

LB TAURIS



*Religion, Enlightenment and the Sexual Revolution*



SEX<sup>AND</sup>  
THE  
CHURCH  
*in the*  
LONG EIGHTEENTH  
CENTURY

WILLIAM GIBSON AND  
JOANNE BEGIATO



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‘This is a ground-breaking book which makes a convincing case that the Church and sex were much more closely linked than previously recognised. The authors have made a case that demands attention and re-evaluates our view of religion and sexual behaviour in the period of the Enlightenment. It is an important work which deserves to be widely read.’

**Jeremy Black, Professor of History, University of Exeter**

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# PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## **Preface**

This is a book about sex and religion in England and Wales in the long eighteenth century, broadly the period between the revolution of 1688 and the repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts in 1828. It does not address Scotland and Ireland, though in some cases Scottish and Irish events were cited in England and Wales. The ‘Church’ referred to in the title is the Church of England, so the book focuses on Anglicans, only considering those who dissented from the Church, either Protestants or Catholic, when their experiences and roles help to illuminate the predominantly Anglican culture of the period. When nine in ten of English people were Anglican we can regard ‘religion’ and ‘the Church’, for the most part, as interchangeable. We also recognise the important distinction between theology and the Church’s teaching and behaviour – though they were in a close relationship; theology was both a cause and a consequence of social attitudes to sex. Both reflected the intensely Protestant and Anglican mind-set of most people in England.

The term ‘sex’ in the title includes beliefs and teaching about sexual acts, attitudes towards people’s sexual practices and sexualities, and only peripherally considers sexual identities. We do not intend to reify penetrative sex as more significant, or qualitatively different, from other forms of sexual behaviour. Tim Hitchcock has demonstrated why such an approach is inherently problematic. ‘Sex’ in our approach includes a

number of different and distinct things: reproduction, marriage as a religious forum for reproduction, sexual behaviour, and sexuality, by which we mean the experience of desire; and sexual identity both in public and to the individual. There is a danger that, since the Church was heteronormative in its teaching, that we adopt this as a lens through which we view sex in the eighteenth century. In fact heteronormativity is challenged at various points throughout the book, not just in chapter seven where we discuss same-sex behaviour, but in the attention that we pay to the experience of women. Women's experience of sex and sexuality is integral to our discussion of erotic writing, to evangelicalism and to marriage.

Given its attention to theology, advice, and discipline, the book often considers the elite. Some of the chapters, especially those on evangelicalism and on the public sphere, for example, pay specific attention to leaders and those at the top of English society, or to organisations such as Methodism, which was directed and controlled by leaders such as John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield. Moreover, England was a deeply hierarchical society in this period and one of the features of the period we are examining is the degree to which sexual attitudes and behaviour were socially differentiated. As such this survey includes people beneath the elite, in the lower and middling ranks whose voices were heard in institutions like the church courts and whose actions were visible at individual and collective level in court cases, community action, and popular culture. They participated in communal and self-policing of morals, instrumentally deployed the church court's services, and consulted clergymen to serve their own ends. We consider both the beliefs of the Church expressed by its leaders and clergy, and we also examine the ways in which popular belief and ideas of both religion and sex related to them. Overall, our purpose is to show how powerful and pervasive religion was in the world of sex in this period, and to argue that historians of sex and of the Enlightenment have been too quick to appropriate sex into the world of rationalism, modernity and science.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Silencing the Church on Sex

This book argues that the Church played a vital role in the formation of social, cultural, and individual attitudes towards sex in the long eighteenth century. It is a view that has not attracted much scholarly attention. The influential relationship between sex and the Anglican Church has been overlooked for several reasons. Historians of the period, predisposed by Victorian historiography<sup>1</sup> and influenced by the Enlightenment and secularisation agendas, have assumed that the eighteenth century saw the waning of the influence of faith.<sup>2</sup> Although historians of religion have challenged and largely despatched the myth of secularisation in the eighteenth century, it, or at least the notion of declining faith, continues to exert a pull over historians of sexuality.<sup>3</sup> For example, Tim Hitchcock's otherwise excellent study of *English Sexualities, 1700–1800* excludes any discussion of 'religious discourses' relating to sex.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, historians of the Enlightenment, however it is defined, have presented the era as one of reason and the development of scientific models of behaviour.<sup>5</sup> For some, the Enlightenment preoccupation with rationalism suggests that sex became a matter principally of individual choice and conscience, of medical knowledge, and one dominated by the print culture of the period.<sup>6</sup> In parallel, they see a collapse in the significance of community, traditional moral teaching, and of the roles of superstition and religious belief in eighteenth-century discussions of sex. Moreover, Enlightenment sensibilities explored ideas closely associated with sexual appetites and behaviour: luxury, indulgence, self-identity, imagination, and consumption.

For many scholars of sexuality, therefore, the Enlightenment transformed sexual culture. Thomas Laqueur boldly claims that ‘modern masturbation can be dated with a precision rare in cultural history’ to the first decade of the eighteenth century, in his book on masturbation, *Solitary Sex*. For Laqueur, Samuel Tissot’s *Onania* ushered in the sexual Enlightenment, in which masturbation reflected ‘Enlightenment’ notions of imagination, selfhood, secrecy, pleasure, female agency and indulgence.<sup>7</sup> In apparently consciously writing religion out of his account of eighteenth-century masturbation, Laqueur ignored, first, that Tissot’s work was adopted and abridged by John Wesley, thereby reaching a wider, and religious, audience, and, secondly, that successive editions of *Onania* included quasi-conversion religious narratives in which contributors described their experience of masturbation. In one typical case a man described how he indulged in masturbation in a barn at night and became increasingly weak, but by immersing himself in prayer he repented and was able to ‘deny the devil’.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, George E. Haggerty’s *Men in Love, Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century*, a literary account of homosexuality, does not even mention religion as a source of popular ideas about sex. It seems that for several historians of sex in the eighteenth century religion is a last bastion of Whig historicism. Even in *Origins of Sex*, which acknowledges religion’s powerful influence on attitudes towards sex, Faramerz Dabhoiwala sees social and intellectual factors as dominant motors for change in the eighteenth century. Indeed he argues that ‘the sexual revolution was a central part of the European and North American Enlightenment’.<sup>9</sup> However, Dabhoiwala’s Enlightenment turns away from religion.<sup>10</sup>

