

Fielding, *The Whole Duty of Man, Shamela, and Joseph Andrews*

In the years since the question of authorship was satisfactorily resolved, *Shamela* has received much attention. Few would now deny that Fielding's parody goes beyond its primary target, *Pamela*, to ridicule three other best sellers of 1740 and 1741—*An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian*, Conyers Middleton's *Life of Cicero* (especially its dedication to Lord Hervey), and *A Short Account of God's Dealings with the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield*. The result of this multiple satire is the exposure of artistic, religious, and social fraud in Walpole's England. One theme linking *Pamela* to the satire of false religion, suggests Eric Rothstein, is *Shamela's* comic adherence "to the serious belief of Middleton and Whitefield that . . . the self should be the measure of moral truth."¹ Amid this egocentrism there is a more positive motif in several allusions to another book, itself a best seller for many years, *The Whole Duty of Man*, which had been attacked by Whitefield and recommended by *Pamela*. Because of its place in his own history Fielding introduced this devotional work in *Shamela* to defend it from such an enemy and such a friend, as well as to vindicate its morality to a deluded public. In *Joseph Andrews* he made it one basis of his hero's virtue.

First published anonymously in 1658 and reprinted numerous times during the years before *Shamela*, *The Whole Duty of Man* was probably written by Richard Allestree, a chaplain to King Charles II and a Provost of Eton.² The book's title page declares its style, method of instruction, and appropriate context: "Laid down In a Plain and Familiar Way, For the Use of All, but especially the *Meanest Reader*. Divided into XVII Chapters; One whereof being read every *Lord's-Day*, the Whole may be read over Thrice in the Year. *Necessary for all Families*."³ Groups of chapters describe "*The three great Branches of Man's Duty, to God* [1-5], *our Selves*, [6-9] *our Neighbour* [10-17]" (p. 1). While not neglecting the basis of faith in God's gift of salvation through Christ, the work emphasizes the practice of that faith in this world and the importance of good works. Such an orientation accords with much other late seventeenth-century Anglican theology, like that of Isaac Barrow and John Tillotson. Anglicans must have read *The Whole Duty of Man* in great numbers, for it went through twenty-five editions by 1700.⁴ Two references near the time of Fielding's birth attest to its continuing esteem in the next century. *The Spectator* named it "one of the best Books in the World"; and Bishop George Bull recommended to the young clergy of his diocese that they sometimes "read a chapter to the people, out of that excellent book, called *The Whole Duty of Man*."⁵

Indeed, when Fielding was a boy at Eton, according to Wilbur L. Cross, "it was then the custom to assemble the boys . . . every Sunday afternoon to listen to an hour's reading from this very pious treatise written by a former Provost."⁶ *The Whole Duty of Man* was probably Fielding's first sustained contact with the kind of Christianity he would adhere to during his adult life and probably retained an important place in his memory, even though he later read and praised the more sophisticated writings of Barrow, Tillotson, Samuel Clarke, and Benjamin Hoadly. As Martin C. Battersin has shown, "In the sermons of these divines and others who shared their belief in a pragmatic, common-sense Christianity, [Fielding] found ready made a congenial philosophy of morals and religion," which was "directed toward the amelioration of society."⁷ To discover the basis, since boyhood, of his belief glibly recommended by Richardson's heroine and repeatedly criticized by the Methodist evangelist must have annoyed Fielding considerably.

Richardson provided two causes for Fielding's satire. The first is Pamela's recommendation. Near the end of *Pamela*, after she has survived the trial of her chastity and married B., Pamela writes to her parents: "As Farmer Jones has been kind to you . . . pray, when you take Leave of them, present them with three Guineas worth of good Books, such as a Family-Bible, a Common-Prayer, a Whole Duty of Man, or any other you think will be acceptable."⁸ Though Fielding would not have quarrelled with her advice, he considered Pamela too selfish to be concerned with the charitable portions of *The Whole Duty of Man*. The monetary aspect of this letter—"three Guineas worth"—suggests Pamela's pride in dispensing her charity as B.'s lady. Fielding made this kind of statement part of the sham religion of his antiheroine.

