



# Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images

*David Morgan*

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## **Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images** David Morgan

This fascinating study of devotional images traces their historical links to important strains of American culture. David Morgan demonstrates how popular visual images—from Warner Sallman's "Head of Christ" to velvet renditions of DaVinci's "Last Supper" to illustrations on prayer cards—have assumed central roles in contemporary American lives and communities.

Morgan's history of popular religious images ranges from the late Middle Ages to the present day and analyzes what he calls "visual piety," or the belief that images convey. Rather than isolating popular icons from their social contexts or regarding them as merely illustrative of theological ideas, Morgan situates both Protestant and Catholic art within the domain of devotional practice, ritual, personal narrative, and the sacred space of the home. In addition, he examines how popular icons have been rooted in social concerns ranging from control of human passions to notions of gender, creedal orthodoxy, and friendship. Also discussed is the coupling of images with texts in the attempt to control meanings and to establish markers for one's community and belief. Drawing from the fields of music, sociology, theology, philosophy, psychology, and aesthetics, *Visual Piety* is the first book to bring to specialist and lay reader alike an understanding of religious imagery's place in the social formation and maintenance of everyday American life.

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