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## **Hogarth moralized**

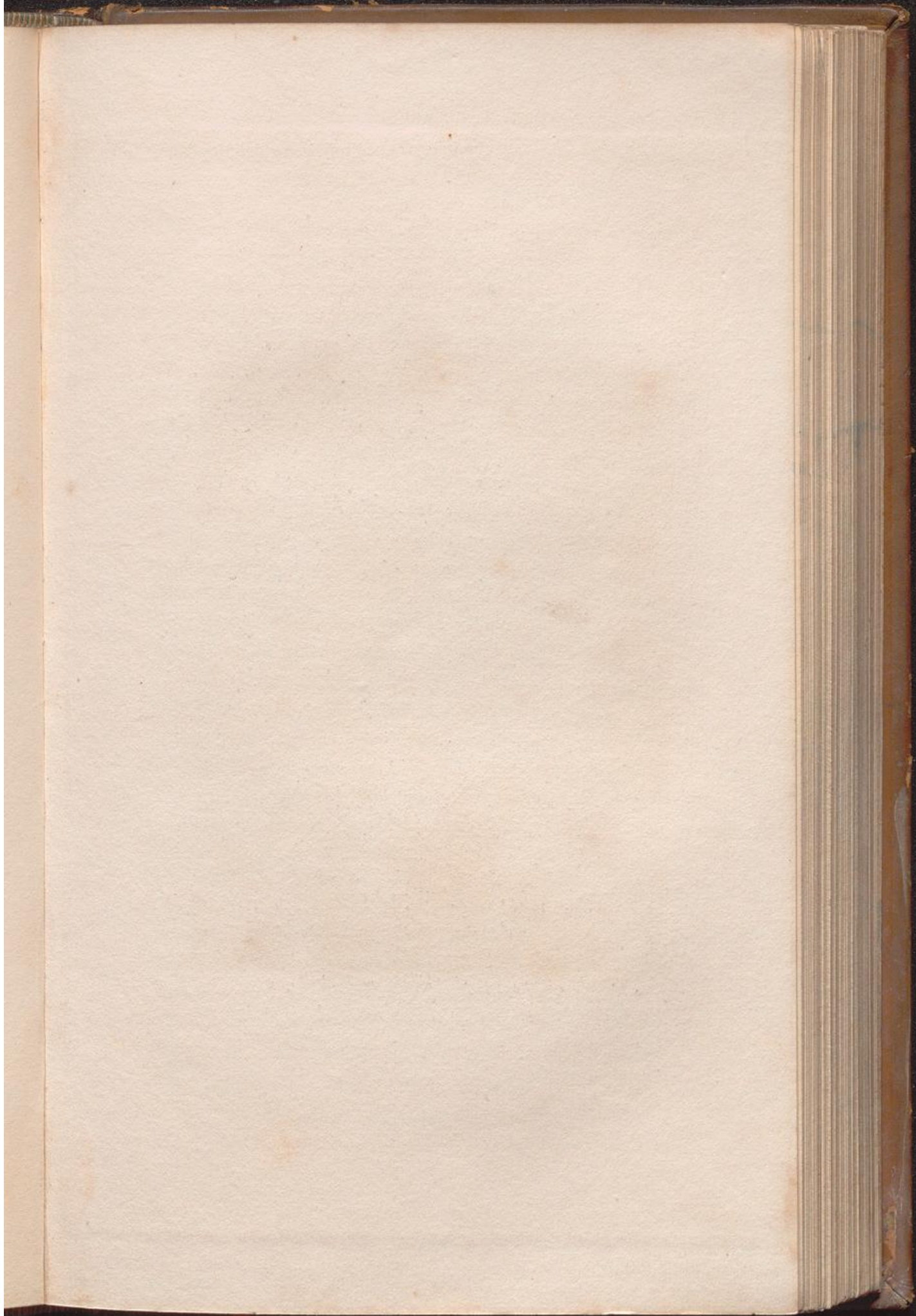
**Hogarth, William**

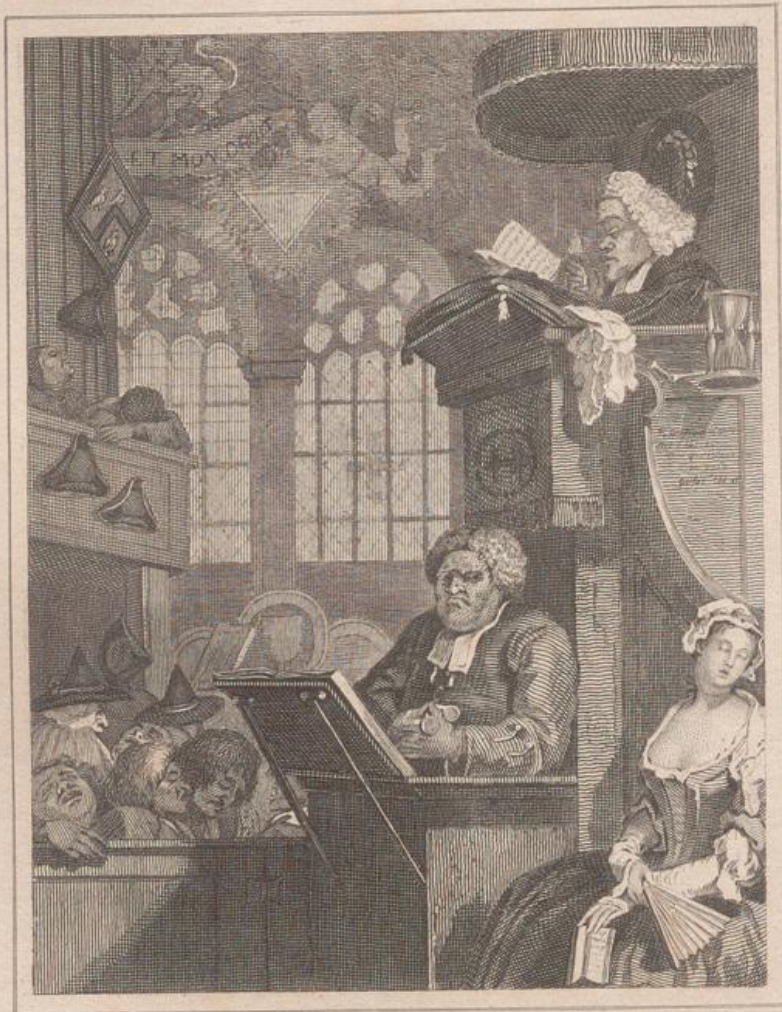
**London, 1831**

The Sleeping Congregation.

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*E. Smith. sc.*

THE SLEEPING CONGREGATION.

*Published by John Major, 50, Fleet Street, Jan<sup>y</sup> 1, 1831.*

## THE SLEEPING CONGREGATION.\*

It has been said by some that have undertaken to dive into the cause, that the decay of christian piety is, in a great measure, owing to the indifference and oscitancy of the clergy, with respect to their pastoral office; they are appointed to teach, say they, and watch over the people committed to their care, with a particular income peculiar to their employ; but on the contrary, they pay little regard to any thing except the pecuniary advantage they receive, valuing the flock but for the fleece: this is a heavy and severe charge against them, such as, in my opinion, they no way deserve; indeed there have been ministers of that stamp, (such as Mr. Hogarth has here thought proper to satyryze), who by unfortunately falling within the pale of the church, have by their uncommon laziness and stupidity brought the credit of religion to a very low ebb. But notwithstanding there have been such men among us, and I fear are at present some few, yet it is an act of injustice and cruelty to condemn the innocent with the guilty, and brand a body of men with that public censure that ought only to fall on individuals. It is the unhappy case of the clergy, (owing I believe in some to their slender income and state of dependance) that though their duty enjoins them to cry aloud and spare not, they are absolutely afraid, fearing to give offence. Were they to go round among their people, inculcating those duties their office requires of them, charging them strictly to be

