



The Battle for
CHRISTIAN
BRITAIN

*Sex, Humanists and
Secularisation, 1945–1980*

CALLUM G. BROWN

The Battle for Christian Britain

Post-war British culture was initially dominated by religious-led sexual austerity and, from the sixties, by secular liberalism. Using five case studies of local licensing and a sixth on the BBC, conservative Christians are exposed here as the nation's censors, fighting effectively for purity on stage, screen and in public places. The Anglican-led Public Morality Council was astonishingly successful in restraining sex in London's media in the fifties, but a brazen sexualised culture thrived amongst the millions of tourists to Blackpool, whilst Glasgow and the Isle of Lewis were gripped by conservatism. But come the late 1960s, tourists took Blackpool's sexual liberalism home, whilst progressive Humanism burrowed into Parliament and the BBC to secularise moral reform and the national narrative. Using extensive archival research, Callum G. Brown adopts a secular gaze to show how conservative Christians lost the battle for the nation's moral culture.

Callum G. Brown is Professor of Late Modern European History at the University of Glasgow. A social historian specialising in secularisation and Humanism in nineteenth and twentieth century western society, he is the author of numerous publications including *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (2001), *Religion and the Demographic Revolution: Women and Secularisation in Canada, Ireland, UK and USA Since the 1960s* (2012) and *Becoming Atheist: Humanism and the Secular West* (2017).

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Preface

The scholar in search of surprises, paradoxes, unanswered puzzles of religious change and the origins of faith loss in the late modern (for some, postmodern) world, is drawn inexorably to the long 1950s (1945–63) and the long 1960s (1957–73). For all their overlap and length, these constituted two distinctive decades – the first kicking off with church growth unmatched since the Victorian era, the second with church collapse not witnessed before. The propinquity of ecclesiastical success with failure startled the churches then and should continue to do so now. Revisionist Christian historian seek to downplay organised religion's rise and fall that peaked between 1957 (the start of the sixties) and 1963 (the end of the fifties). The genesis of modern secular Britain lies more in that gap than in any other time. And in that gap, this book pinpoints sex as the British battleground where rapid downward spiral of organised religion commenced.

This is another of my books bringing a non-Christian gaze upon sex, secularisation, Humanists and the sixties. It surreptitiously upgrades my existing trilogy to a quartet. I started with *The Death of Christian Britain* (Routledge, 2001) in which I applied discourse analysis to establish the vigorous survival of dominant religiosity from 1800 to 1960 through the gendered dimensions of a discursive Christianity, but in which a narrative emerged of Christian cultural hegemony disintegrating in the sixties hand in hand, I suggested, with women's claim to comprehensive autonomy. New approaches were needed to better chronicle this. So, in *Religion and the Demographic Revolution* (Boydell, 2012) I examined the same secularisation as a demographic experience for women, in which discourse change interacted with women's life change (principally in ultra-low fertility and its implications for female education, working life and family formation). In the third book in the series, *Becoming Atheist* (Bloomsbury, 2017), I examined the experiential dimensions of losing religion, in which I again prioritised the gender differences for the sixties generation and women's new willingness to lose religion as a conjunction with a lived feminism. Now, in *The Battle for Christian Britain*, the same

context is examined with a fourth methodology – essentially archive-based documentary research into the myriad battle zones that arose as conservative Christian culture first peaked in influence in the 1950s, then crashed in ruins in the two decades following. This shift in method – from discourse to numbers to oral history to documents – is partly to demonstrate the multiple salience of faith loss to different branches of mid-twentieth-century British history writing, partly to demonstrate how historians of different specialisms – culture, population, feminism, church – each should gaze contextually across a wide gamut, and partly to emphasise the unprecedented significance of sixties-style historical change. Most importantly, multiple methodologies expose how weak an inward-gazing religious history can be.

Acknowledgements

Colleagues have been hugely helpful and influential in this project. Jim Tomlinson has mentored my writings for fifteen years, and did so again here with insights on argument and structure. Lori Beaman brought the freshness of a fellow traveller in non-religionist study, an eye for detail and more ideas than I can fully engage with at present. Lynn Abrams – cajoling, supportive and patient – donated a sharp feminist perspective as ever to my work. Andrew Copson (Humanists UK) and Lesley Hall (Wellcome Archive) kindly reviewed the chapter on Humanists, whilst the Revd Edward Bundock (my local vicar in Helhoughton) engaged with the issues in a creative and hugely knowledgeable manner. Sam Manning was generous in advice on cinema and culture in Sheffield, supplying his spreadsheet of cinema events and valuable comments. My fellow investigator Ealasaid Munro was generous with her understanding of Hebridean society on our research trip to Lewis in January 2017. I tapped my Glasgow colleague Tim Peacock for his expertise in scoping British security files for references to Humanists. David Hilliard checked in Australian sources for me concerning the PMC's first vice chairman, Alfred Barry. And Clive Field shared church attendance data for Blackpool. These kind people have saved me from errors of fact, morality and manners, filled in gaps and sparked in me new thoughts.

Students get more important the older I get, exposing the secular more stridently than I dare. The project arose in the early 2010s from dissertation work by Cait Ross who, as an undergraduate and master's student at University of Dundee, initiated research into the Public Morality Council and stimulated my thoughts. Emily van Blanken and Emma Partridge undertook extensive research for me in the popular culture and licensing system in Sheffield, whilst Rachel Cheng worked for me in the PMC records, and Mathilde Michaud transcribed my oral history interviews. This work was financially supported by a University of Glasgow College of Arts Internship and a School of Humanities research grant. Charlie Lynch, my doctoral student working on Scotland's sexual revolution of the sixties, brought many perspectives on both sex and secularism to my

attention. Paula Blair's doctoral work on obstetrics-related research at University of Glasgow has illuminated for me that field and the key figures of Ian Donald and Dugald Baird. I learned much from other dissertation students: Jamie Allan, Matthew Clarke, Owen McNeil, Suzie Richardson, Jessica Roper, Madeleine Scoular and Chloe Shepherd. Specific students helped with key research issues. Many other students have contributed ideas, sources and connections, especially those in my master's classes on secularisation, and my honours classes 'Atheists: A Social History' and 'Sex and Religion'.

