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Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *The Book That Changed Europe: Picart and Bernard's 'Religious Ceremonies of the World'*. Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010. xi+383 pp. Illustrations, appendices, notes, and index. \$32.95 U.S. (cl.) ISBN 978-0-674-04298-4.

Review by Daniel Stolzenberg, University of California, Davis

*Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* is a remarkable and beautiful book. Its seven in-folio volumes, published in Amsterdam between 1723 and 1737, offered European readers a wide-ranging survey of the “religious ceremonies and customs of all the peoples of the world,” including Christians, Jews, Muslims, and “idolaters” from the Americas to the Far East. It comprised more than 260 spectacular plates by the engraver Bernard Picart (1673–1733) and accompanying texts compiled, and in some cases written, by the publisher, Jean-Frederic Bernard (1680–1752). In *The Book That Changed Europe*, Lynn Hunt, Margaret Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt seek to secure for this book a place in the Enlightenment literary canon, arguing that it represented “a major turning point in European attitudes toward religious belief” (p. 2) by equating and relativizing different religions and thereby promoting toleration. Their study is divided into two sections, “The World of the Book,” which examines the production of *Religious Ceremonies of the World* and the background of its authors, and “The Book of the World,” which explores its treatment of Judaism, Catholicism, idolatry, Islam, and various branches of Protestantism, especially radical sects.

The first chapters of *The Book That Changed Europe* reconstruct the lives of Picart and Bernard, situating the men and their work in the intellectually and economically dynamic culture of the Dutch Republic in the early eighteenth century. For Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt, the origin of the Enlightenment, or at least the side that matters most to them, is to be found in the world of Protestant refugees shaped by the experience of persecution. Bernard left France with his Huguenot family following the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Declining to follow his father into the ministry, he went into business, setting up a brokerage firm and eventually specializing as a bookseller and publisher, an enterprise that allowed him to combine his commercial talent and literary passions. Picart, by contrast, was born into a prosperous Parisian Catholic family and followed his father's trade of engraving. He had already achieved great commercial and artistic success prior to immigrating to Holland at the age of thirty-seven with his friend, the freethinking bookseller Prosper Marchand. In Holland, Picart, who must have broken inwardly with Catholicism much earlier, joined the Walloon Reformed Church, but his personal convictions, though elusive, were certainly more radical.

Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt acknowledge that “the precise religious beliefs of Bernard, Picart, and their overlapping circles of friends are difficult to pin down,” (p. 36) and “refuse to reduce Bernard and Picart's work to one predetermined religious program” (p. 21). Exploring ideas at the limits of orthodoxy and concerned to maintain respectability in the Calvinist community to which their families belonged, Picart and Bernard expressed their views about religion with artful ambiguity. Nevertheless, by drawing inferences about Picart from the convictions of his

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close friend Marchand, and by interpreting Bernard's writings in *Religious Ceremonies of the World* and elsewhere, the authors associate both men with a fairly well defined point of view which resembled Deism. "One central tenet runs through *Religious Ceremonies of the World*," they write, "everyone, all of human kind, entertains a belief in some kind of supreme deity" (p. 292). "The conclusion seems inescapable: disbelief in the central doctrines of Christianity, what Bernard calls 'the false ideas [of so] many Christians,' anchored Picart and Bernard's toleration of human religious diversity" (p. 291). The basic, unifying concept of *Religious Ceremonies of the World* was the idea of a pure, primordial natural religion, common to all men, which different peoples had corrupted in distinct but comparable ways, giving rise to the plurality of religions. It may at first seem paradoxical that men like Bernard and Picart, who came to view true religion as "not a way of life guided by clergy, but a series of abstractions" (p. 294) should focus their survey of religions on the outward domain of rituals rather than doctrine. Their intent seems to have been to focus on the inessential, demonstrating the comparability of the most familiar and exotic cults, thereby allowing the reader to infer the identical core of truth beneath them all.

Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt are unambiguous about the Enlightened mission behind *Religious Ceremonies of the World*: "By offering a global and culturally relative depiction of religious diversity, Picart and Bernard's book supported those voices arguing for religious toleration" (p. 7). Their interpretation finds support in the less enthusiastic testimony of the book's Catholic bowdlerizers, Antoine Banier and Jean Baptiste Le Mascrier, who decried its "extreme 'tolerationism.'" But Banier and Le Mascrier had a different idea about the means by which the book promoted toleration, describing it as "equally ridiculing the fanaticism of the Protestants and seeking continually to give an odious idea of the ceremonies of the Catholics" (p. 195). Although Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt discuss Bernard and Picart's negative opinion of ritualistic religion in its various incarnations (especially Catholic), they emphasize the "cosmopolitan sympathy" (p. 243) with which they treated all their subjects, as they "tried to depict the kaleidoscope of the world's religious activities from the inside" (p. 5). This dichotomy appears especially stark in the case of Judaism. On the one hand, the authors state that Bernard and Picart treated Judaism as the template for the corruption of natural religion by the machinations of priests. On the other hand, they argue that Bernard and Picart's main purpose was to valorize Judaism and counter anti-Semitism, as demonstrated by the sympathetic perspective of the texts and images in the volume on Jewish ceremonies, many drawn from life among Amsterdam's Jewish community.

