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Towards a biblical mind

The ethic of innocence:

lessons from early nineteenth-century Christian moral reformers

by David Sandifer

Summary
Apart from costume dramas, Victorianism has on the whole not aged well. In particular, its moral posture is often associated with rigidity and propriety, not to mention hypocrisy. This paper will seek to retrieve for closer examination one aspect of 'Victorian values' – the 'ethic of innocence' – which animated Christian reformers of the Wilberforce generation, and motivated many of their efforts. It will further attempt to draw some lessons from this mentality for Christians seeking to life faithful lives in the often bewildering cultural context of the twenty-first century.

Introduction

Momentous cultural shifts took place during early nineteenth-century Britain (circa 1790 to 1840). Attitudes to public morality were transformed and Christian moral reformers were at the forefront of these changes. At their heart lay a heightened sensitivity about sexual purity and modesty, particularly public affronts to modesty. These cultural changes coalesced into a set of attitudes, sometimes derisively referred to as 'Victorian prudery', which in many ways came to dominate the rest of the century. Two hundred years later, this mentality seems almost impossibly quaint, and an irretrievable perspective in our post-sexual revolution society.

Today, even Christians are likely to find some of the concerns of that era misdirected, even odd. Yet at a time when many Christians are struggling to live faithful lives amidst ever stronger cultural cross-currents, it is worth reconsidering the achievements of Christians of an earlier time. This is not only to avoid what C. S. Lewis called 'chronological snobbery' – the mistake of thinking we are intrinsically wiser than our forebears – but because the questions which these Christians were wrestling with bear directly on some of the most topical concerns of our time: how should we respond to the on-going cultural fallout from the sexual revolution? How do we shape Christian minds in the context of the information explosion of the internet age, with its attendant temptations to distraction and obsessiveness? And how do we disciple Christians who are tempted daily by always-accessible pornography? This paper will seek to gain a better understanding of the mentality which directed the efforts to reform the public morality of the early nineteenth century, and then will suggest some ways in which we may apply their insights to Christian discipleship in our very different context today.

How do we shape Christian minds in the context of the information explosion of the internet age?

The ethic of innocence

What we may call the 'the ethic of innocence' in the early nineteenth century was a strong concern with the importance of moral formation, and more specifically, with the protection of moral innocence. Underlying this attitude was an intense focus on the importance of consistency and intentionality in every area of a Christian's life, or 'seriousness'.[1] Thus William Wilberforce, in

1 See Ian Bradley's seminal survey of the period, *The Call to Seriousness* (London: Cape, 1976).

his hugely influential *Practical View*, argued that while Christians were bound to experience moral failure, 'their *determination*… is still unshaken, and it is the fixed desire of their hearts to improve in all *holiness*'.[2]

At the heart of the ethic of innocence was the belief that certain influences – found in media, primarily – were intrinsically corrupting, both to individuals and to society, and that therefore such influences should be avoided, repressed, or both. Far from a simplistic moralism, this outlook was the product of a multilayered system of overlapping beliefs and attitudes about morality, religion, sexuality, family, gender, community, the nature of truth, and indeed, the meaning of life. These were grounded not only in Christian theology, but in the Classical moral tradition as well. There is much to explore here, but for our purposes we will highlight four separate, though partially overlapping, beliefs.

Malleabilism

A core characteristic of the ethic of innocence was an emphasis on the malleability of character, which provides a basis for the importance of influences. It is not hard to detect here the influence of John Locke, and indeed his conceptualisation of human psychology was almost universally accepted.[3] Interestingly, however, the metaphor that was most frequently used to illustrate the concept was not the *tabula rasa* but one that harks back to the root meaning of the word culture: the field. Thomas Gisborne, an evangelical writer of conduct books, expressed it thus:

> The mind is originally an unsown field, prepared for the reception of any crop; and if those, to whom the culture of it belongs, neglect to fill it with good grain, it will speedily be covered with weeds. If right principles of action are not implanted, wrong principles will sprout up.[4]

At the heart of the ethic of innocence was the belief that certain influences – found in media, primarily – were intrinsically corrupting.

How then are wrong principles 'implanted'? Often simply by exposure to them, especially if done willingly. This is the danger of novels or plays which make sin seem attractive:

> …such fascinating qualities are lavished on the seducer, and such attractive graces on the seduced, that the images indulged with delight by the fancy, carry on the reader imperceptibly to a point which is not so far from their indulgence in the act as some imagine.[5]

To take pleasure in representations of vice is in some sense to absorb them, to be changed by them, and thus the first step towards actually committing it.