It is equally the case that historians of eighteenth-century religion have not addressed issues of sexuality.<sup>11</sup> Recent historians of evangelicalism have considered it, notably Henry Abelove in *Evangelist of Desire, John Wesley and the Methodists* (1990), and Brett McInelly in *Textual Warfare and the Making of Methodism* (2014). For the most part, however, historians of all denominations have tended to regard the history of sexuality as irrelevant, a marginal aspect of Anglican clerical activities, or even sordid and prurient. They confine matters of sex to discussions of the church courts’ regulatory jurisdiction over illicit sexual behaviour over the course of the eighteenth century, or consider sex as one of the bodily temptations that individuals struggled with, for

example in clergymen's diaries or the conversion narratives of the laity.<sup>12</sup> The absence of work on sexuality also reflects scholars' embarrassment and self-consciousness, a position challenged most recently by Ronald Hyam in *Empire and Sexuality*; and some church historians' personal faith has led to defensiveness and a desire to present the Church as divine in origin.<sup>13</sup>

The situation has not been helped by churches' silence on matters of sex. Diarmaid MacCulloch argues that this was due to institutional embarrassment and the sexually transgressive nature of some religious movements, such as the Anglo-Catholic movement of the nineteenth century. This impulse led to a 'self-editing' in Christianity, like John Wesley's self-censorship.<sup>14</sup> Silence was thus a means by which sex and its morally troubling aspects could be written out of history and an idealised, if bland individual and institutional past constructed; indeed, an earlier generation of scholars who discovered inconvenient truths about leading Christian figures were prepared to leave them undisclosed. Examples include the expurgation of obscene passages from John Thomlinson's diary mentioned in chapter eight and in the silence of commentators on John Wesley's bloodletting, examined in chapter five. In Thomlinson's case his juvenile and obscene diary entries were thought to be too vulgar for the scholarly community in 1910 and in the case of Wesley the hagiographic industry that Methodism spawned could not cope with anything other than an idealised leader.

Another major reason to consider the relationship between attitudes towards sexuality and the Church is the need to carry forward the historiographical revision, and now broad consensus, begun in the 1980s, that the eighteenth-century Church was a powerfully influential political, social and cultural institution.<sup>15</sup> This corrected view of the Church will only be partial if its role in important aspects of social and cultural life is unexamined. This book, therefore, stands in that historiographical tradition and charts the influence of the eighteenth-century Church on understandings of sexuality. It is located in a more recent consensus within the history of sexuality, represented by Lesley Hall, that even in the twentieth century: 'it is undoubtedly the case that spiritual beliefs continued to play a significant role for much longer than simplistic stories of modernity and secularisation might suggest'.<sup>16</sup>

### Politics, Theology, and the Enlightenment

This book therefore has two broad objectives: to restore religion to a central place in understanding sexuality in the long eighteenth century and to recognise that the Church, as a pervasive and dominant influence on society, was deeply connected to matters of sex. It does not, however, suggest that the eighteenth century was simply an extension of the sexual *ancien régime*, or perhaps *régimes*, of earlier periods. There were distinct, though uneven and not consistently 'progressive', changes in attitudes to sex in the period. This unevenness, and the frequent reversals in sexual attitudes, are an important feature of the period and firmly resist the Whiggish account of the period as an onward march to the Enlightenment, 'modernity,' and personal liberty. Historians have often ascribed changes in sexual attitudes and behaviour to the universal, though rarely anatomised, solvent of the Enlightenment. What historians of religion have seldom considered is that religion and theology were not simply passive, ambient influences on sexual behaviour but were engines of some of the changes that appeared in sexual attitudes and behaviour. This is not to argue for a repressive as opposed to permissive history of sexual change. In intellectual and religious shifts with regard to sex, the classification of sex acts into good or bad, acceptable or illicit, was a product of social power.<sup>17</sup>

The idea of religion and theology as motors of changes in sexual behaviour challenges the secularisation and Enlightenment narratives. It might appear plausible that the Toleration Act of 1689 loosened strictures on religious consciences, and therefore also on sexual culture. In fact, as chapter one shows, the powerful influence of Latitudinarian theology, and in particular of Pelagianism, was the forerunner of *both* the growth of politeness and sociability which so strongly features in historical scholarship *and* developments in sexual attitudes. The angry God, who punished all men and women for the sins of Adam and Eve, became less familiar than a God who wanted people to achieve their political, social, economic, and also their sexual, potential. Consequently the role of the Church was not diminished, rather it had a new function: teaching the proper regulation and restraint of sexual desire and pleasure and its lawful and moral expressions. Indeed changes in attitudes to sex in this period do not reflect a waning but a waxing of religious principles.

Historians have debated the nature of the Enlightenment. Some, like Jonathan Israel, champion a comprehensive, progressive and determinist interpretation while others, like Jonathan Clark, disagree.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the most significant challenge came from Michel Foucault who argued that the Enlightenment did not open up liberal values and end oppressive external discipline, but was, rather, a cultural phenomenon which imposed new forms of self-discipline on the individual. Indeed, while the Enlightenment apparently introduced reason to Europe, secular and religious institutions were exerting greater control over populations in all sorts of ways including the regulation of sex. Consequently, Foucault argued for a 'darker' Enlightenment in which sex was not liberalised and made subject to reason but was the subject of repression and coercion.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, the generalised view of the Enlightenment and sexuality cannot be sustained without close attention to the particular.<sup>20</sup>

So while there were profound changes in religious attitudes to sex in the eighteenth century, they cannot satisfactorily be ascribed to the cure-all of an anti-religious Enlightenment. Sexual behaviour changed, but this change was often led by churchmen rather than in opposition to them. Moreover, it is untenable to construct sexual behaviour in the eighteenth century as a secular or secularising paradigm. Anglican theology was not marginalised by changes in attitudes to sex, it was the cause and motivator of some of the changes. So to place religion and sex in the eighteenth century in separate categories of thought and behaviour is a mistake; they were for most people inseparable.