Two key individuals assisted me greatly on my chapters on the BBC. David Kennard gave me munificent access to documents in his archive, whilst Keith Hindell was generous with his recollections of Madeleine Simms and the pro-choice movement of which he has been a central part for fifty years. David and Keith, both former BBC producers, gave me interviews essential to the chapters on the corporation. Additionally, I interviewed David Pollock of Humanists UK about his encounters with Edward Oliver. Thanks to all three for their fulsome interest in my work.

Lastly, I received tremendous help from archives and archivists in tracing documents, people and organisations: Susannah Rayner and William Johnstone at the Roman Catholic Westminster Archive, Stefan Dicker at Bishopsgate Archive, Lesley Hall at Wellcome Archive, Tony Sharkey at Blackpool Central Library and Archive, Sophie Hawkey-Edwards at Conway Hall Library and Archive (London), Louisa North at the BBC Written Archive Centre (Reading), Tim Knebal at Sheffield City Archive, Margaret Martin at Stornoway Central Library, Sally Kent at Jesuits in Britain Archives (Mount Street, London), as well as staff at Lambeth Palace Archive (London), London Metropolitan Archive, London School of Economics Archive, Highland Archive Centre (Inverness) and Glasgow City Archive.

With all that advice, help and generosity, errors and flaws will, as usual, be my responsibility.

Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Insemination
BA	Bishopsgate Archive
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBC WAC	BBC Written Archive Centre (Reading)
BCC	British Council of Churches
BCLA	Blackpool Central Library and Archive
BHA	British Humanist Association (now Humanists UK)
CHLA	Conway Hall Library and Archive
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CRAC	Central Religious Advisory Committee (of the BBC)
DG	Director General (of the BBC)
GCA	Glasgow City Archive
GLC	Greater London Council
HAC	Highland Archive Centre (Inverness)
HLRS	Homosexual Law Reform Society
IUPMP	<i>Internationale Union pour la Protection de la Moralité Publique</i>
LC	Lord Chamberlain
LCAO	London Committee Against Obscenity
LCC	London County Council
LCD	Lord Chamberlain's Department
LMA	London Metropolitan Archive
LPA	Lambeth Palace Archive
LSEA	London School of Economics Archive
MLDA	Moral Law Defence Association
M-O	Mass-Observation
MOH	Medical Officer of Health
NCB	National Coal Board
NSPVD	National Society for the Prevention of Venereal Disease
NSS	National Secular Society
NVALA	National Viewers' and Listeners' Association
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>

PCD	Public Control Department (of LCC)
PMC	Public Morality Council
RBD	Religious Broadcasting Department (of BBC)
RCWA	Roman Catholic Westminster (Archdiocesan) Archive
RPA	Rationalist Press Association
SA	Sheffield Archive
SCL	Stornoway Central Library
SMC	Social Morality Council
SPES	South Place Ethical Society
SPUC	Society for the Protection of Unborn Children
STIs	sexually transmitted infections (venereal disease)
VD	venereal disease
WA	Wellcome Archive

Part I

The Battle in Context

1 Introduction

Battles Galore

In January 1958, a woman from Crowborough in Sussex inquired hopefully as to whether there was a law against naked mannequins being displayed in drapers' windows.¹ She directed her question to the Public Morality Council (PMC) in London, Britain's leading moral vigilante organisation and longest-standing ecumenical body. The PMC was widely regarded as the religious authority on sexual morality in Britain, having been founded by the Church of England in 1899 to represent all the major Christian and Jewish churches on sexual issues. The 1950s was its heyday when it acted as the clearing house for forwarded complaints received by church leaders – including the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, the chief rabbi and the president of the Free Church Council. It wielded enormous influence in offices of state, local government, the police and the entertainment industry. Conservative Christianity in the post-war years was in its prime in Britain, with sex the litmus test of probity, authority, social order and religiosity. The vigilante was widely held in respect and alarm. The Crowborough complainant brings into sharp relief an expectation that the PMC could enforce a normative puritanical code, even upon a plaster composite representation of the human body largely devoid of anatomical detail.

This book is about the battle that erupted in the mid-twentieth century over the threat to Christian Britain that was feared would follow from three major menaces of the period: sex, Humanists and secularisation. For conservative Christians, the heart of all that was good about British culture was founded upon a religious reverence for decency and correctness in behaviour, rooted in a puritanical sexual code they averred was laid out in Scripture. This was interpreted practically by church

¹ LMA, A/PMC/63, PMC Correspondence and cuttings file 1952–59, letter from Miss [indecipherable] to PMC, 8 January 1958.

authorities and a Christian judiciary, enforced by religious-based policing, with Christians assisting as moral vigilantes watching for sexual misdemeanour and reporting it to relevant state authorities. They also watched for profane heterodoxy that challenged the code, and strained to ban it from press, broadcasting and the stage. Conservative Christians pinpointed this supposed threat as being led by organised non-religionists – atheists, freethinkers, rationalists, secularists and above all, in this period, Humanists. British Humanists constituted a tiny but increasingly organised group who, in addition to seeking freedom from persecution for their atheist and agnostic views, developed between the 1930s and 1970s a specific ethical polity based on the individual's right to control over their own body. With many coming from legal, medical and philosophy backgrounds, British Humanists sought legislative change in sexual affairs – including decriminalisation of homosexuality and medical abortion, marriage law reform and liberalisation of divorce, sexual education in schools, freedom of access to and advertising of contraception and an end to literary censorship on all grounds including sex. They also sought decriminalisation for suicide and attempted suicide, legalisation of voluntary euthanasia and approval for medical interventions in fertility promotion (artificial insemination) and fertility prevention (sterilisation). Holding this ethical polity together was a need to set the human body free from external, state-endorsed theocratic control.² But for Christian conservatives of the 1950s and 1960s, this collection of policies constituted a new and ethically dangerous credo that would cut the human body adrift from Christian theology, state control and sexual restraint, with all sorts of ramifications for the social order.³

In this way, sex became complexly and intensely entwined in post-war conservative Christian thought. The Humanist credo was perceived by conservatives as especially dangerous if combined with secularisation and the decay of popular faith, with the Cold War further elevating atheism to the status of traitorous adjunct to 'godless' communism. Sex was ensnared in a maze of thinking about religious faith, social order and the civil state that we would just not recognise let alone understand today – even in the churches from which this frantic panic has by and large either evaporated or been voluntarily suppressed to save public face. For this reason, our understanding of the way in which sex acted in the middle of the last century as the fuel in moral frenzy has not been

² This extensive Humanist agenda was laid out by the leading lawyer Glanville Williams, *The Sanctity of Life and the Criminal Law* (London, Faber and Faber, 1958).

