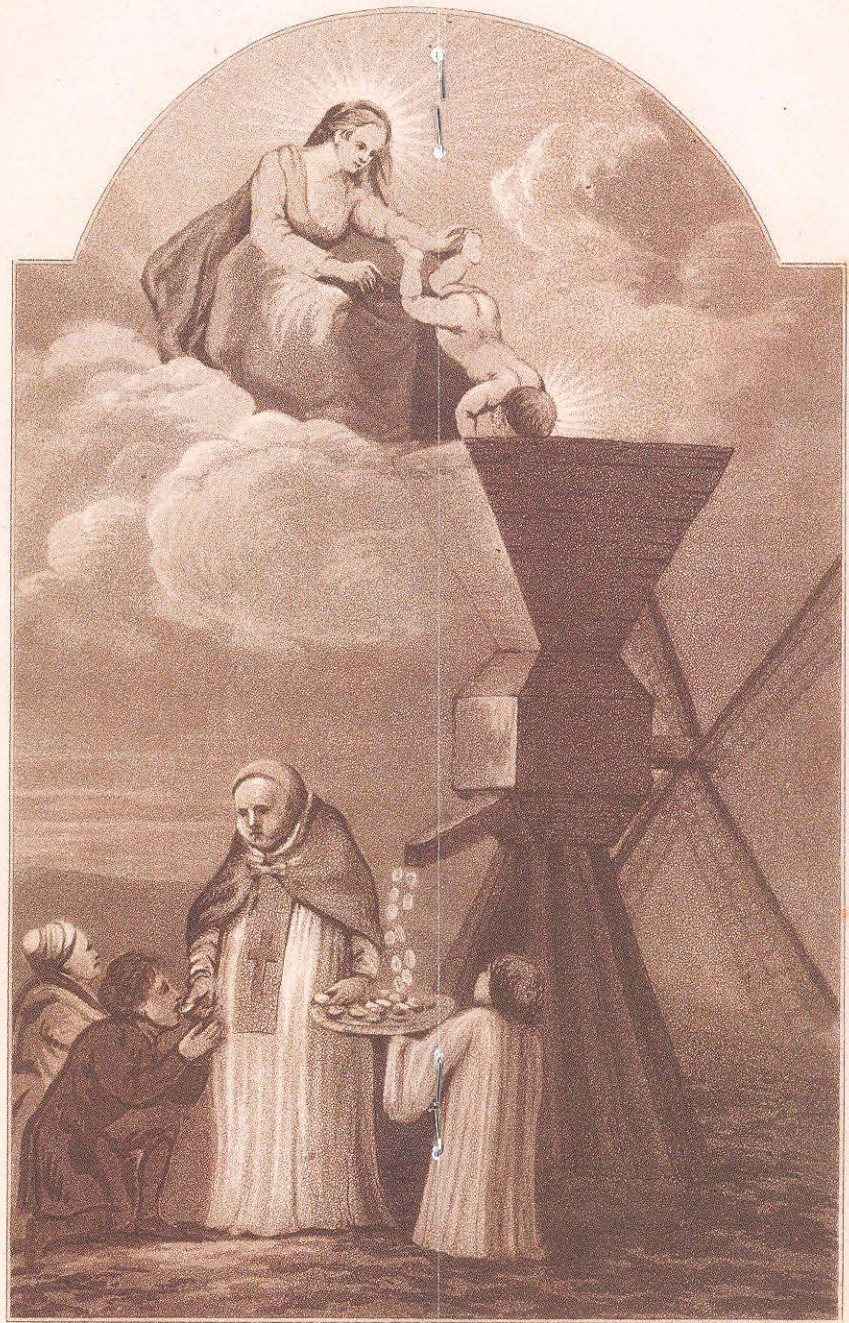
William Hogarth dove into the rich, emerging set of connections between old clerical satire, the new evangelicals, and the relationship of visual representation to modern religion with his

Enthusiasm Delineated (1761), an early and unpublished version of *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism* (1762). Samuel Ireland's later copy of *Enthusiasm*, re-titled *The Plan for the Medley*, is on display here.