One of the themes in this book is the persistent relationship between theology, politics, and sex. To the twenty-first century ear this sounds odd. But this was an era in which theology and politics were intimately connected, and, at times, one and the same. Indeed, 'heterodoxy' and 'dissent' were often defined both politically and theologically. The same is true of sex. As this book demonstrates, people often aligned unorthodox sexual behaviour with unorthodox religion and politics. Consequently, Catholic Jacobites were regarded as sexually, as well as politically and religiously, dangerous; Methodism was attacked as popish and sexually transgressive, and early eighteenth-century women grappled with the idea that non-resistance to the state might be analogous to obedience to a husband. By the early nineteenth century the politico-theology of sex was strongly influenced by events. During the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars sexual

freedom came to be regarded as a dangerous portent of anti-clericalism and antagonism toward aristocracy and monarchy, and conversely France represented the place to which homosexuals fled and from which corrupting pornography entered Britain.<sup>21</sup>

The later part of the eighteenth century is sometimes seen as an age of reform, which embraced morality. For eighteenth-century historians such ideas call to mind the problem of a Whig interpretation of history in which society progresses towards modernity. This book recognises that changes in attitudes occurred during the final quarter of the eighteenth-century; but contends that these changes often materialized under the influences of new ideas and economic transformation. Yet we would want to avoid crude suggestions that in religious matters there was an 'unreformed' and a 'reformed' period. The structural reforms of the Church of England in the 1840s were not a stark break with the past, they were the continuation of a number of processes, some of which included ideas of sex.

### The Ambiguities of Sex and Faith

One of the difficulties of writing about sex and the Church in the eighteenth century is the tendency to assume that belief, or absence of belief, and morality or immorality were hard and fast, impermeable and permanent categories. In fact, of course, this was not so. In the first place there is little evidence for the exclusive categories of faith and sex. Eighteenth-century institutions certainly integrated the two. For example Jonas Hanway's 1758 scheme for a Magdalen Hospital was not only a refuge for the large numbers of prostitutes who plied their trade in mid-Georgian London. In fact, Hanway was motivated by both a desire to clear the streets of the open plying of the sex 'trade' and a desire to save the souls of those women who would grasp the opportunity to abandon their sinful ways. Hogarth's huge canvasses for the entrance hall of St Bartholomew's Hospital, one of which showed Jesus healing at the *Pool of Bethesda*, and probably depicts at least some of the afflicted suffering from venereal disease, indicated the biblical basis for the foundation and a similarly providential hope for healing. The Lock Hospital for venereal diseases was equally religious in origin and intention. The first meeting of the hospital governors began with a reading of St John's account of Jesus' response to the stoning of the

adulteress: 'he that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone,' which captures the religious character of the philanthropy on which the hospital was built. Despite the deeply unfashionable nature of the patients' afflictions, and its perpetual need for funds, in 1762 the hospital built a large chapel. Moreover, its first chaplain, Martin Madan, was a celebrity preacher who attracted huge audiences; and pew rents and sales of sermon tickets probably accounted for half the Lock Hospital's income.<sup>22</sup>

Thomas Coram's Foundling Hospital and the Magdalen and Lock Hospitals were all motivated by a religiously-inspired change in the ways women were perceived.<sup>23</sup> During the sexual vigilantism of the early eighteenth century and of the societies for the reformation of manners, prostitutes were seen as brazen, sinful whores who drew men to temptation and damnation; but by the middle of the eighteenth century prostitutes were regarded as victims of men's sinful predation and self-indulgence.<sup>24</sup> Such views lay behind Martin Madan's proposals for legalised polygamy examined in chapter eight.

Eighteenth-century individuals also encountered considerable moral ambiguity and complexity in matters of sex and faith, which hardly points to an advancing modernisation and liberalisation. For instance, people experienced periods of uncertainty and doubt in their faith, and may also have experienced fluctuations in their personal morality. The uncertainty and malleability of both is captured in some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conversion narratives, whose authors resisted sexual temptation and frequently failed to arrive at a new level of faith. For every indicator of sexual liberty or secularisation there was another of struggle in reconciling sexual acts with religion. For example, should it be concluded that the fairly common use of St Paul's Cathedral's precinct for clandestine homosexual liaisons represented a conscious and flagrant flouting of religious teaching, or simply a search for a quiet, dark place for illicit sex?<sup>25</sup> Equally, when John Painter and John Green were arrested in September 1727 for conducting 'Sodomitical Practices in Stepney Church-Porch' was this a case of deliberate desecration?<sup>26</sup> Certainly 'Molly Christenings,' in which homosexuals adopted new female-nicknames, implies a parody of baptism and exposes the intricate associations between sex and religion.<sup>27</sup>

This religious ambivalence can be seen in individual lives and choices: in 1762 James Boswell solicited a prostitute in the Strand and planned

to have sex with her. He recalled toying with her, but in the end confessed: 'I gave her a shilling, and had command enough of myself to go without touching her. I afterwards trembled at the danger I had escaped.'<sup>28</sup> What is to be made of this? Boswell was certainly fearful of catching venereal disease and 'armoured' himself with a sheep gut condom. But did his trembling also arise from his guilt over his flouting Christian rules? Dudley Ryder, an earnest and serious minded young dissenter who attended Anglican services and read large numbers of sermons and religious tracts, nevertheless experienced the urge to 'fill a whore's commodity' in April 1716, though he was too shy to do so.<sup>29</sup> In Maria Edgeworth's novel *Belinda* of 1801, Lady Delacour marked passages in John Wesley's *Admonitions*; when this was discovered she suggested that she did so in mockery rather than admiration, though her maid suspected otherwise.<sup>30</sup> Evasion was a human trait in both religion and sexuality.

What should be made of the mob's treatment of John Waller, an 'affidavit man' who gave false evidence against prostitutes, homosexuals and other criminals, and on whose evidence some were sentenced to death. When Waller was revealed as a perjurer, whose evidence had condemned prostitutes and homosexuals to execution, he was punished by the pillory. The mob savagely attacked Waller and killed him while he stood in the pillory, some shouting that they were sending his soul to hell.<sup>31</sup> Although he had attacked sexual transgressors, Waller's behaviour was in violation of popular morality. It seems that faith and sex always operated in a highly complex and ambiguous relationship.