³ For a conservative Christian's (Roman Catholic) rebuttal of William's agenda, see Norman St John-Stevan, *Life, Death and the Law* (London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1961).

appreciated fully. Often portrayed by historians of art and censorship as a simple struggle between heroic libertines and preposterous reactionaries,⁴ the threat of sexual revolution in the post-war decades was not a single engagement between two warring sides, but a whole series of differently patterned zones of 'combat'. It was a multifaceted affair deriving from the complexity of the puritanism that the culturally dominant Christians of the day were bent on preserving, extending and perfecting. Hence, the significance of sex and puritanism needs to be viewed on a wide spectrum of activity.

The result was a battle with at least seven different front-line zones. First was the struggle of conservative religionists, mainly of the Christian churches, to impose upon the British people a high degree of ignorance about the human body and sex, through perfecting moral vigilantism over print, stage, film, broadcasts and education. Second was the struggle waged, sometimes reluctantly, by local authorities on behalf of the churches and the constituency of conservative lay Christians, to impose moral puritanism upon the people through the licensing system for public venues – ranging across public houses, restaurants, dance halls, theatres, cinemas, coffee shops and advertising (especially of contraceptives and theatre shows). Third came the struggle between religionists on one side and organised non-religionists on the other – Humanists, secularists, agnostics and atheists – concerning the long-standing theocratic stranglehold of moral and medical law, and the aim they developed of pitching a Humanist plan for moral reform. Fourth was the contest waged by the same Humanists over the recently constructed Christian monopoly on moral and ethical broadcasting (mainly at the BBC but emulated from 1955 at ITV) as they sought entry to the airwaves to disseminate a non-religious view of morality and the material cosmos. Fifth was a discreet tussle in the 1960s between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church (with fallout amongst the Reformed and Free Churches, miffed at being sidelined) over which of the two could pick up the moral *baton* dropped in the face of the secular challenge. Those five frontlines of the battle occupy most of this study.

It is important to take note, however, of two more front lines that feature only tangentially in what follows. The sixth zone followed the ending of overt criminal prosecution for religious unbelief in the 1920s,

⁴ For which see Nicholas De Jongh, *Politics, Prudery and Perversions: The Censoring of the English Stage 1901–1968* (London, Methuen, 2001), esp. pp. 165–213. Some accounts only have censorship appearing with a walk-on part in the post-war liberationist culture narrative; see for example Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940* (London, Methuen, 1995), esp. pp. 139–40; Hewison, *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960–75* (London, Methuen, 1986), esp. pp. 195–97.

when there is suspicion that it was replaced by seemingly intermittent and mostly indirect surveillance imposed by the police and security service upon secularists, including those suspected of communist links, helping to bestow a legacy of social criminality upon non-believers in the Cold War era. The study of this theme after 1945 remains seemingly impossible, for two reasons: because British security files dealing with post 1945 atheists (even well-known ones who confessed to being interviewed by MI5, the Security Service) are unaccountably not listed, let alone opened for scrutiny; and because, unlike other nations, post-1958 security files were closed at the time of writing. And seventh, there was the contest *within* the churches between those with conservative and those with liberal views of sex and sexual culture – a shifting and sometimes imperceptible front line of long-term theological sniping that erupted into more organised doctrinal warfare in the 1960s and 1970s. This begat a version of ecclesiastical ‘culture wars’ over issues like gay sex and marriage, gender equality, abortion, contraception, medical intervention in fertility and infertility issues, censorship and voluntary euthanasia (or assisted suicide); this internecine culture war within many major churches has not yet relented in the twenty-first century. As with the role of the security service, the liberal-conservative struggle within organised Christianity awaits comprehensive scrutiny, but a recent edited collection by Alana Harris has demonstrated how this might be done (especially if transferred to Protestantism), most meaningfully by the skilled religious historian.⁵ Neither of these topics is given the space here that they deserve. This book, then, focusses on the way in which the Britain of the middle of the twentieth century was the site for the listed five zones of religious and cultural conflict. When considered in their cumulative impact, these zones witnessed amorphous fighting for the survival or dismantling of Christian Britain, with sometimes confused and overlapping running skirmishes that lasted, at their peak intensity, until the 1980s.

This was a period of dynamism in religious affairs. On the one hand, it is worth remembering just how much Christian renewal was in the air in the post-war years. Politicians across the continent, including in Britain, were heralding ‘Christian democracy’ as the moral, anti-materialist panacea for the wrongs of Europe in war and peace, and even socialists were morally conservative.⁶ Conservative Christians feared by turns the

⁵ Alana Harris (ed.), *The Schism of ‘68: Catholicism, Contraception and Humanae Vitae in Europe, 1945–1975* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

⁶ Sir Stafford Cripps, *Towards Christian Democracy* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1945).

atheist, the communist, the feminist, the liberal theologian, the wavering church leader, the medical reformer, the capitalist of the big cultural industries, the 'advanced' comic, the script writer, the artistic entrepreneur of the intellectual middle classes, the BBC producer, the sexually precocious and the 'invert', and the underworld pimp and sex slaver. At the outset in the 1940s and early 1950s, for all that the struggle was perceived as mammoth, there was confidence amongst conservative religionists that moral regulation was in good working order and being serviced by new legislation. International co-operation was developing to combat the spread of sexual 'filth', and governments and parliamentarians were receptive to the mushrooming number of petitions and delegations from churches and moral vigilante groups. Conservative Christians believed that there was universal recognition of where moral righteousness was located, and that there was no serious intellectual or theological opposition to sexual restraint as the undefiled backbone of British values. Moreover, with individuals adopting moral respectability with some vigour amidst the moral return to normalcy after the war, the mood of the nation seemed unopposedly for the promotion of that restraint. In the 1940s and 1950s there were votes in moral self-control, making the twenty years following the end of the Second World War one of invigoration and advancement of conservative morality.