Enthusiasm Delineated is a harsh satire of the evangelical fervor of George Whitefield's Tottenham Court Road Tabernacle. In Hogarth's print, the raving congregation gnaws on Christ icons (a satiric representation of transubstantiation) while a dog with "Whitefield" printed on his collar howls. Mother Cole, the famous Covent Garden madam with both alcoholic and evangelical tendencies, clutches a Christ icon between her legs, and a ghostly Christ collects the tears of a drunkard in a bottle. The scene is energetic to the point of being chaotic. Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Methodist characters and symbols collide in the print as figures of excess who bring their beliefs into a visual realm, thus making them too literal. Hogarth declared in the cartoon below that his aim was "to give a Lineal representation of the strange Effects of litteral and low conceptions of Sacred Beings and also of the Idolotrous Tendency of Pictures in churches and prints in Religious books &c." His statement confines the sacred to a realm beyond representation, safe from "litteral and low" conceptions, a point he makes with more ambivalence in his "Apology to Painters" when he claims that English religion "forbids, nay doth not require, images for worship or pictures to work up enthusiasm." His hard Protestant line softens as he asks himself the question:



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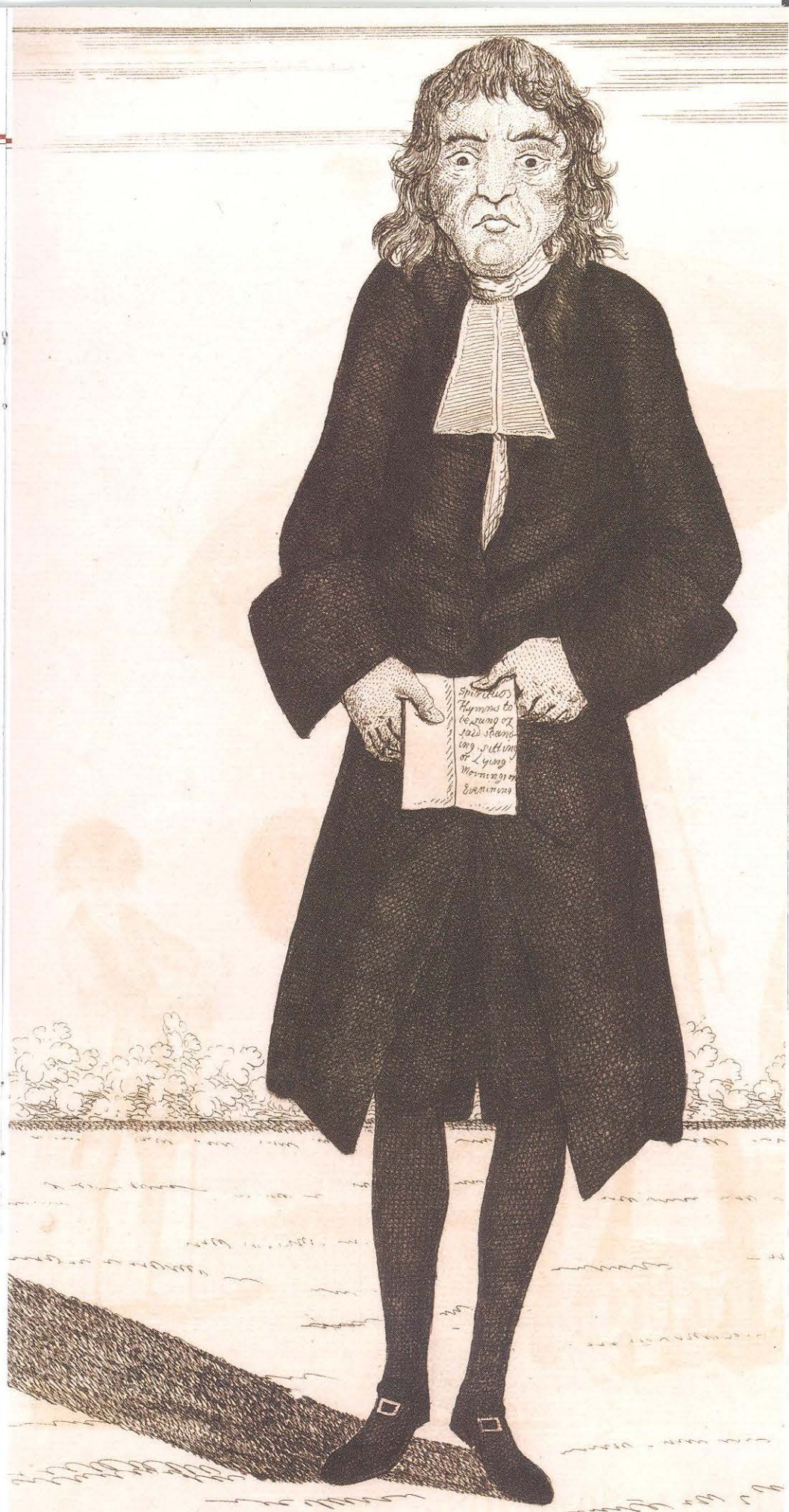