There were no hard and fast categories of sex and religion even in perceptions of prostitution in the long eighteenth century. For example, prostitutes took sides in religious controversies. In 1710 the Sacheverell trial led to riots in London on the issue of whether Protestant dissenters were dangerous to the Church of England. The trial brought to the surface of London society the deeply-felt divisions between High and Low churchmen. One of the sections of the population which mobilised for Sacheverell's High Church Tory opinions were the London prostitutes. They importuned their clients with the phrase 'are you for the Doctor, sir?' – asking the client if he supported Dr Sacheverell.<sup>32</sup> As late as 1731 Hogarth depicted the harlot Moll in her boudoir with a picture of Dr Sacheverell on the wall.<sup>33</sup> In this way, even the most fallen section of society engaged with

religious politics and saw their identities as strongly affected by matters of faith. In fact one of the neglected aspects of the Sacheverell unrest between Tories and Dissenters was whether the recruitment of women to their causes was a source of division.<sup>34</sup>

It is likely that prostitutes did not all regard themselves as irredeemably sinful, just as people experienced periods of doubt in their religious belief. After all, some of the lurid contemporary accounts of prostitution in London suggested that tens of thousands of women were involved in the sex trade, many of whom were 'demi-reps,' that is, married women or servants who fell back on prostitution from time to time as their financial needs dictated.<sup>35</sup> Moreover prostitutes often deployed signs of faith alongside their immoral activities. One of the notorious London brothel keepers, Mother Wisebourne, was said to carry a Bible with her when she walked the streets, partly as a feint to deter people from assuming she was a prostitute; and she left a Bible open in the hallway of her house to throw off her naiver neighbours.<sup>36</sup> Of course, the question arises, was Mother Wisebourne therefore considered hypocritical, a doubter or woman of faith? Fears of hypocrisy in matters of sex and faith abounded after all. In the *History of the Human Heart* (1749), the author noted that Camillo, the young hero of the novel, did not just attend church on Sundays but also on weekdays and 'behaved on these occasions with all the outward marks of the most sincere devotion.' Nevertheless he was soon to corrupt a 'posture girl'. The author took Camillo's religious observance to be hypocrisy and a feint to throw off his observers.<sup>37</sup>

Faith, superstition, and stratagems of expedient morality coincided in other fictional accounts of prostitution. The author of *The Whore's Rhetorick*, claimed that the fictional 'Mother Creswell,' told her girls that they would be provided with a copy of *The Whole Duty of Man* and *The Practice of Piety* partly because it helped to impress their clients. However, she also claimed they were 'helps to devotion'.<sup>38</sup> So she expected her prostitutes to be devout. The claim that madams and prostitutes attended St Anne's Soho to 'pray in their paint' and to solicit clients from the congregation, captures the moral ambivalence of the age.<sup>39</sup> Certainly it is possible to be cynical about such ploys. But erotic books, such as *The London Bawd* of 1705, suggested that prostitutes went to church and saw their trade as operating alongside their worship and faith.<sup>40</sup> The author of the *London Bawd* showed how a devious

demi-rep gulled her husband in religious vein. When he returned home unexpectedly she was entertaining a client, she recalled:

springing from the Arms of my affrighted Gallant, I took a Sheet out of the Chest of Drawers in the Chamber, and tying it with a Copped Crown upon his Head, I made him look methought just like some Fornicator, a going to do Pennance in a Parish Church, and then turning him into the next Room, I bid him, if my Husband came in thither (who was a very timorous Man, and almost trembled at the Talk of Spirits) to Counterfeit a Ghost, by which means I wou'd quickly use a Stratagem which shou'd Relieve him without Danger.<sup>41</sup>

As chapter eight shows, clergymen also embodied the tensions between sex and faith. The *Cuckold's Chronicle* in 1793 considered the serial adultery of Mrs Errington. Among the men with whom Mrs Errington was reported by her maid to have spent time alone was the curate of Battersea, Mr Walker. In sarcastic tone the author asked whether Mrs Errington and the curate spent their time together in religious exercises, or reading *Pilgrim's Progress* or *The Whole Duty of Man*. In the end the author conceded that 'a transaction will bear two constructions.'<sup>42</sup>

### The Unrecoverable Past

Ideas about sex have changed over time. Scholars of sexuality demonstrate that while 'there is a biological basis for human impulses, drives, and desires . . . it is social forces that fashion a biological reality into a "sexuality."'<sup>43</sup> In the broadest sense, sexuality and sexual identities are modern constructs. As Kim Phillips and Barry Reay point out, before 1800 it is more constructive to explore the universe of meanings that people placed on sex acts, rather than attempt to identify the acts themselves.<sup>44</sup> This book takes such an approach since it is more fruitful to explore individuals' experience of sexual acts and attitudes.

Sex inevitably raises evasive issues of attraction and the interior life. For historians this can be problematic and represents an element of the past that can only be glimpsed since few people discussed their sexual desires and acts in the past. Scholars of sexuality and the Church are faced with a number of questions. To what degree was there an interplay

between faith, the Church, and people's sexual acts, thoughts, and feelings? Did sex play any part in clerical career advancement and patronage? Was sexual attractiveness an ingredient in the application of spiritual and civil jurisdiction? Did sexual proclivities and feelings influence theologians and churchmen towards certain religious ideas and principles? Did denial or sublimation of such feelings play a part in church teaching? Did people align beauty and goodness, desire and desirability, with one another in the way they often do today? If not all these questions can be answered, the centrality of sex to the 'workings of society,' as Sarah Toulalan and Kate Fisher observe in their introduction to a history of sex and the body since 1500, 'ensures that a variety of relevant documents that provide insights into various sexual cultures, customs, thoughts, rules and regulations, experiences and emotions can be mined by scholars'.<sup>45</sup> This book therefore uses a wide variety of sources to uncover the centrality of the Church to understandings of sex and vice versa in the eighteenth century.

### Route Map

This book is organised thematically. The first chapter examines the Church's teaching on sex. Although the Church's teaching on sex has been normative, and has varied according to its context, after the Restoration there was a degree of consensus on what constituted sexual infringement of religious teaching. That consensus was sufficient for there to be popular support for spiritual discipline and for the need for church-enforced penance. Nevertheless there were some important changes in the Church's teaching on sex. While biblical injunctions regarding sexual behaviour remained strong, the notion of collective guilt as a result of sexual sin was fading. Sin became increasingly perceived as an individual responsibility, as did redemption, and moral behaviour. Moreover theological arguments against sexual misbehaviour were joined by economic and social arguments, including those of property rights and of the need for social order. Some sexual behaviour, such as masturbation, was more likely to be conceptualised as a medical as well as a spiritual problem. Ideas of relativism also grew, in which behaviour such as masturbation was perceived as less dangerous morally and socially than adultery or fornication. New theological ideas also developed, largely under the influence of Latitudinarians. In the

eighteenth century God was seen as more reasonable in his expectations of mankind and therefore more tolerant of sin. Moreover the theological suspicion of pleasure declined, so that it became a natural behaviour not necessarily associated with sin. God was perceived as wanting men and women to achieve their full potential. In such a universe, sex was natural and to be enjoyed; and blanket proscription gave way to nuanced regulation. However, it would be mistaken to overstate these changes. They were gradual and evolutionary. The period remained one in which there were different sexual standards of behaviour for men and women, and for aristocrats and the poor. Enlightenment ideas of individualism and of the naturalness of mankind were emerging but they were not dominant. And earlier ideas of the nature of sin and the need for firm sexual regulation remained strong among many social groups.