On the other hand, the place of religion in intellectual, governmental and popular culture was being challenged and, from the 1960s, very successfully so. Liberal theologies came to contest the agenda of the conservative religionists; in the *Lady Chatterley* censorship trial of 1960, witnesses for the defence included church representatives, and an extensive recent historiography attributes the liberal Christian cause with fundamental shifts in the culture of the nation in the 'long sixties'. But more challenging still was the evolution of the organised Humanist movement – which, amongst other things, equalled the Christian presence amongst Chatterley witnesses.⁷ Non-religionists got better organised in the 1950s and 1960s, including internationally, and, though small in number, set down the first direct challenges to their criminalisation and exclusion from the public sphere. Of even greater significance was the challenge mounted by non-religionists to the churches' theological

⁷ For radical Christians at *Chatterley*, see the evidence of Robinson, Hopkinson and Milford. For Humanists, see the evidence of E. M. Forster, James Hemming and Noel Annan, all in C. H. Rolph (ed.), *The Trial of Lady Chatterley: Regina v. Penguin Books Limited* (London, Penguin, 1960). On the Christian side, see Mark Roodhouse, 'Lady Chatterley and the Monk: Anglican Radicals and the Lady Chatterley Trial of 1960', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* vol. 59 (2008), pp. 475–99. Sadly, no equivalent analysis of the Humanist contribution yet exists.

stranglehold of key legislation dealing with sex and the human body. By the 1970s, British public culture was witnessing the undoing of Christian moral hegemony and legislative monopoly. This book is about how this transition was constituted of a series of combative encounters.

This Book's Interventions

The book intervenes in a number of key issues surrounding scholarly understanding of the cultural nature of twentieth-century Britain and its change in the critical mid-century decades between 1945 and 1980. These issues are interlinked.

The first intervention is to promote an enlarged place for religion in the secular history of British culture of the century. Many historians of sexuality and culture have explored the conservative sexual context of the 1940s and 1950s and the ways by which it unravelled. The literature on this has long been infected with both a focus on the woes of the political classes and a London-centrism, notably by scholarship on the 'swinging sixties'. Whilst Richard Davenport-Hines has marked 1963 as the changeover year in politics, class and deference due to the Profumo affair,⁸ the wider London focus has recently been taken to a new level, and brought earlier in the period, by Frank Mort and Judith Walkowitz's major studies of the capital's mid-twentieth-century sexual culture. The most convincing case has been Mort's, where, in his study of London between 1953 and 1963, he has pinpointed in the capital an emerging series of cultural beacons strongly themed by homosexuality and prostitution – a revived high society, dazzling crime narratives that obsessed the nation, government entanglements in sex culture, the commercialisation of Soho and scandals of various sorts. Mort places homosexuality as a major unifying theme across the decade, and London as the reinvigorated heart of the national consciousness of sexual permissiveness.⁹ With a very similar intellectual outcome, Judith Walkowitz has presented in her study of *Nights Out* in London an argument intensifying the supposed distinctive cultural cosmopolitanism of large cities and – like Mort – the key role of Soho in the life of twentieth-century Britain.¹⁰ But these narratives elevating Soho do not explain the sixties and national cultural change. Rather than seeds of transformative sexual and

⁸ Richard Davenport-Hines, *An English Affair: Sex, Class and Power in the Age of Profumo* (London, Harper Press, 2013).

⁹ Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ Judith Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2012).

intellectual change being flung, centrifuge-like, from Soho to the nation, the present book contextualises London amidst the claims for attention accruing to the regions, pits a seaside resort directly against Soho for its significance in cultural sexualisation of the working classes, shows that even in a northern industrial city a sexual revolution was just as much underway as in metropolitan London and examines the structural reasons that delayed change in the public cultures of two Scottish case studies. The present book contests the Mort-Walkowitz narrative in much the same way that Beth Bailey challenged a cosmopolitan-centred narrative of the American sexual revolution, finding it strong in the Bible Belt city of Lawrence, Kansas – which she described as ‘the state that most consistently represents the antithesis of bicoastal sophistication ... the ultimate provincial place, the ultimate not-New York’.¹¹ The task here is to divert attention from a sexually *avant-garde* cosmopolitan sexual-literary elite to a series of erupting battles, some in London, but some rooted in the regions in which conservative Christianity found itself in confrontation with rising pan-class sexual liberalism, a youth culture ill-disposed to deference and the establishment and declining religious values. This study complicates the sexual geography of mid-twentieth-century Britain, and proposes multiple realms of battle where Christian Britain met the power of those striving to facilitate the autonomy of the individual.

To do this, the book deals in detail, in a way not done before, with the operation of moral vigilantism in post-war Britain, especially in London in which, despite the scale of the moral problem that the metropolis presented the churches, was a place in which vigilantism had its most vigorous presence. More than that, metropolitan moral vigilantism was a surprisingly successful force, as we shall see, restraining libertine culture, to an extent corralling it within Soho, and within that quarter keeping it constantly under the cosh of daily surveillance by paid and unpaid agents of conservative Christianity. But Soho cannot stand as a cipher for Britain as a whole, nor even as the most important source of liberalisation of culture. The regionally diverse story of moral culture is told through studies of the licensing regimes of five places – London, Blackpool, Sheffield, Glasgow and the Isle of Lewis – to reveal the regional specificities of the nation’s official moral culture, and the localities’ different governmental and ecclesiastical mechanisms, their varying moral panics and the very different timings and trajectories of change to moral culture. London joins Glasgow and the Western Isles – the ultimate not-London,

¹¹ Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 4.

in Beth Bailey's rhetoric, if you will – as well morally policed, rather usurping the image that scholars have attributed to the capital, whilst Blackpool and Sheffield display how much northern England contributed to the liberalisation that lay behind the sixties cultural revolution. The book does this by looking at licensing, moral panics, religious vigilantism and sexual cultures before and after the watershed of the mid-1960s, to demonstrate just how complicated is the story of the ways in which Britain's conservative religious culture lost vigour. In the process, we see how historians of censorship have been too narrow in painting what was going on as mainly a bunch of freedom-loving arts liberals challenging unspeakably condemnatory moral diehards of the churches. So, the aim here is to put religion much more firmly, and complexly, into the secular historian's narrative of how Britain became a more civilised nation of progressive moral culture in the mid-twentieth century.