W. Hogarth pinxt.

Transubstantiation Satirized.

does English religion forbid or just not require images? Is the image an anathema to “true” religion because it does things, “working up” enthusiasm? What, in other words, might religious images do to the viewer?

While *Credulity* and *Enthusiasm* are clearly versions of the same subject, Hogarth reworked the copper plate so extensively for this 1762 composition that his apprentice and early biographer Samuel Ireland wondered he did not start it over. Among the many changes, the glowing Christ icons in *Enthusiasm* are replaced in *Credulity* with Fanny Phantom dolls. Sometimes known as “Scratching Fanny” or the Cock Lane Ghost, the phantom reputedly appeared at the home of Methodists and became something of a tourist attraction, as believers and curiosity-seekers, including Horace Walpole, crowded into the small room where the residents had heard her scratching. Ireland mentions many of the alterations between the two prints and observes that they may have been motivated by a friend who “suggested that the satire would be mistaken, and that there might be those who would suppose his arrows were aimed at religion, though ever the shaft is pointed at the preposterous masquerade habit in which it has been frequently disguised.” But in his descriptive analysis, Ireland sidesteps the alteration of the two most incendiary features of the print: the masking over of the Christ icons with Fanny Phantom, and the deleted sketch of the “windmill.” Ireland borrowed this imagery when in 1791 he engraved *Transubstantiation Satirized* as an individual print in



which the Virgin Mary feeds the infant Christ into the hopper of a windmill, as a Jesuit priest catches communion wafers below.

Hogarth first included the windmill image as a painting on the rake's wall in his 1731 *The Marriage Contract*. Bernd Krysmanski notes that the tradition of the "mystical mill" was

common in early fifteenth-century German art and was subsequently adopted by Protestant artists for anti-Catholic propaganda. But it remained part of some churches, somewhere in the space between visual satire and devotional art. Hogarth's image comes from Bishop Gilbert Burnet's description of one such altarpiece at Worms. He wrote "one would think [it] was invented by the Enemies of Transubstantiation, to make it appear ridiculous. There is a Wind-mill, and the Virgin throws Christ into the Hopper, and he comes out at the Eye of the Mill all in Wafers, which some Priests take up to give to the People." Ireland reproduced the shape of an altarpiece in his engraving,

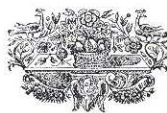




underscoring both the source of Hogarth's image and the pointedness of the satire on eucharistic belief, which is interwoven with the problem of representation in modern religion; what can come into the realm of the visual, and to what extent can it be granted material existence? Hogarth's sublimely satiric prints

illustrate the anxieties that run throughout religious and clerical satire in the eighteenth century, anxieties which, as the 2005 Danish cartoons satirizing the Prophet Muhammad suggest, are still with us in some form. The eighteenth-century images on display here preserve for us a moment in an ongoing conversation about the relationship of religion, representation, and modernity.

Misty G. Anderson
Associate Professor of English
University of Tennessee



Further Reading

Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood. *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2009.

Jacques Derrida. "Above All, No Journalists!" *Religion and Media*. Ed Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber, trans. Samuel Weber. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001: 56-93.

Bernd W. Krysmanski. *Hogarth's Hidden Parts: Satiric Allusion, Erotic Wit, Blasphemous Bawdiness and Dark Humour in Eighteenth-Century English Art*. Hildesheim, Zurich, New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2010.