Chapter two considers the Church's role in the public sphere. The Church of England endorsed public activism against sexual misbehaviour and regarded rebuking and shaming those deemed immoral as important weapons for this end. Sexual morality was linked in the public mind with other social transgressions, criminality and failure to conform to sexual norms was associated with religious and political heterodoxy. This morality dominated public life for the first half of the eighteenth century. But the sexual vigilantes of the societies for the reformation of manners over-reached themselves and the moral consensus they reflected was in decline from the mid-century. Thereafter public moral campaigns focused on 'vice' with less emphasis on sexuality. Public morality had an ambivalent attitude to the sex lives of monarchs, who were in the long eighteenth century also religious figures. For political and religious reasons William III, Mary II, Anne and George I were all deemed to be beyond the public censure for sexual misbehaviour. But, by the mid-century, public rebukes of George II for adultery emerged. By the reign of George III royal sexual misbehaviour became both politicised and symptomatic of emerging anti-clericalism.

Chapter three addresses the role of the spiritual regulation of sex. The Church regulated lay and clerical sexual behaviour through its courts throughout the long eighteenth century. The Church prosecuted people who were considered sexually immoral, typically those who had sex outside marriage, and punished offenders found guilty through public confession and humiliation. People also used the church courts to deal with illicit sexuality in other forms, including spouses who sued

each other for adultery, and those who tried to defend themselves against accusations of sexual misbehaviour and restore their public reputation. Though the system of ecclesiastical courts is sometimes characterised as being in terminal decline in the long eighteenth century and thus a manifestation of the Church's loss of control of sex and society, it is more accurate to see it as in a state of flux. The courts' role in punishing sexual offences varied according to region: earlier decline in regulation occurred in areas which underwent more rapid economic or urban transformation while they continued to present offenders in rural, less industrialised areas up to the final quarter of the eighteenth century. It is misguided to see the decline, whether rapid or slow, as indicating society's rejection of the Church's teachings on extra-marital sex. Other factors played a part in the changing role of the church courts. The volume of litigation overall declined in the period. Like other arenas of civil litigation, the church courts became more socially exclusive and professionalised, used predominantly by higher-ranking married couples to resolve marital difficulties. Crucially, the church courts also responded to intellectual and social change, adopting the shift in ideas about discipline and inculcating morals which saw more success in their indoctrination through education and internal conscience rather than through external regulation.

The fourth chapter considers the Church and marriage in the eighteenth century. The Church played a powerful and ongoing role in the making of marriage, as well as defining its parameters and seeking to ensure its success both at the level of institution and as a personal relationship. Those who wrote about marriage, frequently used scripture as the foundation of their discussion and advice and it was canon law which dictated how people entered and left matrimony. The church courts, as already shown, policed marital conformity and punished those who weakened the institution of marriage by fornication, bastardy, and adultery. In many ways, it was the Church's views on marital sex that shaped much of its activities in the arena of matrimony, a factor which has been overlooked by historians to date. The Church taught that sex, procreation, and mutual comfort were the fundamental reasons for marriage. In its courts, marital sex helped prove the existence of a union and clerics who published guidance for married couples, often used marital sex as a measure of the health and state of an individual marriage. Indeed, society accepted the Church's contention that marriage was the

only legitimate site for sex and individual and familial faith was critical in finding a suitable partner and sustaining a successful marriage. Spouses whose partners broke their marriage vows by committing adultery were also offered the Church's assistance through separation and while understandings of extra-marital sex became more nuanced, its definition as a sin did not disappear by the end of the Georgian period. In fact, breaking the marital vows of fidelity had considerable ramifications for those who held political authority, a feature of political life which retained a grip throughout the long eighteenth century as the prevalence of adultery (and clerics) in sexual scandals reveals.

Although evangelicalism is often associated with temperance and prudery in the nineteenth century, chapter five demonstrates that in the eighteenth century its association with sexuality was profound and widespread. This chapter spans the two major waves of evangelicalism in the long eighteenth century. The first, from the 1730s when John Wesley and George Whitefield spearheaded a period of conversion and 'vital' religion, saw Methodism identified by contemporaries as a highly gendered movement and one which used the language and imagery of sex. The intimacy developed by Methodist organisations led to both imagined sexual behaviour and scandals and rumours that dogged the movement. One of the problems for Methodism was that both its principal leaders, John Wesley and George Whitefield, had troubled relationships with women and wrestled with their sexuality. Wesley also placed greater emphasis on the advantages of the single life, which appeared to undermine the value of marriage among his followers. As an itinerant preaching society, Methodism also suffered from the ability of preachers to move on from relationships and a number of its preachers were the subject of scandal. In its second wave from the 1770s, Anglican evangelicalism was more institutionalised. The period of acute national crisis in the 1780–90s ushered in an active evangelical movement headed by men and women like William Wilberforce and Hannah More. Although Nonconformists were also swept up in the evangelical tides, this chapter focuses on those who remained within the established Church. It specifically proposes a shift over the period in the relationship between society, evangelicalism, and sex and gender. In the earlier period, evangelicals such as Wesley and Whitefield were conceptualised as a threat both to social and familial order, with widespread allegations of illicit sexuality, the destruction of family life, and disruption of

gender conventions. By the later period, however, evangelicals espoused a rhetoric which placed them at the centre of familial, gender, and therefore social order. Indeed arguably in the period 1780s to 1840s the relationship between evangelicalism, morals, and respectability came to define and distinguish middle-class culture.