\* [Portrait introduced—Dr. Desaguliers, the preacher.]

just in their respective dealings with men, and urging them earnestly to attend the public service of God, they would be looked upon as meddling and impertinent; were they in their pulpits to exclaim loudly against the particular vices of the age; were they to ring in the ears of their congregations the punishment reserved for the sinner; were they to press home the solid and severe truths christianity dictates, and tell the people of their faults, they would immediately be stigmatized. Thus is the poor priest condemned for doing his duty, as his God requires. But what is more remarkable, I have often observed, that those very persons who censure the active minister, are most ready to condemn the inactive one: he, I mean, who suffers his parishioners to wear away their lives in a state of thoughtlessness. Such is the perverseness of mankind, that I have known a minister's delivering himself a little freer from the pulpit than is the general custom, to have been a bar to his future preferment; when these are the only men that should be advanced, that they might be able to do more good in their respective generations. Not but that we have reason to complain of some who have forsaken the church, and wrested the scriptures to answer particular purposes; with respect to such men, I must take the liberty of saying, that I am afraid it has been more necessity than principle that has determined them to the steps they have taken, presuming they would not have left the church could they have selected a congregation under the present establishment, without being reduced to the necessity of taking refuge under the act of Toleration. I am sorry to say it, the pastoral office seems now to be made little better than a convenience; a rectory, or a vicarage, being considered only by a parent as a tolerable provision for a child. It is the greatest misfortune of the