But it was not only Lockean psychology which underlay this emphasis: in this case, orthodox Christian anthropology, especially in its Protestant expression, reinforced the concern. For human character was not, in fact, considered to begin in a neutral state, but with a propensity for evil which outside influences might all too easily amplify. Evangelicals in particular were quick to emphasise this dimension, in contrast to Rousseauan ideas of childhood innocence which had gained currency in some circles. As Hannah More put it:

> Is it not a fundamental error to consider children as innocent beings, whose little weaknesses may perhaps want some correction, rather than as beings who bring into the world a corrupt nature and evil dispositions, which it should be the great end of education to rectify?[6]

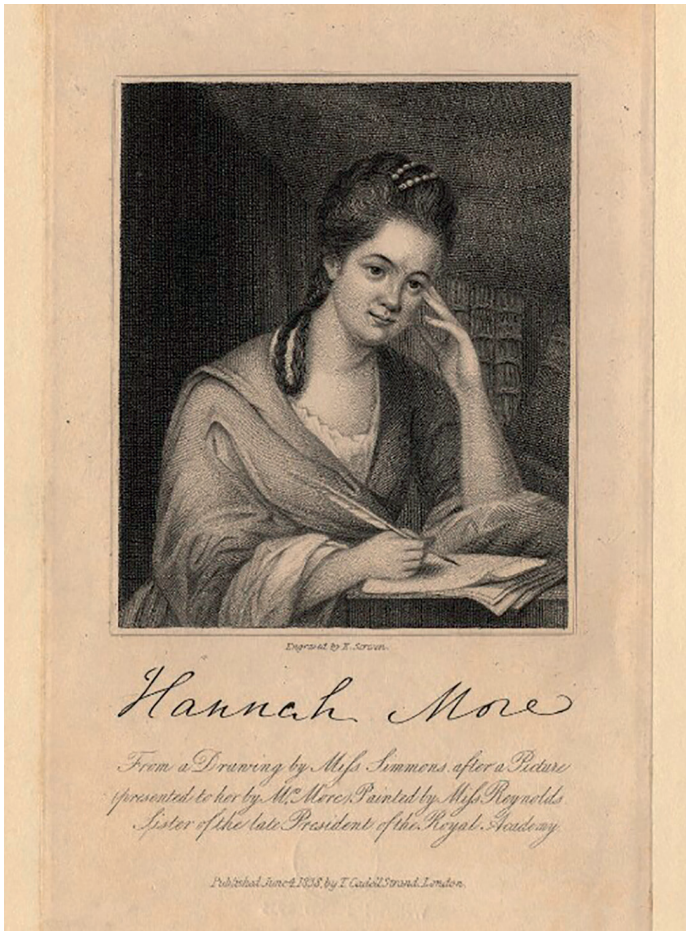
Unsurprisingly, the conviction of the general malleability of individuals resulted in a special concern for the impressionableness of children. Gisborne warns that 'in youth when the feelings of the heart are the most lively, and established modes of proceeding are not yet formed, [the principle of imitation] is far more powerful than in the more advanced periods of life'.[7] The concern about the availability of obscenity was largely about its potential to corrupt the young. Shortly after the formation of the Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1802, the *London Chronicle* noted approvingly its intentions to prosecute obscene works by warning that 'God only knows how many [youth] may grow up to be men and women, having their principles and habits corrupted and tainted by these seeds of vice, so early implanted in them!'[8]

The explosion of interest in the education of children during this period can be understood largely as an expression of this belief in the malleability of the young: if children are being permanently shaped by their early influences, it becomes paramount to ensure that these influences are salutary rather than destructive. The primary role of education was viewed as moral and religious formation, rather than the imparting of knowledge. The education reforms of the period were not primarily about knowledge, whether for its own sake, or as a means of social advancement: an entrenched belief in malleabilism meant that education was viewed as a central tool for universal moral improvement.

Aesthetic moralism

A second aspect of the ethic of innocence concerns the understanding of aesthetic value. The dominant view, one held not only by evangelicals but by almost all of the educated class, and grounded in Classical ideals, was what we might call 'aesthetic moralism'. The core ideis that there

2 William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of the Prevailing View of Professed Christians* (Dublin: Robert Napper, 1797), 108-109.
3 Church historian Gerald Cragg describes Locke as the 'moving spirit of the eighteenth century' whose influence was 'supreme'. (G. R. Cragg, *Reason and Authority in the Eighteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 5.
4 Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797), 44.
5 Hannah More, *Moral Sketches of Prevailing Opinions and Manners, Foreign and Domestic: With Reflections on Prayer* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1819), 143.
6 Hannah More, *Strictures on the System of Female Education* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davie, 1797), 56.
7 Thomas Gisborne, 116.
8 V. A. C. Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-century London* (London: Atlantic, 2006), 455.