The second intervention offered in this volume is in relation to religious historians' narrative of what happened in twentieth-century Britain. Religion – its history, character and salience in that place and period – is overwhelmingly in the hands of religious scholars and those embedded in church history, faith history and religious studies. Much of the scholarship that has emerged since 2000 has served up a sweeping revisionism comprising various elements. Principally, this rests upon a denial that Britain secularised in the 1960s and after – an approach that leads some religious historians to traduce 'secularisation', quite satisfactorily defined in 1966 by Bryan Wilson as the declining social significance of religion,¹² as a teleological and ideological concept of anti-religious people, rather than as a valid concept, empirically measurable, of historical change. Instead, they portray religious changes as processes internal to religion – a re-arrangement of faith within Christianity and liberalisation of the Christian self, driven by baby boomers becoming spiritual 'seekers', and believing (in God) but not belonging (to churches).¹³ Not all of this literature pulls in the same direction, producing its own contradictions. But a collective consequence has been the

¹² Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Perspective* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966), p. 14.

¹³ Amongst the significant corpus of revisionist Christian literature, see Grace Davie, *Religion on Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994); Jane Garnett, Matthew Grimley, Alana Harris, William Whyte and Sarah Williams (eds.), *Redefining Christian Britain: Post 1945 Perspectives* (London, SCM Press, 2006); Nigel Yates, *Love Now, Pay Later? Sex and Religion in the Fifties and Sixties* (London, SPCK, 2010); Sam Brewitt-Taylor, 'Christianity and the Invention of the Sexual Revolution in Britain 1963–1967', *The Historical Journal* vol. 60 (2017), pp. 519–46.

narrowing of religious history's engagement with wider social and cultural history of the post-war period, the increasing denial of change to religion being impacted by forces external to it (by society) and the paucity of non-ecclesiastical sources deployed as evidence on these themes. One of the core topics of this revisionism has been promulgated by an argument that liberal Christian theology broke out from the cloisters and university colleges in the 1950s and 1960s to trigger the religious crisis of the period as an internal, though in this narrative curiously non-rancorous, victory for liberal progressive Christianity in many areas.¹⁴ With very few exceptions,¹⁵ the revisionist literature emanating from religious history is one-sided by concentrating on the progressive tendencies of supposedly 'radical' Christians, especially in the Church of England. Such a focus resonates with many religious historians' inclinations, but deflects attention from the obvious: that whilst many Christian Churches were at least partly liberalised, neither the Church of England nor Britain as a whole ever came to be dominated by a liberal or radical religious culture. That delusion – that what we have now is a liberal and civilised Christian nation – needs to be confronted, and one way to do that (there are several) is through historical analysis. This book does it with an alternative narrative tracing the impact of conservative religion upon civil institutions charged with managing the nation's public culture. We focus here upon conservative Christians sitting astride the dominant public religious culture of the nation in a variety of organisations in the 1940s and 1950s, then being challenged in the 1960s and 1970s and in effect overthrown from hegemony (both in the country and in the churches). And rather than peaceable, this was a significantly rancorous transition.

The third intervention is to re-balance the same religious-history narrative from its preoccupation with the relatively *mild* progressivism of liberal Christians in mid-century with the more radical, and – in most realms – ultimately victorious progressivism of Humanists.¹⁶ Some liberal Christians raised their voices for some forms of legal reform, though rarely without sustaining the 'sinfulness' of things like gay sex, suicide

¹⁴ Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007); Timothy Willem Jones, *Sexual Politics in the Church of England, 1857–1957* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013); Sam Brewitt-Taylor, *Christian Radicalism in the Church of England the Invention of the British Sixties, 1957–1970* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018). See my riposte to McLeod in Callum Brown 'What Was the Religious Crisis of the 1960s?' *Journal of Religious History* vol. 34 (2010), pp. 468–79.

¹⁵ One being Harris (ed.), *Schism*.

¹⁶ The one major area of failure of Humanist campaigning in the 1960s was in relation to voluntary euthanasia.

and divorce, and often obtained ecclesiastical agreement very late in the process of campaigning and legislating. The book introduces Humanist leadership in modern ethics, with a progressive agenda to change legislation, the control of public culture, government policy and reshape narratives about human morality and origins told by the nation to itself. From a one-sided impression of social reform, this book tilts the story towards a rapidly marching phalanx of people of no religion who are currently pretty much invisible in the historical narrative of cultural and moral change in twentieth-century Britain. This book begins the process of inserting them in the varied stories of secularisation and the end of deference, and challenges Hugh McLeod's balm to worried church people that the 'civilised country' (of which he and I both speak in the 1960s)¹⁷ was of theological design rather than of the grinding down of conservative Christianity in the public sphere by changing popular taste, secular advance and church disaffiliation.

The fourth major intervention this book makes is in relation to the sexual history of the British nation. Much has been written about sex and cultural change in the mid-twentieth century, but insufficient attention has been paid to the diversity of intersections between sex and religion. Previous studies tend to come from religious historians dwelling upon sexual policy change within the churches and on the churches' progressive roles in selected fields of national politics; this literature often belongs to denominational ecclesiastical history, with an introspective gaze, ambition and purpose usually extolling the liberal Christian legacy of the 1960s. Notwithstanding the importance of that historiography, fuller understanding of the sexual revolutions – heterosexual, homosexual, fertility, censorship legislation and advancing women's autonomy – requires a fitting together of the religious and the secular. The religious-history literature focusses almost entirely on the civil war without wounds within the churches between liberals and conservatives over sexual issues, much of it in a very short period between 1965 and 1967 when Anglican bishops, as David Steel MP put it in relation to abortion, 'eventually tottered off the fence'.¹⁸ Thus, the reader might get the impression from the weight of articles that the Church of England was responsible for decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967. Some liberal Christians, including the most advanced theologian, Derrick Sherwin Bailey, argued for decriminalisation, but they did so with retention of the concept of the 'sinfulness' of things like gay sex, suicide and

¹⁷ He speaks of it at McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, pp. 213–39.

¹⁸ Madeleine Simms and Keith Hindell, *Abortion Law Reformed* (London, Peter Owen, 1971), p. 8.

divorce.¹⁹ The real radical contributions, those advocating equality in law and morality, arose from homosexual campaigners, feminists and liberal psychologists, medics and lawyers, most of whom were Humanists. As a result, what is missed in the religious-narrative historiography is the campaigning work that had been building since the late 1930s by reformers outwith the churches, in Humanist utopian groups, and who identified the churches as the problem, not the solution, in advancing legal reform in sexual law. In [Chapter 8](#), we examine key Humanists who in the post-war decades identified the churches as the main obstacle to sexual reform and to establishing a modern moral education.