Second, in the "Preface," the "few brief Observations" concluding the novel, and especially the laudatory letters included in the early editions of it, Richardson seems to imply that *Pamela* itself is a work of practical devotion. The Preface declares that among the book's aims are "to inculcate Religion and Morality in so easy and agreeable a manner, as shall render them equally delightful and profitable to the younger Class of Readers, as well as worthy of the Attention of Persons of maturer Years and Understandings . . . to set forth in the most exemplary Lights, the Parental, the Filial, and the Social Duties, and that from low to high Life" (p. 3). In the concluding "Observations" Richardson lists the various duties to be learned from his heroine, such as "Duty to their Parents, tho' ever so low in the World" or "Their Duty to God, Charity to the Poor and Sick" (p. 411). The first introductory letter, printed in the first and subsequent editions, finds the novel a "Standard or Pattern" because "The greatest Regard

is every where paid in it to Decency, and to every Duty of Life. . . . Vice and Virtue are set in constant Opposition, and Religion every-where inculcated in its native Beauty and chearful Amiableness" (p. 4). A letter added in the second edition, which Fielding apparently mined for *Shamela*, discovers "under the modest Disguise of a *Novel*, all the *Soul* of Religion . . . and *Morality*" (p. 9). Such boasts about the novel's utility Fielding ridiculed.

Whitefield denounced *The Whole Duty of Man* in two published letters and a sermon. The most thorough attack appeared early in 1740 in *A Letter from the Reverend Mr. Whitefield to a Friend in London, Shewing the Fundamental Error of the Book, Entitled, The Whole Duty of Man*. Though he begins by admitting that this "much admired Book" was "once of Service to me" and "useful to many others," Whitefield disagrees with its orientation:

The Book in general is calculated to civilize, but I am perswaded, it never was a Means of Converting a single Soul. —I have just been looking over the Index and General Titles at the End of it, and cannot find the Word Regeneration so much as once mentioned. —And indeed, the whole Treatise is built on such a false Foundation, as not only proves the Author to be no real Christian at Heart, but also, that he had not so much as a Head Knowledge of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because his theology emphasized justification by faith, with the necessity of the new birth, Whitefield judged *The Whole Duty of Man* useless to the Christian. Of its stress on good works he says: "What is there, in our hearty Endeavour or Repentance, to recommend us to the Favour of God, or to render them worthy of being joined with the Righteousness of Christ? as tho' that was not sufficient of itself. —Our best Actions are but *splendida peccata*, Glittering Sins."⁹ Whitefield repeated such criticism in two other works published early in 1741, *A Letter to Some Church Members of the Presbyterian Persuasion* and "The Seed of the Woman, and the Seed of the Serpent" in *Nine Sermons Upon the Following Subjects*.

Fielding was not alone in defending *The Whole Duty of Man* or ridiculing Whitefield. In 1740 two pamphlets appeared in defense of the devotional work: *A Modest and serious Defence of the Author of the Whole Duty of Man* and *A Curious Letter from a Gentleman to Mr. Whitefield wherein he proves that Mr. Whitefield knows much less of Christianity than either Archbishop Tillotson, or the Author of the whole Duty of Man*. The controversy over *The Whole Duty of Man* also produced in mid-1741 *The New Whole Duty of Man, containing the Faith as well as the Practice of a CHRISTIAN*, which, its advertisers claimed, did not favor the Methodists though it did supply "the CREDENDA of the Christian Religion," which were "wanting" in its predecessor.¹⁰ Among two hundred anti-Methodist publications, including satires in prose and verse, issued during 1739 and 1740, one hundred fifty-four were aimed

at Whitefield.¹¹ So Fielding's mockery of Whitefield, like his ridicule of Cibber, thus merely added fuel to an already raging satiric fire, unlike his parody of *Pamela*, which was among the earliest negative reactions to the novel.

The Whole Duty of Man found an able defender in Fielding. Although he mentioned the book as early as June 10, 1740 in *The Champion* as one that no "sober family" should lack,¹² Fielding made the work more prominent in *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*. In the parody, published on April 2, 1741, there are three direct references to *The Whole Duty of Man*. The first appears in Parson Tickletext's letter to Parson Oliver as he praises the encyclopedic quality of *Pamela*: "Happy would it be for mankind, if all other books were burnt, that we might do nothing but read thee all day, and dream of thee all night. Thou alone art sufficient to teach us as much morality as we want. Dost thou not teach us to pray, to sing psalms, and to honour the clergy? Are not these the whole duty of man? Forgive me, O author of *Pamela*, mentioning the name of a book so unequal to thine."¹³ Tickletext's notion of *Pamela* as a substitute for *The Whole Duty of Man* is consistent with the suggestions of the novel's own prefatory material. The limitation of duty to prayer, psalms, and honoring the clergy reflects Fielding's belief that *Pamela*'s well-rewarded virtue involves little active charity, but primarily concern for self.