Hannah More, by Edward Scriven, published by Thomas Cadell the Younger, after Frances Reynolds
stipple engraving, published 4 June 1838 (1780)
NPG D13788 © National Portrait Gallery, London

can be no strict separation between what is aesthetically excellent and what is morally uplifting. Aesthetic and moral valuations are not synonymous, but neither are they entirely distinct; it follows, then, that what is immoral cannot, by definition, ever be considered to be great artistically.

The purpose of art, then, is above all to elevate the soul. This idea was given influential expression by Samuel Johnson in his introduction to his edition of Shakespeare's plays, in the mid-eighteenth century. Paraphrasing Horace, he wrote that the aim of poetry was to 'instruct by pleasing' – a definition that by the end of the century had become virtually axiomatic, and was applied to all artistic endeavour. Building on this, Johnson would also state that 'it is always the writer's duty to make the world better'.[9]

The *Bowdler Family Shakespeare* (from which we get the word 'bowdlerise') was a signal instantiation of this perspective, as it endeavoured to cleanse the bard of problematic aspects of his plays. The influential and by no means evangelical *Edinburgh Review*, endorsed this expurgated edition enthusiastically:

> Mr Bowdler has not executed his task in any thing of a precise or prudish spirit... and only effaced those gross indecencies which every one must have felt as blemishes, and by the removal of which no imaginable excellence can be affected … so far from being missed on their removal, the work generally appears more natural and harmonious without them.[10]

Bowdlerising Shakespeare is thus not only defensible on moral grounds, it also improves his work on aesthetic grounds – the offensive parts can be removed without injury, since they cannot, by definition, be great art. This mentality generated much of the consternation over Lord Byron's life and work during this period: universally admired for his talent, his personal profligacy presented a contradiction. Hence, he attracted ferocious castigations, one reviewer going so far as to state that: 'we have here, for the first time in the history of our literature, a great work, of which the very basis is infidelity and licentiousness… the poet has... struck a blow against the honour and happiness of his species...'[11]

In the end, no artist who traded in vice could ever truly be great, for this would undermine the basis of civilisation:

> He who should prove to us that one really great poet was radically a cold, selfish, bad man… would, indeed, do more to poison the sources of kindliness and charity, and every noble sentiment, than all the satirists that ever denied or derided virtue from the beginning of the world.[12]

If this perspective seems jarring to us today, it is because another one, which proclaimed the emancipation of art from morals, would eventually come to dominate Western culture. It is useful to be reminded, however, of how radical this vision of 'art for art's sake', as the later Aestheticists would put it, would have seemed in the early nineteenth century.

Modesty and the preservation of innocence

The characteristic which arguably lay nearest the centre of the ethic of innocence was modesty, underpinned by a valuation of innocence itself, as a positive good. Modesty, in this sense, was understood not as preventing exposure of the (female) body in company but rather as guarding oneself against exposure to harmful outside influences which would contaminate the soul or warp the mind. Often, the emphasis was on avoiding all familiarity with something debasing or corrupting, as opposed to engaging in careful or judicious use. Thus, in the case of Lord Byron's writings, the reviewer writing in the evangelical *Christian Observer* makes clear that he will not attempt to 'say which of Lord Byron's poems may or may not be read without danger' since for 'all works palpably evil or even doubtful, the duty of the Christian is clear, to abstain from familiarity with them.'[13]

9 Samuel Johnson, *The Plays of William Shakespeare* (London: J & R Tonson, 1765), Introduction, xiv, xix.
10 [Francis Jeffrey], 'Art. 3. The Family Shakespeare', *The Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 36 (Oct. 1821), 54.
11 'Art. 6. Don Juan', *Edinburgh Monthly Review*, Vol. 2, Is. 2 (Oct. 1819), 482.
12 [G. J. Lockart], 'Moore's *Life of Lord Byron*', *Quarterly Review*, Vol. 44 (Nov. 1834), 170.
13 'Character, Opinions, and Writings of Lord Byron', *Christian Observer*, Vol. 25 (May 1825), 287.