The fifth and final intervention is to show how the religious contribution to the nature of the establishment in Britain changed between 1945 and 1980. The establishment is an important concept in British civil perception of the twentieth century, generally taken to be rooted and renewed in the liaisons and attitudes inculcated in English public schools and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and bearing fruit in the privileged interlocking of the political, landed, military, civil service, judicial, broadcasting and ecclesiastical worlds. The book posits that after some strengthening in the 1940s and 1950s, the religious dimension of the establishment was rather forcibly diminished in the 1960s and 1970s. The strengthening started in the Second World War as the church sector acquired, largely through unchallenged reassignment to itself, new roles in national morale, inculcating a renewed ecclesiastical confidence in the possibility of invigorating the religious condition of Britain, a condition which church leaders had come to perceive as weakening in the later 1930s. For the Church of England, there was a sense that the war had fortified its position in the lifeblood of the nation, merging faith, morality and service in its establishment role, and strengthened the ability of its leaders to literally stroll from Lambeth Palace to Whitehall (notably the Home Office and 10 Downing Street) and remonstrate quite successfully on some matter of moral law. The war boosted church influence in one particular way. It gave to the Church of England a key role in the moral management of BBC staffing and output of religious and ethical broadcasting, and, as the corollary, giving to the BBC a central position in the culture and religious life of the nation. Religious content became a very important feature of broadcasting, with the result that it acquired a crucial status within those mainstream churches upon which access to the airwaves was conferred. But this all changed in the 1960s and 1970s, and this book examines some of the ways in which religious narratives became

¹⁹ See his evidence in Brian Lewis (ed.), *Wolfenden's Witnesses: Homosexuality in Postwar Britain* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 233, 237–41.

challenged by atheistical and Humanistic ones. In a subtle way, the establishment changed character, with the BBC becoming initially a major focus of battle to sustain the Christian character of the nation, but then flipped to become a platform for cultural secularisation. The outcome was backlash as moral vigilantism passed from a neutered religious establishment to the freelance ‘pirates’ of vigilance led by the redoubtable Mary Whitehouse.

Christians’ Fears and Hopes

The churches showed themselves very worried between 1945 and 1980. There was a distinctive peak to the efforts of the Christian community to tackle impending crises. Certainly, the churches were in a vigorous mode as soon as the war ended, and a sense of pan-European culpability in the Holocaust, racism and imperialism triggered a mood for moral atonement, inspiring various theological, spiritual and artistic ventures. There were programmes for evangelisation, the development of new missionary formats (including radio mission, Christian commandoes and, in the opposite direction, a return to the conversion of the congregation), and co-operation with missionaries and crusades (led by evangelicals like Billy Graham, Catholic preachers like Father Patrick Peyton and by agents of Moral Rearmament [MRA]) spirited by American religious liberality across the Atlantic to convert the old country.²⁰ There were innovations in Christian art and culture, notably in drama, with several religious groups (including the Church of Scotland and MRA) buying theatres to stage plays dealing with religious and moral improvement.²¹ The Edinburgh Festival of Music and Drama was founded in 1947 as a moral rather than tourist venture by the city’s corporation, which invited the Church of Scotland to preside at huge open-air Festival Sabbath services in Princes Street Gardens that brought the surrounding streets and hillsides to a standstill as hundreds of thousands of people came to listen, sing and pray.²² Though the outcomes of religious evangelisation

²⁰ Alana Harris and Martin Spence, “‘Disturbing the Complacency of Religion’? The Evangelical Crusades of Dr Billy Graham and Father Patrick Peyton in Britain, 1951–54’, *Twentieth Century British History* vol. 18 (2007), pp. 481–513.

²¹ From the late 1940s to mid-1970s, the Church of Scotland owned the Gateway Theatre in Edinburgh’s Leith Walk, whilst from the 1940s to the 1990s MRA owned the Westminster Theatre in London, each used for moral dramas.

²² *The Scotsman* quoted in Callum Brown, ‘Spectacle, Restraint and the Twentieth-Century Sabbath Wars: The “Everyday” Scottish Sunday’, in L. Abrams and C. G. Brown (eds.), *A History of Everyday Life in Twentieth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 171.

in post-war Britain were at best mixed,²³ the forces of religious conservatism fought during the next twenty years with tenacity and widespread public complicity to keep libertinism, nudity, sex and radicalism out of art – including Edinburgh's Festival and Fringe performances and art exhibitions – only surrendering to the lost cause in the late 1960s.²⁴

Whilst religious historians tend to portray the churches as engaged in the post-war period in conceptual advances in ideas on sex and secularisation that led the nation,²⁵ two forms of narrative prelude that given here. The first is from Peter Hitchens, a conservative Christian commentator who in *The Rage against God* provides a book that fully acknowledges (and abhors) the role of the 1960s in the entwining of declining sexual morality with youth protest and secularisation.²⁶ The second is from Adrian Bingham who points to the way the press straddled a line between sexual prurience and religious-framed moralising, fostering moral panic and titillation that peaked in the 1950s in the *News of the World* with a readership 'reach' of more than half the adult population of Britain.²⁷ Panics became official. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the police and Home Office noted with alarm the rise of cases of underage sex classically involving girls aged 13–15 and boys 16–18; between 1957 and 1961 there was an 89 per cent rise in convictions for underage sex in England and Wales, accompanied by rising numbers of girls taken before the courts for being in 'moral danger' for liaising with black men.²⁸ It was in the late 1960s and early 1970s that press panics ballooned: over 'the promiscuous girl' whose sexual restraint was supposedly undermined by the rise of pop culture; 'wife swapping' in the

²³ There were crusades, parish evangelisation and 'revival' (in the Isle of Lewis for instance), and vigorous growth for the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland. But evidence for low support also abounded. For regional examples, see the case studies in [Chapters 3 and 4](#).