This limitation, too, suggests the letter's Methodist overtones, for earlier Tickletext praises "the useful and truly religious doctrine of *grace*" (p. 304), in the character of Parson Williams, whose theology is Whitefield-like, though his actions are not. Williams believes that "to go to church, and to pray, and to sing psalms, and to honour the clergy, and to repent, is true religion; and 'tis not doing good to one another, for that is one of the greatest sins we can commit, when we don't do it for the sake of religion" (p. 319). Whitefield in his sermon "The great Duty of Charity recommended" makes the standard antinomian argument for justification by faith when he declares, "It is not the leading of a moral life, being honest, and paying every man his just due; this is not a proof of your being in a state of grace, or of being born again." Tickletext's attitude toward *The Whole Duty of Man* resembles Whitefield's evaluation of that book and of charity: "Our enemies say we deny all moral actions; but, blessed be GOD, they speak against us without cause: we highly value them; but we say, that faith in CHRIST, the love of GOD, and being born again, are of infinite more worth."¹⁴ To neither Whitefield, Tickletext, nor Williams is charity the essence of the whole duty of man, as it is for Fielding and the theologians he admired.

Two other allusions to *The Whole Duty of Man* make it part of *Shamela*'s

reading, satirizing Pamela's learned piety. The first shows it as an aspect of her hypocrisy. As she tells her mother, "I immediately run up into my room, and stript, and washed, and drest myself as well as I could, and put on my prettiest round-ear'd cap, and pulled down my stays, to show as much as I could of my bosom (for Parson Williams says, that is the most beautiful part of a woman), and then I practised over all my airs before the glass, and then I sat down and read a chapter in *The Whole Duty of Man*" (p. 322). Shamela's treatment of each item in this series as equivalent—washing, dressing, practicing airs, reading devotions—makes her care for her body and spirit equally matters of affectation, the true source, as Fielding claims in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, of the ridiculous.

In the description of Shamela's books, we discover that her copy of *The Whole Duty of Man* is not even complete and that it has some unusual company: "A full Answer to a plain and true Account, &c., *The Whole Duty of Man*, with only the duty to one's neighbour torn out. The third of the *Atalantis*, *Venus in the Cloyster: Or, the Nun in her Smock*. *God's Dealings with Mr. Whitefield*. *Orfus and Eurdice*. Some sermon-books; and two or three plays, with their titles, and part of the first act torn off" (p. 327). Shamela's copy lacks the last eight chapters of *The Whole Duty of Man*, nearly half of the whole volume, and retains only the parts relating to God and self. What is omitted is central to the kind of Christianity Fielding espoused. The devotional book is again juxtaposed to a manifestation of its attacker, Whitefield's brief autobiography. In fact, each time Fielding alludes to *The Whole Duty of Man* in *Shamela*, he does so in a way that both parodies *Pamela* and ridicules the "great Methodist," as he had tagged Whitefield earlier in *The Champion*.

Not only does Fielding defend *The Whole Duty of Man* in *Shamela*, but he also recommends its morality to his readers. Because of Shamela's faulty copy he would seem to be emphasizing that part of the work relating man to his neighbors, much as Swift in "A Modest Proposal" advocates the paragraph of solutions that his persona rejects. The emphasis on both justice and charity and the implications of human relations amplified in the contents of these missing chapters correspond to much of Fielding's morality. For example, though most of those in *Shamela* profess themselves to be Christians, few act according to the idea of spiritual brotherhood expressed in *The Whole Duty of Man*: "The church in our baptism becomes a mother to each baptized person; and then surely they that have the relation of children to her, must have also the relation of Brethren to each other. And to this sort of Brethren also we owe a great deal of tenderness and affection; the spiritual bond of

religion should, of all others, the most closely unite our hearts" (pp. 318-19). Parson Williams takes this "bond of religion" very literally, to facilitate his union with Shamela's person. Or in contrast to the levelling tendency of *Pamela* or Whitefield's open-air meetings, *The Whole Duty of Man* declares: "In regard that these degrees and distinctions of Men are by God's wise providence disposed for the better ordering of the world, there is such a civil Respect due to those, to whom God hath dispensed them, as may best preserve that order for which they were intended" (p. 281). By such standards Fielding expected his readers to judge the negative examples of *Shamela*.

Fielding made one more significant allusion to *The Whole Duty of Man*. In *Joseph Andrews*, written later in 1741, though not published until February 1742, it is part of the protagonist's reading. Joseph tells Parson Adams in the third chapter, "That ever since he was in Sir Thomas's family, he had employed all his hours of leisure in reading good books; that he had read the Bible, the *Whole Duty of Man*, and Thomas à Kempis" (p. 18). Although this reference appears in the early part of the novel, when Fielding still had *Pamela* in mind (in the reversal of the B-Pamela situation in that of Lady Booby and Joseph), the allusion seems designed to distinguish Joseph from his sister, whose appearance in the fourth book confirms her selfishness. And the allusion distinguishes Joseph from Fielding's antiheroine Shamela. The implication that Joseph's copy is complete—with the duty to one's neighbor intact—suggests that Joseph is not just a parodic character, but one whose morality is essential to the novel. Although this novel also teaches partly by negative examples, Joseph is a comic hero, as chaste as Pamela, but more truly charitable. His simple Christianity, derived in part from *The Whole Duty of Man*, provides one moral basis of this comic epic in prose, along with the values of Parson Adams, Mr. Wilson, and the narrator.