Chapter six tackles celibacy, and the related issues of conjugal chastity and moral restraint, to challenge further the view of the eighteenth century as one of sexual revolution in which a secularising process changed attitudes to sexual continence. The Church of England certainly promoted marriage as the primary institution of social order, and thus the unmarried state was often characterised as inferior, with the potential to pose a moral and economic risk to society and nation. Consequently, numerous religious writings tackled the issue of celibacy, particularly in the early eighteenth century. This chapter demonstrates, however, that in attacking the celibate state or promoting a modified version, the Church did not present sex as either intrinsically sinful or problematic. The clergymen who offered their views typically celebrated sex and its pleasures as long as it was the right type: marital. Moreover, although the Church's ability to discipline illicit sexuality through its courts diminished, and a discourse of sexual liberty circulated among some highly educated, wealthy men, celibacy was not side lined, nor did it lose its political, rhetorical, and ideological force over the century. Celibacy was indeed disparaged, not least because Anglicans identified it as Roman Catholic and therefore reprehensible and the concerns around celibacy shifted, tied to political, economic, and cultural concerns. Yet, the debate remained rooted in a religious framework, which in some respects encouraged a degree of ambiguity about the celibate state across the period from outright denigration in the later seventeenth century to cautious approval in the early nineteenth. Definitions of celibacy were not fixed, with a variety of different terms in use, a range of views about the merits of abstinence in general, and, critically, the possibility of temporary celibacy. Discussions of sexual continence served several political purposes at different times from denigrating Roman Catholicism legitimately to evading patriarchal authority, to avoiding the distractions of family life with the goal of greater spiritual conviction, or from professional necessity.

Chapter seven analyses the Church and same-sex relationships. In the eighteenth century popular and religious responses to same-sex

behaviour and desire were perhaps among the most unstable and inconsistent of opinions. There was fierce vilification, condemnation, and prosecution by Church authorities, such as that aimed at molly culture. At the same time some churchmen appeared to have taken a more tolerant attitude to it, sometimes unwilling to prosecute or condemn sodomy, with others even willing to collude in the evasion of punishment in certain homosocial environments in which tolerance was more prevalent. The covering up of homosexual scandals and the willingness to permit those clergy caught in compromising situations to evade punishments did not necessarily imply any acceptance of same-sex behaviour; it is more likely to have been an institutional defence mechanism and later one which saw political defence of the status quo as important for the stability of wider society. So if there is a field of religion and human sexuality in this period which most exemplifies the need to avoid a Whiggish interpretation of an upward path from darkness to sunlit uplands it is that of same-sex activity. This is reflected in wider discussions of the nature of homosexuality in the eighteenth century and the historical divergence of interpretations between those who emphasise the repression and punishment of sodomy and those who lay stress on gradual tolerance of it. These divergent opinions should not be viewed as exclusive categories since both repression and tolerance were evident in the period.<sup>46</sup>

The final chapters turn to representations of the Church and its personnel in print culture. Chapter eight examines sexual scandals and the Church. Throughout the eighteenth century scandals dogged the Church, as they did in earlier and later ages. Sexual scandals in the Church, like those of the monarchy, could challenge institutional authority and the ideas of moral absolutes on which ecclesiastical influence rested. An aspect of their significance is in the emergent ideas of what was public and private, and of what was legitimately a matter for public comment. In many cases those scandals that reached the public did so because there was some animus or motive for revealing them. But there was also a randomness in whether scandals were made public. The nature of scandal was rooted in the expectation that clergy should lead exemplary lives, and in the issues of hypocrisy and double standards that occurred when they did not. The Council of Trent held that the character of the priest did not affect the sacraments he conveyed, but in the popular mind a parson who was immoral was unlikely to be effective.

Some of the scandals in this chapter arose from sincerely held views, in other cases scandal arose from clergy affected by mental illness; by the later period all of these scandalous cases took advantage of a new form of literature, the cheaply produced sensational account of a trial or other event. It was in the early nineteenth century that these writers and publishers took advantage of the growth of radical anti-clericalism in publishing lurid accounts of clerical crimes to further their own political and ideological positions.

The final chapter explores the ways in which writers combined sex and religion in erotic narratives to contribute to political, social, and cultural debates throughout the long eighteenth century. These erotic narratives encapsulate the complex relationship between the Church and sex. While defenders of Christian morals campaigned against obscene literature and its circulation, the Church and its personnel found themselves protagonists in this material, which developed eventually into the genre of pornography. This chapter explores how writers used sex to condemn different denominations, featured fictional clergymen as characters in erotica, and exposed real clergymen's sexual proclivities in order to advance political views. The resulting sexual narratives do not therefore conform to any thesis of modernity in which a stable category of pornography emerged designed solely to sexually stimulate readers. This chapter confirms that authors continued to write about sex in order to attack institutions. Since erotic writing retained anti-religious and satirical facets, perhaps it suggests that sexual liberty was not yet in place by the turn of the eighteenth century.



# CHAPTER 1

## THE CHURCH'S TEACHING ON SEX

Some histories of sexuality give the impression that changes in attitudes to sex in this period were smooth and uncontested. By associating sex with modernity and the Enlightenment, they suggest that attitudes to sex developed in the same way as economic advances, or the growth of ideas such as liberty.<sup>1</sup> The theological ideas that underpinned eighteenth-century attitudes to sex, as this chapter shows, underwent significant changes, but they did not follow a uniform Enlightenment trajectory. In the Church of England theological teachings on sex were often rooted in the past and the changes in attitudes it stimulated were a complex combination of progressive and conservative ideas.

Historically, the Church's teaching on sex has not been constant, it has varied over time and was socially constructed by the context in which the teaching developed. For example, though St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas both appeared to sanction prostitution as a release of sexual tensions, at other times the Church regarded prostitution as a serious social evil to be fiercely condemned. Theologians themselves acknowledged the relativist attitudes towards sex. In *Archaeologiae Graeca*, 1697, John Potter, later Archbishop of Canterbury, explained that in pagan society prostitution was not condemned for a number of reasons. First, it was not publicly seen, prostitutes went to the homes of their clients rather than importuning in the streets; secondly it was an indulgence to young men; and thirdly it prevented such men from making 'attempts' on the virtue of respectable women.<sup>2</sup> Potter did not condone such

behaviour, though he acknowledged that Western culture sprang from ancient society. Like others, in the eighteenth century he recognised that much of the Church's teaching on sex was derived from an earlier time.