church of England, that the patrons of benefices should be so wilfully blind to the interest of religion ; nothing being now studied but the serving a friend, with an eye to their own advantage. Thus the cause of Christ is made subservient to the worldly interests of man, and the whole body of the clergy suffer for what they are in no wise blameable.

In this sleeping congregation we have the most striking idea of the great effects of modern oratory, that of lulling a number of people into a state of insensibility, after the manner of Sir William Temple's tale-tellers in Scotland\*, by a tolling monotony of what they do not understand. The scene is here taken from a country church ; the congregation consisting chiefly of the lower class of people, and the ill-judging minister, supposed to be addressing them in language they cannot comprehend, which we are to imagine not his own, his vacant face declaring an empty head, and the rising pimple, that he spends more of his time over the bottle than in his study. With great humour is he represented as preaching on Matt. xi. v. 28. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ;" he, owing to his exceeding stupidity, having a happy talent of quieting a restless body by slumber. The first thing we may learn from the piece before us, is, how inattentive the generality of mankind are to matters of the greatest importance ; and from the prayer-book's (dropping from the hand of the dozing woman) being open at the matrimonial ser-

\* Persons whose employ was to sit by the bedside of any one fatigued or jaded with too much exercise, and relate some story of a cock and a bull, a giant or a dwarf, in a uniform tone of voice, in order to lull the person to sleep : and if he chanced to wake in the course of the night, these tale-tellers proceeded in their hum-drum story till the weary person was again buried in repose.

vice, we are taught how industrious they are to stop their ears to improvement, and fence out reflection, by amusing themselves with what they think the most entertaining. With great propriety is that text of scripture written against the pulpit. "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain!" Galat. iv. ver. 11. The hum-drum drawling manner of the indolent preacher, is very evident from the visible effect upon his hearers. Instead of being full of his subject, possessed with the very spirit of it, and labouring under the weight of those conceptions which it inspires; instead of pressing upon the audience with that torrent of tender and manly eloquence, as to animate the cold, rouse the stupid, melt the obdurate, and bend the stubborn, we see the purse-proud priest seated in his pulpit, poreing over his discourse, which is supposed to be delivered in such a yawning manner, that one would almost think he talked in his sleep: nay, by his handkerchief beside him for continual use, we are told that coughing, hawking, and spitting, the defects of other mens rhetoric, are the flowers, the figures, and ornaments of his. Methinks when I hear such preachers, I fancy the chimes going to the tune of a psalm, so little seem they affected with what they say! The truth is, there is too much resemblance between them; they both go as they are set, and one almost as mechanically as the other; only there is this unhappy difference in the case, that the bells often call people to their devotion, whereas these thoughtless, lazy, listless preachers, do but make them sick of it. The common method of hurrying over the sermon, lest dinner should wait, and the fear of exceeding their customary time (expressive to the greatest degree of the degeneracy of the clergy) is denoted by the hour-glass beside him as a monitor, lest he should dwell a little longer

than ordinary. By the figure of the clerk, we may observe the consequence that officer of the church would fain be thought of; and by the screwing up of his face, we are given to understand that one chief part of religious deportment is supposed, by the ignorant and superstitious, to consist in outward appearance and fantastical grimace; a well-pointed reflection on the ridiculous custom of those who, when they talk of religion, do it so precisely, after a canting, whining and sighing manner, with an affected tone, and ill-contrived look, as if they were conjuring or telling fortunes; a custom that has of late brought religious matters into contempt. And as a farther proof that the distortion of his face is merely affectation, see him amorously leering on the naked bosom of the female near him! Upon the whole, this piece is an excellent satire on the slovenly, indecent method of some of our modern clergy, and the spreading lukewarmness of religion.\*

[\* "The original picture was in Sir Edward Walpole's collection; the present proprietor I do not know." J. I.