The last three chapters of *The Whole Duty of Man*, especially, offer a useful context for viewing the morality of *Joseph Andrews*. The discussion of relative duties (including those of master and servant) in "SUNDAY XV" and of charity in "SUNDAY XVI" and "SUNDAY XVII" proves this work to be an important part of the background of the novel. Like the sermons of Fielding's favorite divine, Barrow, the devotional book emphasizes the strong motives for charity, the joining of affections and actions in it, its central rule (loving others as one's self), and its valuing of the poor person, "who is a man, and bears the image of God" (p. 373). Charity is the essence of the novel's morality. In *Joseph Andrews*, as in *Shamela*, *The Whole Duty of Man* also provides a context for judging characters' faults in more particular ways. For instance, the litigious

inclination of some, including Lady Boody, who wants to prosecute Joseph and Fanny for trying to marry, perverts the peaceableness of spirit which is an aspect of charity in *The Whole Duty of Man*. Its author writes: "Men think it nothing to go to Law about every petty trifle, and as long as they have but Law on their side, never think they are to blame; but sure, had we that true peaceableness of spirit which we ought, we should be unwilling, for such slight matters, to trouble and disquiet our neighbours" (p. 392). Acts of charity are, in some respects, also acts of justice. Fielding, a lawyer and a Christian, was sympathetic to such thinking, as Mr. Booby's rescue of Joseph and Fanny from the jurisdiction of Justice Trotter reveals.

The continuity between the allusions to *The Whole Duty of Man* in *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*—as part of the protagonists' reading—provides one more piece of internal evidence that the same author wrote both. More importantly, it shows that this book was frequently on Fielding's mind as he began the works of his maturity. Whitefield believed the author of *The Whole Duty of Man* to be "as much admired and read by the more common, as the Archbishop [Tillotson] by the more learned and polite Sort of People."¹⁵ Fielding had read both, and though the phrase "more learned and polite" describes him in many ways, his protagonists are "more common," part of the appropriate audience for Allestree's work. Neither could plausibly be found reading Tillotson's or Barrow's sermons. But *Shamela* earns Parson Oliver's censure through her incomplete attention to *The Whole Duty of Man*, while Joseph deserves the gentility he receives because of his innate nobility and his learned morality, learned partly from that book. In creating *Shamela* and Joseph, Fielding recollected an intimation of his mature theology from his boyhood. In *Shamela* he showed what the whole duty of man was not. And although he did not even imply that his first novel would supplant such a popular and useful work of devotion, as he apparently thought Richardson had, we may surely see *Joseph Andrews* as Fielding's whole duty of man, with the duty to one's neighbor at its center.¹⁶

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NOTES

- 1 "The Framework of *Shamela*," *ELH*, 35 (1968), 395.

- 2 Paul Elmen, "Richard Allestree and *The Whole Duty of Man*," *The Library*, 5th ser., 6 (1951), 19-27.
- 3 *The Whole Duty of Man* (London: John Eyres, William Mount, and Thomas Page, 1744), p. i. All further references to this work appear in the text.
- 4 James Sutherland, *English Literature of the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 30.
- 5 *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), IV, 541; Bishop Bull, quoted in James Downey, *The Eighteenth-Century Pulpit: A Study of the Sermons of Butler, Berkeley, Secker, Sterne, Whitefield, and Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 6.
- 6 *The History of Henry Fielding* (Yale U. Press, 1918), I, 48.
- 7 *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art: A Study of Joseph Andrews* (Wesleyan U. Press, 1959), p. 14.
- 8 *Pamela or, Virtue Rewarded*, ed. T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), p. 391. All further references to this reprinting of the first edition appear in the text.
- 9 *A Letter from the Reverend Mr. Whitefield* (Philadelphia: B. Franklin, 1740), pp. 3, 6.
- 10 *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 11 (June 1741), 335.
- 11 Albert M. Lyles, *Methodism Mocked: The Satiric Reaction to Methodism in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Epworth Press, 1960), pp. 127-28.
- 12 *The Complete Works of Henry Fielding, Esq.*, ed. William Ernest Henley (1903; rpt. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967), XV, 331.
- 13 *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 305. All further references to these works appear in the text.
- 14 *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield, M.D.* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771-72), VI, 234, 239.
- 15 Whitefield, *A Letter from the Reverend Mr. Whitefield*, p. 3.
- 16 This paper was read at the Conference on Christianity and Literature, South Atlantic Modern Language Association, Atlanta, Georgia, November 1980.