²⁴ Angela Bartie, *The Edinburgh Festivals: Culture and Society in Post-War Britain* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

²⁵ This religious-history literature also seeks to divert attention from the declining social significance of religion: Harris (ed.), *Schism*; Brewitt-Taylor, 'Christianity and the Invention'; Harris, 'The Invention of a "Secular Society"? Christianity and the Sudden Appearance of Secularization Discourses in the British National Media, 1961–4,' *Twentieth Century British History* vol. 24 (2013), pp. 327–50; Laura Monica Ramsay, 'The Ambiguities of Christian Sexual Discourse in Post-War Britain: The British Council of Churches and Its Early Moral Welfare Work,' *Journal of Religious History* vol. 40, (2016), pp. 82–103; Laura Monica Ramsay, 'The Church of England, Homosexual Law Reform, and the Shaping of the Permissive Society, 1957–1979,' *Journal of British Studies* vol. 57 (2018), pp. 108–37.

²⁶ Peter Hitchens, *The Rage against God* (London, Bloomsbury, 2010).

²⁷ Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918–1978* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 19 and passim.

²⁸ SA, *Chief Constable of Sheffield, Annual Report 1962*, p. 15.

new housing estates; sex shops; and recreational drug use with which many in the churches became obsessed.²⁹ Divorce remained until 1969 in the hands of open courts for which huge numbers of husbands – rarely wives – contrived with paid escorts and hired photographers to provide evidence of supposed adultery to demonstrate the ‘fault’ the courts required in the breakdown in marriage. Sex was the acceptable ‘fault’, where violence, desertion or mental incapacity were more shaming.³⁰ This narrative, being increasingly better told (and from different positions), is the one underlying this book.

Science was also part of the story. In mid-century, as the opportunities for medical assistance to individuals mushroomed, the Christian churches levered themselves into postures of moral madness. In 1946 a conference organised by the Public Morality Council for Anglican, Roman Catholic, Jewish and Free church theologians and medics agreed unanimously (excluding only the Quakers) that artificial insemination (AI) – the technological possibilities for which remained in the future – would not be morally acceptable because it would inevitably involve the sins of either male masturbation (with a father’s sperm) or female adultery (with a stranger donor’s sperm).³¹ Within two decades the Protestant churches came to be broadly accepting of the techniques of IVF, but when the world’s first test-tube baby, Louise Brown, was born in Oldham in 1978 the leader of the Scottish Catholic Church, Cardinal Gordon Gray, duly denounced the occasion. In a recorded interview with an astonished Libby Purves, the Catholic-raised BBC radio presenter, his eminence said he did not oppose the procedure because of the science but because of ‘the sinful means to produce the male sperm’. Sensing a huge embarrassment likely to engulf the Church and Catholics more broadly, Purves reported that she ‘buried’ the interview.³² Conservative Christianity was floating away from public moral culture.

²⁹ On the panic over drugs and moral change, see James H. Mills, *Cannabis Nation: Control and Consumption in Britain 1928–2008* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. pp. 62–155. In tabloids’ panic (*Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Express* and *News of the World*), wife swapping peaked between 1970 and 1979. Jamie Allan, ‘Wife-Swapping: How the Moral Panic Developed in the British Popular Press, 1965–1985’, unpublished MA diss. University of Glasgow, 2018, pp. 14–26. For sex shops, see Roger Davidson, *Illicit and Unnatural Practices: The Law, Sex and Society in Scotland since 1900* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp.153–76.

³⁰ Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, pp. 133–44.

³¹ Public Morality Council, *Artificial Human Insemination: Report of a Conference* (London, Heinemann, 1948), passim.

³² Libby Purves, *Radio: A True Love Story* (London, Coronet Books, 2002), p. 183.

Transatlantic Narratives

Sex rarely stood alone in church concerns. Humanists and atheists in the United Kingdom and in North America were identified as part of the cause of the collapse of conservative sexual values. The Cold War distinctively united the external threat with the internal threat – the communist and atheist overseas with the sexual deviant and atheist at home. The story of how sex and secularism were jointly envisioned as threatening national stability of the nation has been well told for many decades by American historians, particularly historians of sexuality and of women, who provide a well-founded narrative of, first, the power of resurgent conservative religionism in church, politics and everyday life in the 1945–63 period, followed by, second, the breakthrough of a complex sexual revolution commixing hetero and homosexual elements with radical, liberal and racial dimensions.³³ The narratives these scholars told have established a widespread consensus, rarely challenged in over a quarter of a century of scholarship.³⁴ Setting the story against the backdrop of Cold War politics and McCarthyism, this research explored the power of moral censorship, religious discourses and the impediment to flowering of youth culture prior to the 1960s.

Some recent work on the USA has more explicitly focussed on secularism, and some of it on links to sex. Most emanates from the religious-history sphere, and takes some of the presumptions of the faith historian for granted. It is taken for granted, first, that in the American case the USA has long been and remains ‘a godly nation’ for which the term ‘atheist’ is a trigger to near universal hostility. It is taken for granted, second, that the atheist has encompassed a wide selection of freethinkers, infidels, ‘apostates’ and agnostics, ranging from the noble public speakers in the Ingersoll tradition, to the wayward and unpatriotic

³³ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, Basic Books, 2008, orig. 1988); Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing up Female in the Fifties* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1992); Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Boston, Harvard University Press, 1999); Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1997). In the same vein, see also Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and Its Aftershocks* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2002); Margaret Lambert Bendroth, *Growing up Protestant: Parents, Children, and Mainline Churches* (New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 2002); Doug Owsam, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996) and Ronald B. Flowers, *Religion in Strange Times: The 1960s and 1970s* (Macon, GA, Mercer University Press, 1984).

³⁴ One of the few to do so was the late Alan Petigny in his *The Permissive Society: America, 1941–1965* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009).

communists chased by McCarthyism.³⁵ Studies of freethinkers and atheists in the USA have long tended to be sold on the peculiarity or outlandishness of the leaders, and on the crazy fates of some of them – notably the founder and leader of American Atheists, Madalyn Murray O’Hair, branded by some as the most hated woman in America, who was found murdered in 1995 in odd circumstances taken to besmirch the atheist cause.³⁶ But the position of atheism is changing slowly in American historiography, with a limited ‘normalisation’ of the atheist as a figure in the American cultural landscape. Yet even here, the branding is to the dangerous side of normality. Leigh Eric Schmidt ties his 2016 caricature of ‘village atheists’ in the USA to bedrocks of traditional discourse, with three of his four case studies framed by conventional anti-atheist rhetoric: one tying the atheist to religion (in ‘the secular pilgrim’), one to anti-god, foul-mouthed, law breaking (in ‘the blasphemous’) and one to sexual deviance (in ‘the obscene atheist’).³⁷ There are welcome developments of more sympathetic treatments, especially from the social sciences (including the Zuckerman, Galen and Pasquale interdisciplinary study of the demographics, psychology and post-religious profile of *The Non-religious*),³⁸ and by historians in neighbouring Canada.³⁹ Yet, by referring to the atheist so often using largely hostile in-period terminology like ‘infidels’ and ‘apostates’, even some sympathetic treatments in North America leave enhanced the sense of the atheist’s deviancy in the history narrative of a mainly religious nation.