An example of such a regressive regime was that exercised by Bishop Thomas Wilson of Sodor and Man. Wilson's was one of the longest episcopates of the period: he was consecrated bishop in 1697 and remained at Sodor and Man until his death in 1755. Wilson's approach to morality and the Church's discipline was derived from earlier times. In 1714 he arranged for a bridle to be made with which he punished cases of defamation and in 1720 he imprisoned one islander for fornication in addition to his public penance.<sup>3</sup> Wilson even ordered a prostitute to be sentenced to be dragged across Douglas harbour behind a boat, in effect a judicial execution by drowning.<sup>4</sup> Such was Wilson's inflexibility that in 1722 the governor, with whom he was in a political conflict, imprisoned him for nine weeks for appearing to defame his wife.<sup>5</sup> Wilson's moral government of the diocese of Sodor and Man though representative of an older, sterner, and inflexible system of ecclesiastical oversight of moral discipline, overlapped with less repressive attitudes to morality. Yet Wilson remained a celebrated bishop, noted for piety and devotion to his diocese, and his publications remained in print and widely recommended well into the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Theological views on sex were not homogenous in this period because they reflected different doctrinal positions and principles. An example is the advice given to married couples on having sex the night before, or on the day of, taking Holy Communion. The discussion of this issue followed the advice given by the Catholic saint, Francis La Salle (Bishop of Geneva until his death in 1622) in his *Introduction à la vie devote*, published in 1609. La Salle commented that what he called 'the marriage debt' could be paid on the night before and even the day on which someone had communicated, for, 'it is no indecency, but rather a meritorious thing to pay it. Wherefore no one ought to be debarred from communion for paying this debt.'<sup>7</sup> His advice was reiterated by Richard Challoner (later Catholic vicar-apostolic for London) in his 1724 translation of the work for an English Catholic readership. When, however, the Anglican Henry Dodwell translated the work, 'fitted for the use of Protestants', in 1673, he omitted this section, simply noting that as far as sex on the night before communion 'in ancient law,

God would not have the creditors exact that which was owing to them, upon feast days and holy-dayes.'<sup>8</sup> So sex immediately before Holy Communion was acceptable for Catholics but not for Protestants.

The Church's teachings on sex were derived from a number of sources, principally from the Bible. Paul-Gabriel Bouce suggested that eighteenth-century society was so strongly influenced by the Bible that it was hardly surprising that most attitudes to sexuality were based on Leviticus and Deuteronomy.<sup>9</sup> But there were other sources for Church teaching. Homosexuality was regarded as sinful as a result of biblical injunctions and was punished by the spiritual courts; but in 1534 the 'Acte for the punysshement of the vice of Buggerie' also condemned it as a criminal offence which could be punished by the death penalty. During the Commonwealth other forms of sexual behaviour were criminalised and severe punishments were imposed: in 1650 a law even imposed the death penalty for incest, adultery and fornication. The Restoration of 1660 reversed Commonwealth legislation and restored the church courts for spiritual offences. By 1676 Lord Chief Justice Matthew Hale asserted that Christianity and biblical injunctions were 'a parcel of the laws of England' and any attack on the Church's teaching was 'a subversion of the law.'<sup>10</sup> Thereafter, in the period covered by this book, the Church's teachings were of two types. First, the offences punished in the church courts and in other legal actions and secondly the public teachings of leading churchmen. As the activity of church courts is considered in chapter three, this chapter will address the ways in which the Church's beliefs about sex were constructed in canon law, theology, and public teaching.

### The Church and Sex in Canon Law

The eighteenth century saw the most comprehensive codifying of English canon law since the Reformation, which aimed to provide a clear and coherent rationale for the Church's claim to both moral authority and jurisdiction. Edmund Gibson's monumental two volume *Codex Juris Anglicani* of 1713 made the case for the spiritual jurisdiction of the Church of England. Gibson took the authority back to 28 Henry VIII, c. 12 which sanctioned spiritual courts in England following the split from Rome. He also cited the Act of 1662 (13 Charles II, c. 2) which permitted clergy to exercise temporal authority.<sup>11</sup> The Church's claims

C O D E X  
JURIS ECCLESIASTICI  
A N G L I C A N I:  
OR, THE  
STATUTES, CONSTITUTIONS,  
CANONS, RUBRICKS and  
ARTICLES,  
OF THE  
Church of England,  
Methodically DIGESTED under their Proper *Heads*.  
WITH A  
C O M M E N T A R Y,  
*Historical and Juridical.*

BEFORE it, is

An Introductory Discourse, concerning the *Present State* of the  
*Power, Discipline and Laws, of the Church of England:*

And AFTER it,

An APPENDIX of INSTRUMENTS, Ancient and Modern.

By EDMUND GIBSON, D. D.

Archdeacon of *Surrey*, Rector of *Lambeth*, and Chaplain to his Grace  
the Lord Archbishop of *Canterbury*.

L O N D O N:

Printed by *J. Baskett*, Printer to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty; and  
by the Assigns of *Thomas Newcomb*, and *Henry Hills*, deceas'd. And are to be Sold  
by *R. Whitledge*, at the Bible and Ball in *Ave-Mary-lane*. 1713.

Figure 1 Title page of Edmund Gibson's *Codex Juris Ecclesiastici Anglicani* (1713), the formal position of the Church's authority over spiritual and moral behaviour.

to spiritual authority over sexual matters rested on these statutes. Gibson made clear that, according to the Canons of 1603, 'notorious and evil livers' could not be admitted to Holy Communion. He also provided an account of the 'spiritual crimes and vices restrained by temporal punishment'.<sup>12</sup> There were four principal categories of sexual crimes: buggery and sodomy; rape and ravishment; fornication, adultery and incest; and bastardy.<sup>13</sup> Gibson stated that though buggery and sodomy remained sins, the spiritual courts could hand offenders over to the temporal courts because they were criminalised by the act of 1534 as crimes. The same was true for rape: it had been a crime in England since 1275 and statutes concerning forcible sex with women had been passed under Richard II and Elizabeth I. Gibson showed that while the law had been repealed under Mary, it had been restored by Elizabeth I in 1562, and thereafter those convicted of rape had been exempted from general pardons in 1609, 1661, 1674, 1695, 1696, and 1708. The penalties for conviction of rape were severe, including life imprisonment and heavy fines, and under the law of Elizabeth I the death penalty was added. Moreover rape of a child under the age of ten was a crime which could not attract benefit of clergy.<sup>14</sup> Gibson's third category, fornication, adultery, and incest, included offences reserved for the spiritual courts alone since 1285 and there had been no change in that provision (other than in the case of courts martial for such instances in the army and navy). Similarly bastardy was principally a spiritual offence, although there were important civil consequences, not least those concerning inheritance, maintenance of the child, and poverty.<sup>15</sup>

Gibson's *Codex* was the most significant work on the Church's spiritual jurisdiction of the eighteenth century. It was granted official status by formal receipt by the archbishops of Canterbury and York and also by acknowledgement and thanks to Gibson from the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury in 1713. Thereafter it was the standard work, with bishops, ecclesiastical lawyers, and laity using it as a guide to ecclesiastical law. A copy was bought by Convocation for Westminster Abbey which was available to be consulted by the public.<sup>16</sup> The *Codex* demonstrates the strength of the Church's spiritual jurisdiction over matters of sex and indicates that leading churchmen regarded it as an important element in the relationship between Church, state, and society throughout the eighteenth century.