The underlying conviction here is that not all knowledge is worth gaining; indeed, that the possession of some forms of knowledge is intrinsically harmful or, at the very least, dangerous. As Hannah More put it, 'there is some knowledge it is a praise not to know'. While much of the ethic of innocence should be viewed as sympathetic to philosophical currents of the time, it is perhaps at this point that it departs most conspicuously from the dominant emphasis in Enlightenment thought, that knowledge for its own sake is always to be sought. Thus Hannah More, who once moved in the highest echelons of English society, offers a warning:

> …the sense in which Christian parents would wish to impress on their children, to know the world, is to know its emptiness, its vanity, its futility, and its wickedness.[14]

Rochelle Gurstein, writing about this mentality in the American context later in the century, observed that for 'the party of reticence', to speak of 'indecent, filthy, unnamable, and shameful things' was to 'go beyond the limits of human understanding' and thus 'a powerful act of pollution and contagion.'[15]

If marriage and family were the greatest of temporal goods, then, of all sins, those which would spoil this gift deserved special condemnation.

The protection of innocence was first of all a matter of Christian discipleship and personal discipline – as well as parenting. But as it affected public morals it was also about defining the boundaries of what was permissible. Indeed, it was about defining the boundaries of the 'thinkable' – what should be within the bounds of the conceivable. How successfully this frame of mind permeated the public sphere may be illustrated by a striking example from early in the twentieth century. In opposing in Parliament a bill to extend the criminal law to lesbian acts, Lord Desart, Director of Public Prosecutions, appealed not to liberal toleration but to the risks of publicity: 'You are going to tell the whole world that there is such an offence, to bring it to the notice of women who have never heard of it, never thought of it, never dreamt of it. I think this is a very great mischief.'[16] The bill was never passed.

Chastity

It is impossible to speak about the ethic of innocence without drawing attention to what may seem most obvious about it: the way in which chastity[17] was conceptualised as a central and fundamental good. The novels of Jane Austen illustrate this: one is transported to a world utterly alien to our own in this respect, where chastity seems to exist as a kind of precious jewel, admired, protected, universally praised. Though her writing clearly had a didactic end, Austen was hardly an outlier in this respect. She reflected a widely shared estimation of marriage and family (not necessarily 'love' in the romantic sense) as the truly great and central human good. As Henrietta Bowdler put it, 'to the sacred institution of marriage we owe the greatest blessings which this imperfect state affords, and to it we owe many of the virtues which will lead us to heaven.'[18]

The unique place of marriage amongst temporal goods of course reflects a traditional emphasis within Protestantism going all the way back to Luther, and invigorated and developed, in the British context, by the Puritans. It was also one of the defining characteristics of the Evangelical Revival, and was adopted energetically by Hannah More: many of her widely disseminated tracts aimed at winning men back from the tavern and to the joys of hearth and family. The picture which she thus often painted in these tracts was one where domestic happiness figures as a kind of *summum bonum* of earthly existence.

It is important to point out that, contrary to popular stereotype, these Christians were not 'anti-sex'. None of their writings reflect an animus towards sex as such. Given the emphasis on modesty we would expect them to be discreet in this regard, and indeed they were, so references to sex are infrequent and oblique, yet when in the context of the marriage bed, they are positive. To quote again from Henrietta Bowdler:

> the glory of the Christian Religion, [is] that while it checks every approach to vice, and condemns even a thought that is impure, it sanctifies all the virtuous affections of our nature; it connects every relation of life with our duty to GOD; it bids us perform, for his sake, all those kind offices which even natural affection would lead us to perform for our own…[19]

Here is a vision of sex as a natural good which, in its intended context, unites different spheres of human life under God's gracious rule. Nor was there, in its intended expression, any place for either reserve or shame in sex. Thus of a newlywed Christian couple it can be said that, 'the delicate reserves that religion taught them hitherto to observe in each other's company now being unnecessary', they 'delighted in God, and they delighted in the society of each other'.[20]

However, this elevation of marriage meant conversely that sexual sin was often denounced with unyielding intensity. If marriage and family were the greatest of temporal goods, then, of all sins, those which would spoil this gift deserved special condemnation. Furthermore, if it

14 Hannah More, *Strictures on the System of Female Education*, 130.
15 Rochelle Gurstein, *The Repeal of Reticence* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 53.
16 Ari Adut, *On Scandal: Moral Disturbances in Society, Politics, and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 43.
17 'Chastity' is sometimes used today synonymously with sexual abstinence; in the tradition of Christian moral theology, it means the absence of sexual sin, i.e. either faithfulness in marriage or abstinence in singleness – this is the way that it was used in the nineteenth century, and in this article.
18 Bowdler, 124–5.
19 Bowdler, 124.
20 'Review of Bean's Advice to a New Married Couple', *Christian Observer*, Vol. 3 (March 1804), 162.