John Locke. *An Essay Concerning Toleration: and Other Writings on Law and Politics, 1667-1683*. Eds. R.J. Milton and Philip Milton. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.

Phyllis Mack. *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008.

Birgit Meyer. "Medium." *Material Religion* 7.1 (March 2011): 58-64.

Robert Orsi. "Belief." *Material Religion* 7.1 (March 2011): 10-16.

Isabel Rivers. *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment, A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*: Vol. 1: Whichcote to Wesley. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.

Regina Maria Schwartz. *Sacramental Poetics and the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2008.

Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007.

Exhibition Checklist

[in order of installation]

Artist Unknown

Old Orthodox

Etching with roulette

Published by M. Darly, October 9, 1777

777.10.09.01.1+

Charles Williams, fl. 1797-1830

The Mischief of Methodism

Etching with hand coloring

Published by Thomas Tegg, September 1811

811.09.00.03.2+ impression 1

Samuel Ireland (d. 1800) after William Hogarth (1697-1764)

Transubstantiation Satirized, ca. 1794

Etching

Hogarth Collection 794.0.38

Samuel Ireland (d. 1800) after William Hogarth (1697-1764)

Virgin and Child with Friar's Foot

Etching

Hogarth Collection 794.0.39

Samuel Ireland (d. 1800) after William Hogarth (1697-1764)

Enthusiasm Delineated, 1795

Etching and engraving

In *George Steevens's Collection of Hogarth Prints*

Folio 75 H67 800 vol. 2

Samuel Ireland (d. 1800) after William Hogarth (1697-1764)

Credulity, Superstition and Fanaticism, 1795

Etching and engraving

In *George Steevens's Collection of Hogarth Prints*

Folio 75 H67 800 vol. 2

Artist Unknown

Methodism or the Religious Humbugg, 1758

Etching

758.0.32

In *A Political and Satyrical History of the Years 1756, 1757, 1758, and 1759*

London: Printed for E. Morris, 1759

724 759 P vol. 1 & 2 copy 1

Artist Unknown

Parrawankaw & Dr. Squintum, ca. 1769

Etching

769.0.74

In *Town and Country Magazine*, Supplement to the year 1769

61 T66 1769 vol. 1

Artist Unknown

Continence of a Methodist Parson

Mezzotint with etching

Printed for R. Sayer & J. Bennett, June 10, 1776

766.06.10.01

George Bickham (1706?-1771)

Enthusiasm Display'd

Etching with engraving

Published by Charles Corbett, August 20, 1729

739.08.20.01+ Impression 1

Artist Unknown

Wolves in Sheeps Cloathing

Etching

Published by William Humphrey, May 23, 1777

777.05.23.01+

Artist Unknown

Toothless, He Draws the Teeth of All his Flocks, 1779

Etching

Frontispiece for *Sketches for Tabernacle-frames. A poem.*

London: Printed by J. Bew, 1778.

762 Sa 83



Artist Unknown

The Pluralist, ca. 1764

Etching

Printed for John Bowles and Carington Bowles

764.00.00.12+

Louis-Phillipe Boitard (fl. 1733-1770) after John Miller (ca. 1715-1792)

La Dime. The Tythe Pig, 1751

Mezzotint

751.00.00.50

Artist Unknown

The Wet Parsons and Dry Quaker

Etching and engraving

Published by Laurie & Whittle, January 12, 1803

805.01.12.01

Artist Unknown

The Pleasing Method of Rouzing the Doctor, or, A Tythe Pig No Bad Sight
Mezzotint with hand coloring

Printed August 31, 1775, for Carington Bowles

775.08.31.01+

James Gillray (1756-1815)

End of the Irish Farce of Catholic Emancipation

Etching with aquatint and hand coloring

Published by H. Humphrey, May 17, 1805

805.05.17.01++

James Sayers (1748-1823)

The Repeal of the Test Act, a Vision

Etching

Published by Thomas Cornell, February 16, 1790

790.02.16.01++ Impression 2

Printmaker Unknown

after Richard St George Mansergh (fl. 1772-1778)