Gibson's work suggested that just as the state was responsible for the economy, foreign policy and other temporal aspects of society, the Church was responsible for its moral and sexual regulation. Civil and criminal offences were to be pursued in the king's courts; moral and sexual crimes in the Church's. The restoration of the jurisdiction of church courts after 1660 was undoubtedly more successful than some scholars have recognised, a theme explored in more detail in chapter three. Indeed, concerns at the vigour with which the Church pursued offenders led to petitions to the House of Commons in 1732 to prevent ecclesiastical courts from over-reaching their bounds. Robert Whatley argued, both to Bishop Edmund Gibson and to the committee of the House of Commons examining church courts, that they were too active and the deployment of penance had the effect of punishing men and women for a sinfulness that was integral to the human condition.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the House passed a resolution that no suits for criminal cases should be initiated in ecclesiastical courts. The Commons committee also resolved that the church courts should not add excommunication, a penalty following a spiritual conviction, to criminal punishments. In the 1670s and 1680s an attempt had been made to disqualify from voting those who had been sentenced to excommunication, but this was eventually regarded as illegal.<sup>18</sup> A further resolution laid down that fines paid instead of a sentence of penance should be devoted to the poor law of the parish.<sup>19</sup>

In order to implement its spiritual jurisdiction over sex, the Church needed a means of discovering and prosecuting such offences. The mechanism used was that of churchwardens' reports to the archdeacon's annual visitation of the parishes in his archdeaconry. Gibson, for instance, included direct questions about sexual matters in his articles of enquiry, issued prior to his visitations as archdeacon of Surrey. He asked: 'are there any in your parish who lie under a common fame, or vehement suspicion, of adultery, fornication or incest?' Offenders identified in this way were presented by the churchwardens for punishment at the archdeacon's court. Gibson's visitation practices were so admired and copied that in 1717 he published his account of how to organise them, including the questions to be asked. It is not clear how many archdeacons took up Gibson's questions about sex, but it seems likely that most did so.<sup>20</sup>

The character of religious punishment of sexual offences was different from that of criminal penalties. The latter included elements of deterrence and exemplary punishment as a means of instilling norms into society and to persuade offenders not to repeat their behaviour and the community used the pillory to exact revenge and retribution. But spiritual punishments also sought, uniquely in this period, to achieve an inner transformation by seeking offenders' genuine remorse and regret, symbolised by the penitents' white wand and wearing of white raiment. Churchmen emphasised that punishment of sexual crimes was also an act of charity and compassion since it was aimed at defending the transgressor's salvation and chance of entry to heaven.<sup>21</sup>

### The Church and Fornication

The Church's position on fornication, which was defined as sex outside marriage, was clear and rooted in its condemnation in biblical teaching. In sexual matters ideas of communal guilt were gradually declining but as belief in individual responsibility for sin grew collective responsibility did not disappear completely. In 1690 William Barlow declared that adultery and fornication were 'distinct sins', the latter being 'the lower sort of uncleanness.'<sup>22</sup> Barlow urged his congregation to watch out for fornication and to challenge it in others. This communal responsibility for fornication was demonstrated in the financial consequences of the sin: a congregation might have responsibility for the children born from fornication, especially when 'so many base-got children are either murder'd as soon as born, or neglected or starv'd not long after their birth.' Barlow also argued that fornication struck at the heart of Trinitarian belief: it was a sin against God's creation, a sin against marriage instituted by Christ, and a sin against the Holy Spirit by defiling the body.<sup>23</sup> Such explicitly theological constructions of the nature of fornication exerted a strong force on the clergy who viewed such arguments as part of the Church's battle against Socinianism and Dissent.

Barlow also claimed that fornication was so widely known to be a sin that none could claim ignorance of it and therefore transgressors were wilfully separating themselves from God and the Church. He observed that fornication enslaved men and women to lust, and 'the slave to that tyrant is never at rest, no not so much as in the night when other slaves, tired with the toil of the forepassed day, take their ease.' Such a 'slave'

was robbed of peace. The mind which was focused on lust also turned to stratagems and tricks to indulge itself. Like others, Barlow saw a link between fornication and the theatre: 'one seeing a harlot going in her gaiety to the theatre wept to think of the pains the wicked took to go to Hell.' Finally a man robbed his family if he used their money to indulge his desire for fornication with prostitutes, and destroyed his body since lust 'impairs his health, shortens his life and hastens his death.'<sup>24</sup>

Barlow also emphasised that fornication robbed women of both virginity and reputation. He argued that the only solution was to shun fornicators and to have no commerce or conversation with them; and to avoid the idleness which often gave rise to lust. Drunkenness and gluttony led to fornication and he therefore advocated regular fasting to cleanse the body. Finally, he reminded his congregation that 'the eye of God is upon you.'<sup>25</sup>

Some saw a need to condemn fornication because they feared that adultery and fornication, and even polygamy, might be seen as lawful. It was assumed that, as access to the Bible increased, instances in the Old Testament of divorce, polygamy, and bigamy would come to the public's attention. As will be seen in chapter eight, polygamy was a topic which preoccupied eighteenth-century churchmen. This concern was the motive of the *Letter of Advice to a Friend Upon the Modern Argument of the Lawfulness of Simple Fornication, Half-Adultery and Polygamy* published in 1696. The author made clear that there was no doubt in people's minds that these activities were sins and unlawful, but that there was a tendency for men 'having their appetites unbridled' to find ways to justify their behaviour. The author reiterated that the Gospels condemned fornication, adultery and polygamy and that these sins affected people beyond the fornicators as well as damning them. He emphasised that there was no such thing as a 'tolerable' sin, and cited a consequence of adultery that was evident for all to see in royal and aristocratic houses:

King Charles II had no lawful issue: and his un-lawful was a Grief . . . to him, joining with the Seditious Party against him.<sup>26</sup>  
How many Noble Families in England might be brought as instances, to confirm this observation, whose Honours are fallen, or gone into Collateral Families, for want of lawful Heirs, from the most remarkable Corrupters of the Marriage Bed?<sup>27</sup>