is true that these warnings were often directed at women in a special way, the overall concern was not gendered. In fact, a striking characteristic of the period – resented by many at the time – was the way in which virtues hitherto considered as 'womanly' were increasingly conceived as desirable for men – gentleness, reserve, and sexual purity in particular. As some historians have argued, the reform of sexual morals in the early nineteenth century was in many ways a woman's campaign, where 'female moralists', sought to 'impress their values on British culture'.[21] The destructive power of sexual sin was thus lamented for men as well as women, as exemplified by a character in Charles Kingsley's *Yeast*, who reflected on his earlier escapades with bitter regret: 'he would have welcomed centuries of a material hell to … escape from the more awful spiritual hell within him – to buy back that pearl of innocence which he had cast recklessly to be trampled under the feet of his own swinish passions!'[22]

Exposure to the mindset that gave birth to the ethic of innocence may lead us to interrogate our own practices and assumptions as Christians.

Lessons for Christians today

What are we to make of the ethic of innocence for our time and context today, as Christians seeking to live faithful lives in our particular culture? It goes without saying that the Christians of the early nineteenth century were not perfect, and that their conceptualisation of the Christian life contained its own imbalances and dangers. From our perspective today we might say that their emphasis on purity risked underplaying grace, that their attention to innocence could border on prudery, and that their elevation of marriage and family could tend to idolatry. Indeed, these dangers were arguably realised in the following decades as their concerns hardened into cultural types: it was not for nothing that 'Victorianism' began to be lampooned from the early twentieth century. Moreover, the whole question of public morality takes on a very different hue in the context of post-Christian late modernity, versus a nineteenth-century Britain which was still part of Christendom.

That said, we are fools if we cannot learn from our forebears, and if an examination of their ideas does not lead us to hold up a mirror to our own imbalances and blind spots. If the past is a foreign country, then we should learn from the Christians who lived there, just as we seek to learn from Christians who live in non-Western cultures today. And in the same way that a cross-cultural experience can lead us to see ourselves in a new light, exposure to the mindset that gave birth to the ethic of innocence may lead us to interrogate our own practices and assumptions as Christians. There are many lines of inquiry that we could follow here, but we will consider two in particular, as they relate to Christian discipleship.

Firstly, do we take seriously enough the degree to which our ideas and character are shaped by the media which we consume? For most of Christian history, the church usually taught that going to the theatre was a sin.[23] In the eighteenth century, most evangelical Christians eschewed the reading of novels (with a few exceptions, such as *Robinson Crusoe*). During the 1950s and 60s, most conservative Christians would probably have said that going to the movies was 'worldly' and to be treated, at least, with great caution.[24] Likewise many committed Christian families were leery of television when it first appeared, and chose not to own one. All of this seems ludicrous to Christians of almost every stripe today, even as our media environment is incomparably cruder and more debased. Of course it is recognised that Christians should be judicious in what they watch or read, yet little energy is typically devoted to this, no doubt for fear of seeming legalistic. Is it possible that we have now become somewhat naïve about the degree to which we are being influenced and shaped by the media we consume?

Early nineteenth-century Christians did not warn against media influences out of censoriousness or philistinism – indeed, many of them had a breadth of education which would put most of us to shame today. Instead, their warnings reflected their convictions about the mind as a spiritual battlefield and a sober assessment of our vulnerability. A strong case can be made that these convictions are in keeping with the New Testament emphasis on our relation to the outside world, as expressed in well-known passages such as Philippians 4:8 ('whatever is true… noble… right… pure'), Romans 12:2 (don't be conformed to the world), or 2 Corinthians 10:5 (take every thought captive to Christ). In addition, in Jesus' words about the eye being 'the lamp of the body', and that 'if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness' (Matthew 6:22, 23), we are given a profound lesson about the close relationship between what we see and who we are: we are unlikely to rise far above the quality of what we habitually gaze at.