The Clerical Macaroni

Etching

Published by Matthew Darly, March 4, 1772

772.3.4.1.1

From *Caricatures, Macaronies and Characters by Sundry Ladies*

Gentlemen Artists, &c.,

72 772 D37 vol. 2

Artist Unknown

The Rev. Macaroni

Etching

Published by Matthew Darly, October 1, 1772

From *Caricatures, Macaronies and Characters by Sundry Ladies*

Gentlemen Artists, &c.,

72 772 D37 vol. 6

Artist Unknown

The Divine Macaroni

Etching

Published February 4, 1772

772.02.04.01

Artist Unknown

Aminadab

Etching

Published by Matthew Darly, November 2, 1771

From *24 Caricatures by Several Ladies, Gentlemen, Artists, etc.*

771.11.02.01.1

Artist Unknown

The Revd. Mr. Whitfield Preaching at Leeds, 1749

Etching

749.00.00.03+

Paul Sandby (1731-1809)

Modern Reformers, after 1763

Etching and engraving

763.00.00.131+

William Hogarth (1697-1764)

Sleeping Congregation, (1736) retouched by the artist 1762

Etching, fourth state

Kinnaird Collection, K-51b

Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827)

after William Hogarth (1697-1764)

Sleepy Congregation, undated

Watercolor

The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Unknown Artists (G.S. and I.S.)

Short examination of Spirit of Quakerism, ca. 1770

Etching

770.00.00.30+

Isaac Cruikshank (1756?-1811?)

after David Allan (1744-1796)

Presbyterian Penance, 1807

Etching with hand coloring

807.01.00.01+

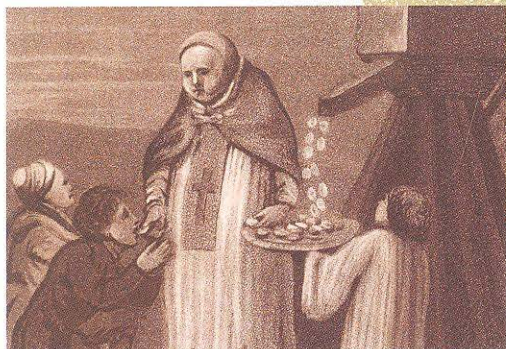
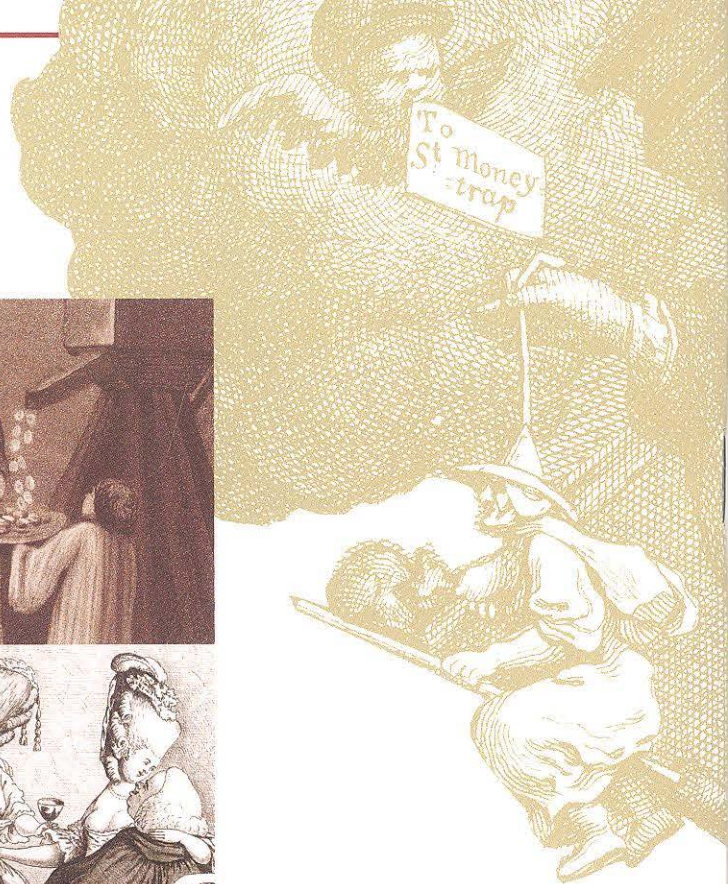
Artist Unknown

Presbyterian Conventicle, ca. 1700

Etching

700.00.00.14++





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