As in Schmidt’s study of an ‘obscene atheist’, the way in which people of no religion enter historiography conforms to a long-standing American pattern of casting them as sexually deviant and usually unpatriotic. It is

³⁵ Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York, Metropolitan Books, 2004); Jacoby, *The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll and American Freethought* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2014); Fred Whitehead and Verle Muhrer (eds.), *Freethought on the American Frontier* (Amherst, NY, Prometheus, 1992); Evelyn Kirkley, *Rational Mothers and Infidel Gentlemen: Gender and American Atheism, 1865–1915* (Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press, 2000).

³⁶ Bryan F. Le Beau, *The Atheist: Madalyn Murray O’Hair* (New York, New York University Press, 2003).

³⁷ These are three of the four chapter headings in Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Village Atheists: How America’s Unbelievers Made Their Way in a Godly Nation* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2016).

³⁸ Phil Zuckerman, Luke Galen and Frank Pasquale, *The Nonreligious: Understanding Secular People and Societies* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016).

³⁹ Lynne Marks, *Infidels and the Damn Churches: Irreligion and Religion in Settler British Columbia* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2017); Tina Block, ‘Ungodly Grandmother: Marian Sherman and the Social Dimensions of Atheism in Postwar Canada’, *Journal of Women’s History* vol. 26 (2014), pp. 132–54; and Tina Block, *The Secular Northwest: Religion and Irreligion in Everyday Postwar Life* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2016).

the peculiarity of the USA in the West to have a constitution which grants to secularists low-hanging fruit to fight for in the courts. The First Amendment's separation of church and state focusses the minds of American non-belief organisations, and at various levels of government gives rise to a steady stream of court actions, many of which are successful, to push back American religionists' attempts to bring prayers into school or to erect the stone block of the Ten Commandments outside courthouses. There is genuine pride on the part of many American atheists at being able to regard themselves as patriotic and at one with the founding fathers of the nation. Where once atheists were cast as communist traitors, since the 1960s many have been anything but, and include significant numbers of entrepreneurs and republicans. But this rising demographic diversification of American non-believers has yet to impact squarely upon the narrative of atheist history in the country which remains fixedly on exploiting a seemingly deep-seated caricature of obscene and un-American deviance.

Adjoining this American-led narrative of the deviant atheist have been international narratives concerning the rising threat of immorality. Though much of the study of public morality has been led by religious historians, there have been areas in which specialist media historians have held sway – such as in the study of the history of censorship of theatre, film and book. One notable international study undertaken by Christoph Knill and others at the University of Munich has chronicled the history of moral regulation in nineteen European nations between 1960 and 2010 by quantifying morality policy change, providing a rare narrative of the law in areas including pornography, prostitution, abortion, euthanasia and homosexuality.⁴⁰ In the process of mapping the religious and secularist pressures influencing moral law between the restrictive and the permissive, the authors spent considerable time modelling paradigms of morality change amidst the mosaic of political compromises. Whilst the researchers point to the role of major forces such as secularisation, individualisation and modernisation, the study ultimately loses out by missing detail, nuance and paradox in relation to the religious and ecclesiastical factors at work in different nations and their regions. It resorts, as in some earlier studies, to categorising nations into 'the religious world' and 'the secular world', based on the nature of the political party systems or religious identity, leading inevitably to crude

⁴⁰ Christoph Knill, Christian Adam and Steffen Hurka (eds.), *On the Road to Permissiveness? Change and Convergence of Moral Regulation in Europe* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015).

polarisations.⁴¹ Still, notwithstanding conceptual oversimplifications, the Knill et al. study is useful in its comparative design, in part for highlighting contexts of exceptions to rules, but even more importantly for demonstrating the broad movement of European nations in the same direction at the same time. The same was shown by the more focussed, but yet still comparative study by Kelly Kolman of the development of same-sex marriage in EU nations from the 1980s onwards, in which she argued that there was little international movement for change, but rather change came about as a result of the working out of changing popular attitudes, pressure-group activities and political swings within each nation.⁴²

In contrast to both the USA and comparative work, in Britain this story explaining morality and legal change since 1960 has been much less comprehensively developed. On the positive side, there have been many excellent studies by broadly secular social historians focussing on the history of the family, singlehood and sex in popular culture, and recent work on the cultural history of the Cold War.⁴³ Yet, many generalist historians have argued that the decade from 1945 to 1956 was one of consensus, characterised by being as Dominic Sandbrook described it ‘an essentially satisfied country’ based on contentment and unity.⁴⁴ This has been a view rightly challenged, by, amongst others, Steve Nicholson in his detailed review of the censorship system of British theatre where he shows there were immense struggles underway between Christian conservatives, pragmatic civil servants and libertine and adventurous artists and playwrights over what culture was, what parts of the human body might be revealed on stage and about whether Jesus Christ or a deity could be featured in art.⁴⁵

The problem is that this religion-defined combat for popular culture has not been systematically studied. For one thing, key religious historians have shown little inclination to perceive any particular dominance of conservative Christianity in the 1940s and 1950s, preferring instead to adopt or accede to the narrative of gradualist liberal Christian

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–40.

⁴² Kelly Kollman, *The Same-Sex Unions Revolution in Western Democracies: Internal Norms and Domestic Policy Change* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2013).

⁴³ Mort, *Capital*; Walkowitz, *Nights Out*; Hilary Land, Jane Lewis and Kathleen Kiernan, *Lone Motherhood in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998); Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*; Nicholas Barnett, *Britain’s Cold War: Culture, Modernity and the Soviet Threat* (London, IB Taurus, 2018).

⁴⁴ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London, Abacus, 2006), p. 66.

⁴⁵ Steve Nicholson, *The Censorship of British Drama 1900–1968: Volume Three: The Fifties* (Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 2011), pp. 9–10.