As befits their subject, Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt devote much attention to images. One of the best chapters, "Picart's Visual Politics," examines how the engravings in *Religious Ceremonies of the World*—either drawn from life, in the case of communities present in Holland, or derived from existing images by other artists—communicated Picart and Bernard's ideas about religion. In producing the plates (some of which he drew and engraved himself, others were executed by assistants under his supervision) Picart pursued what the authors describe as a "determined quest for authenticity" (p. 147). In depicting the most exotic cults, however, Picart seems to have systematically sacrificed authenticity in the name of a larger purpose. For example, in depicting American Indian ceremonies, such as Inca sun worship and Aztec human sacrifice, Picart placed his subjects in distinctly European urban landscapes (pp. 151, 155). The authors' argument that Picart's purpose was to render the strange familiar and thereby engender sympathy may at first elicit skepticism. Similar Western impositions in earlier depictions of American and Asian subjects, such as in the work of Theodor de Bry (one of Picart's important sources) have typically been explained as Eurocentric failures of objectivity. But the authors are convincing that, in Picart's case, European motifs were introduced in order to counter Eurocentrism by minimizing the differences between cultures. How else to explain Picart's

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insertion into a depiction of the Indian god Shiva of a European violin (p. 154), which was absent in his source image by Conrad Decker? The authors make effective use of comparisons between Picart's images and those in prior works, which tended to emphasize the strangeness and violence of non-Christian religions. But the most powerful support for their argument comes from the cumulative impact of Picart's own images, which subjected all religious traditions, even Calvinism, to the same evenhanded ethnographic gaze.

Bernard's handling of texts paralleled Picart's combination of drawing from life with creative reuse of existing images. *Religious Ceremonies of the World* includes an original introductory essay by Bernard, but mostly "he compiles and adapts information from the most recent and reliable sources to develop an evidently balanced and even sympathetic account that nonetheless serves his own intellectual and moral purposes" (p. 248). This style of encyclopedic bricolage allowed Bernard to insinuate more than he dared say explicitly and reconcile two goals that were potentially in tension: propagating a radical, Enlightened message about religion and toleration and, at the same time, maximizing profits by appealing to a broad, multi-confessional audience. Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhadt suggest that the book was designed to allow two kinds of reading. On the surface it was simply an up-to-date compilation of curious information; but readers who understood Bernard's technique would read selectively and detect its "hidden agenda" (p. 269). Not that the radical message escaped many orthodox readers, as the reaction of Banier and Le Mascrier, as well as the book's inclusion on the Index of Prohibited Books, make clear.

Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt describe Picart and Bernard as "artisans of the Enlightenment" and attribute their neglect by previous scholars to misguided assumptions about the authorship of the Enlightenment and an excessively narrow focus on elite intellectuals. In depicting not only the engraver Picart but also the businessman Bernard as "artisans," the authors make an explicit analogy to recent scholarship by historians of science such as Pamela Smith, who emphasize the contributions of artists and craftsmen alongside philosophers to the Scientific Revolution.<sup>[1]</sup> Unlike the artisans discussed by Smith, however, Picart and Bernard do not seem to have claimed intellectual authority based on artisanal expertise. Though well read and deeply committed to propagating Enlightened ideas, neither man aspired to redefine himself as a *philosophe* or a man of letters. Picart was content with fame—and wealth—as an artistic genius, while Bernard deliberately cultivated obscurity, literally effacing his role as author and editor of *Religious Ceremonies of the World*, which bore only the name of its engraver. This reticence, and not only narrow-minded historiography, must be counted among the reasons for Bernard's low profile in scholarship on the Enlightenment.

*The Book That Changed Europe* makes strong claims for the importance of *Religious Ceremonies of the World* and its authors. Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt describe Bernard as "one of the founders of the Enlightenment" (pp. 127–8) and "a major contributor to the ferment about religion," whose "place in intellectual history has been overlooked" (p. 102). They identify the book's paramount contribution as a revolutionary understanding of the nature of religion. "Picart's images," they claim, "especially when read alongside Bernard's text, essentially created the category 'religion.'" By consistently focusing on common rituals like birth, marriage, and funerals, or on the most outlandish customs, they implicitly "transformed religion from a question of truth ... to an issue of comparative social practices" (pp. 156–7). While the authors concede that *Religious Ceremonies of the World* "did not change attitudes singlehandedly" (p. 17), they mean their title to be taken seriously. Although they focus on the role of the "foot soldiers of progressive thought," rather than the general staff, *The Book That Changed Europe* is an unapologetically heroic history, celebrating Picart and Bernard's work as "an enormous stride forward," because of its promotion of modern values of tolerance and religious freedom. It is not,