The internet has magnified the power of media beyond any historical parallel; if there was any wisdom in the early nineteenth-century emphasis on the role of influences, surely our concern today should be, if anything, greater. It is difficult to estimate, in particular, what impact social media and pornography have had, in very different ways, upon moral and spiritual development. But the anecdotal evidence, as well as emerging social research,[25] is not encouraging; is it really sensible for a parent to hand over a smartphone to their 14-year-old, with little or no oversight

21 Mary Hilton, *Women and the Shaping of the Nation's Young: Education and Public Doctrine in Britain*, 1750–1850 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 5.

22 Charles Kingsley, Yeast: *A Problem*, quoted in Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 375.

23 This attitude was by no means limited to Christians, as the place of the theatre has been contested by many thinkers from Plato all the way to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. See Jonas Barish, *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

24 See, for example, Robert Sumner, *Hollywood Cesspool* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1955) and A. W. Tozer, 'The menace of the religious movie', in *Tozer on Worship and Entertainment* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006).

25 Social scientists Jean Twinge and Jonathan Haidt have written widely on the negative effects of smartphone usage, in particular. They maintain an open-source literature review on the subject which is available here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1w-HOfseF2wF9YIpXwUUtP65-olnkPyWcgF5BiAtBEy0/edit

or controls? Meanwhile, most Christian leaders continue to be hesitant to recommend anything more prescriptive than judicious use. Yet Jesus left his hearers in no doubt that his disciples must be decisive, even ruthless, in avoiding sources of temptation (Matthew 18:9). Surely it is not too much to consider closing down a social media account, if it is a recurring occasion of temptation? Also, how can we develop a culture of mutual accountability in churches, which makes it normal for the many struggling with porn to institute robust controls over their internet access?

Secondly, do we properly estimate and warn against the destructiveness of sexual sin? It is one sin amongst many, eligible for forgiveness, mercy and restoration just as much as other sins, and Christians in the past may have placed undue focus on this issue. All that said, sexual sin appears to have a unique, and often destructive, power. The apostle Paul describes it as unlike any other sin because it is a sin *against one's own body* (1 Corinthians 6:18). For many of us, our experience confirms this: sexual sin often leaves scars that can take a lifetime to heal and, conversely, chastity – whether in singleness or in marriage – confers profound blessings and benefits. The early church was born into a cultural context of sexual laxity which bears many comparisons to our own – and in response Christian catechism gave pride of place to the necessity of chastity, reinforced by the practice of church discipline.[26] Yet today, remarkably, even as our media have become saturated with sexual content and our culture has dismantled almost every obstacle to sexual activity except consent, teaching and discipline on sexual ethics in churches has become, if anything, weaker. Interestingly, there has begun to be some high-profile pushback against the sexual revolution,[27] as well as wider public discomfort with some of its consequences (expressed notably in the #MeToo movement). Yet Christians often fear that if they address this too directly they will be accused of being obsessed with sex. Across much of Europe, more and more evangelical churches are struggling to address growing moral licence among younger members and, in some parts of Europe, many of them have resigned themselves to the idea that young people will be sexually active before marriage. This is tragic for them, and ruinous for the church. Christian leaders must prioritise giving them the intellectual, spiritual, and relational support that they need to live the lives of purity and wholeness to which God is calling them – and rediscover the core Christian practice of church discipline.[28] One expression of a concern for chastity and relational maturity would be to encourage young Christians to give serious consideration to marrying earlier. The average age of first marriage in the UK is now over 30 for women and 32 for men. Though it is likely somewhat younger for Christians, we have not been immune to this upward trend. While it is the result of complex forces (greater independence of women, extended higher education, rising costs of housing) it has hardly been helpful to chastity amongst Christian young people.[29]

Early nineteenth-century Britain was a period of immense social and cultural change. Arguably at the very centre of this was an intensification of concerns around the protection of moral innocence, what has been described here as the ethic of innocence. Evangelical Christians were at the forefront of this mentality, and of the changes which resulted from it. While we cannot turn back the clock and retrieve a time before Freud and the sexual revolution, the concerns, priorities and successes of these Christians have much to teach twenty-first-century Christians living in a culture increasingly divorced from the Christian vision of life.

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26 See Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013) and Kathy Gaca, *The Making of Fornication: Eros, Ethics, and Political Reform in Greek Philosophy and Early Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

27 See Louise Perry's *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution* and Christine Emba's *Rethinking Sex: A Provocation*.

28 In the Reformed tradition church discipline is one of the three defining marks of the church, along with right preaching of the Word, and right administration of the sacraments (see the Belgic Confession, Art. 29).

29 For a recent sociological argument for why early marriage might also be advantageous for *other* reasons, see Brad Wilcox, *Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization* (New York: HarperCollins, 2024).

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