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however, an argument about the Enlightenment *in toto*. Like Jonathan Israel, who appropriated Jacob's notion of a "radical Enlightenment" in his eponymous study, they locate the most revolutionary and laudable aspects of the Enlightenment among its early and most iconoclastic representatives. [2] Acknowledging the less generous views of later Enlightenment thinkers, they situate Picart and Bernard in "an unusual moment in European intellectual and religious life, the time after the first discoveries of new places and strange customs and before the crystallization of new European attitudes of racial superiority" (p. 160).

Like much recent scholarship, *The Book That Changed Europe* is concerned with the place of religion in the Enlightenment. In some ways its approach is reminiscent of work by Peter Harrison and Justin Champion, who have argued that English freethinkers and Deists revolutionized the study of religion around the turn of the eighteenth century.[3] Like Champion (and unlike Jonathan Israel) Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt prefer to describe Picart and Bernard as redefining religion rather than opposing it. Like Harrison, they emphasize the transformation of the meaning of the concept, "religion," although unlike him, they do not probe its roots in the Protestant Reformation or refer to William Cantwell Smith's pioneering treatment in his *The Meaning and End of Religion*. [4]

To my mind, the book's chief weakness lies in the way it deals with early modern scholarship on religion before *Religious Ceremonies of the World*. Recent studies by Peter Miller, Martin Mulso, and Jonathan Sheehan, among others, have shown how the work of seventeenth-century sacred philologists tended, if often inadvertently, to redefine religion along the same lines as Picart and Bernard's work.[5] Something similar can be said for the Catholic theologians and missionaries, who, in their effort to understand non-Christian cultures in colonial contexts, produced comparative ethnographies, which often involved daring conceptions of natural religion, as Anthony Pagden demonstrated in his *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*. [6] Guy Stroumsa's recent study, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason*, offers a contrasting perspective on the origin of the modern comparative study of religions, emphasizing the decisive innovations of seventeenth-century scholars, who laid the groundwork for the eighteenth century. [7]

Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt are aware of these earlier traditions, referring at the outset to the ironically "sacred and theologically inspired antecedents" of Picart and Bernard's global survey of religions. But they pay them short shrift. I wished, for example, they had done more with the work of Joseph-François Lafitau, the Jesuit missionary author, who makes a few fleeting appearances in *The Book That Changed Europe*. Despite its very different religious outlook, Lafitau's *Moeurs des sauvages américains comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps* (1724) had important commonalities with Picart and Bernard's approach, positing a universal, primordial religion (though of divine not natural origin) that was corrupted over time by different nations, whose customs, such as marriage and funeral rites, could be fruitfully compared.

To the extent that Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt make large claims about the originality of Picart and Bernard's work and its influence in redefining the study of religion, the absence of more serious engagement with this relevant body of scholarship compromises their argument. But ultimately this difference of interpretation is not of the sort that can be resolved by empirical evidence. Granted that pious scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries pioneered comparative methods that contributed to the secularization of the study of religion which later Enlightenment thinkers made explicit, where along this continuum is one to locate the "turning point"? Historians disposed to an ironic narrative are likely to stress the heavy lifting done by modernity's unintentional inventors. But this is not the perspective of the authors of *The Book That Changed Europe*. For Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt, the crucial contribution to the making of

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the modern world—in other words, the Enlightenment—is to be located precisely in those moments when bold thinkers first explicitly promoted secular and tolerant principles, regardless of how much they depended on the intellectual spadework of earlier scholars with different goals.

Depending on their inclination about such matters, readers may be more or less convinced by the authors' claims for the singular importance of Picart and Bernard's work in redefining the study of religion. But *The Book That Changed Europe* makes a compelling case that *Religious Ceremonies of the World* deserves a more prominent place in studies of the Enlightenment. By example, it also makes a compelling case for collaborative historical research. The authors not only joined forces to write the book under review, but also organized a yearlong seminar devoted to Picart and Bernard at the Getty Institute, whose fruit includes a complementary collection of articles. [8] Thanks to these admirable collaborations, Picart and Bernard's magnum opus is sure at last to receive the greater recognition it deserves.

#### NOTES

[1] Pamela Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004).

[2] Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[3] Peter Harrison, "Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and Its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[4] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

[5] Peter N. Miller, *Peiresc's Europe: Learning and Virtue in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Martin Mulsow, *Moderne aus dem Untergrund. Radikale Frühaufklärung in Deutschland 1680–1720* (Hamburg: Meiner 2002); and Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005)

[6] Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[7] Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[8] Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt, eds., *Bernard Picart and the First Global Vision of Religion* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010).

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