The Social Life of the Early Modern Protestant Clergy

Edited by
Jacqueline Eales and Beverly Tjerngren

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THE CONTRIBUTORS

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Jon Stobart is Professor of History at Manchester Metropolitan University. His research interests span a range of topics in the history of retailing, consumption and material culture, most recently in the context of the English country house. This has led to a number of publications, most notably *Consumption and the Country House* (Oxford University Press, 2016, with Mark Rothery), and the edited collections *Travel and the British Country House* (Manchester University Press, 2017) and *The Comforts of Home in Western Europe, 1700–1900* (Bloomsbury, 2020).

Beverly Tjerngren is a PhD student at the Department of History, Uppsala University. Her research focuses on rural clergy in early modern Sweden.

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EDITORIAL

The articles in this special issue are based on the authors' presentations at the European Social Science History Conference in Belfast on 5 April 2018. They were presented in a double session conceived and organized by Beverly Tjerngren, with considerable and generous advice and assistance from Jon Stobart. The two panels, under the common heading 'The Man Behind the Curtain: The Social Life of the Clergy', explored the lives of early modern English and Swedish clergy outside their official duties in a church setting. The first session focused largely on said clergymen's economic conditions and possibilities while the second centred around the phenomenon of the clerical family. The articles are presented here in a roughly chronological order, rather than in the order of conference presentation.

Three of the contributions focus on the new phenomenon of clerical marriage after the Reformation. Rosamunde Oates argues that in England the first generations of clergy wives used their obligations of hospitality to engage actively in the process of reform. This was evident both in the households of bishops and in the homes of the parish clergy. Jacqueline Eales examines the shift from a general defence of clerical marriage by the English clergy to the positive portrayal of individual clergy wives and daughters, who were increasingly depicted as exemplary role models in the century from 1620 to 1720. Beverly Tjerngren provides a case study of an eighteenth-century Swedish clerical marriage and charts the decline of hospitality in the pastor's parish home after the death of his wife.

The other three contributions centre on the economic and financial status of the clergy. William Gibson challenges the view that the eighteenth century English episcopate were greedy for preferment and illustrates their efforts to safeguard the estates of their bishoprics sometimes drawing on their personal income to do so. Far from being rapacious, these church leaders were often careful custodians of the church finances entrusted to them. Jonas Lindström provides a case study of the economic networks of an eighteenth century Swedish pastor and demonstrates how parishioners and clergy were bound not just by religious and social ties, but by their economic relationships as well.

Jon Stobart examines the domestic material culture of a group of rural Northamptonshire clergy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He concludes that these men and their families aspired to gentility through their domestic settings, which aligned them to the social, cultural and material worlds of the gentry.

The participants would like to thank discussants Janine Maegraith (University of Vienna) and Mikael Alm (Uppsala University) for their helpful and insightful comments during the panel presentations in Belfast.

A version of Jacqueline Eales's contribution was read in October 2019 at a symposium on the Clerical Estate at Lincoln College, Oxford, in honour of Dr Andrew Foster. We also extend special thanks to Dr Foster for reading and commenting on the articles.

We are also grateful to William Gibson for organising the publication of this special issue of the JRHL&C. His guiding hand has led us graciously and ably through the process from start to finish as we collected and edited the articles for this volume.

With much appreciation,
Jacqueline Eales and Beverly Tjerngren

MARTHA OR MARY? CLERICAL WIVES AND HOSPITALITY IN THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

Rosamund Oates, Manchester Metropolitan University

'In 1575, someone in the Elizabethan government drew up a parliamentary bill designed to reform clerical hospitality. The author complained that 'diverse of the clergy now being married, and having wife and children, do over much alienate their minds from the honest and careful duties . . . of good hospitality'. The bill never made it beyond the draft stage, but it illustrates the importance of clerical hospitality to the Elizabethan regime and fears about wifely influence in clerical households. The author attacked the fairly new practice of clerical marriage, claiming that wives exercised too much power in clerical households, particularly large episcopal households. Wives, he complained, should not 'intrude' into the 'worldly affairs of any such seat of government as now far otherwise at present is reported'. Instead, the bill proposed to increase hospitality by forbidding clerical wives to have anything 'to do in any respect with the order, rule of government of the household'. Women were ordered to concentrate on educating children, and on 'godly exercises' such as 'prayer, alms deeds and ministering to the poor'. In the 1575 act, the professional and pastoral aspects of the clerical household – namely hospitality – were to be restricted to the clergyman himself.[1]

The bill of 1575 was not presented to parliament, but it reflects both the influence that clerical wives could have in the Church of England and contemporary unease about it. Clerical marriage was one of the most significant innovations of the Reformation and historians have explored how contemporaries, from parishioners to Queen Elizabeth, responded to clerical marriage.[2] Little attention, however, has been paid to how far clerical wives in England were agents of change. Marriage to clergymen offered women a degree of agency in the Church, allowing them to take an active, and influential, role in the 'Protestantisation' of England.[3]

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Motivated by a genuine commitment to Evangelical reform, many clerical wives saw themselves as active participants in the establishment of the Church of England. Women could discharge their husbands' pastoral duties through the 'public housekeeping' of the household (most notably hospitality), and they wielded further influence through the soft power of convivial dining and networks of kin and friendship that shaped the post-Reformation Church in England. Historians have asked, 'was there a Reformation for women', and at least part of that answer lies in the experiences of clerical wives in the vicarages, deaneries and episcopal palaces of early modern England.[4]

This article demonstrates the influence of clerical wives in the Elizabethan and Jacobean Church by focussing on networks of patronage around the two centres of the Church in northern England: Durham and York. The experiences of Frances Matthew *née* Barlow (1550/1–1629), married to archbishop of York, Tobie Matthew (*c*.1544–1628), highlights the influence of wives who had the resources of the clerical household at their disposal. Mary Prior has argued that bishops' wives had limited authority in the episcopal households of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, as Frances Matthew's experience shows the provision of hospitality – an important clerical duty – was a sphere which episcopal wives could, and did, control.[5] This potentially gave them great influence, giving rise to the anxiety seen in the parliamentary bill drafted in 1575. This was particularly true for the families of senior clerics, who had inherited a medieval tradition of hospitality akin to that expected of the gentry and nobility. And hospitality was important in the success of the English Reformation. Felicity Heal and Kenneth Fincham have both shown that hospitality was a significant part of the episcopal role in the Elizabethan and Jacobean Church.[6]

This article is not just about the influence that women exercised through the households of their clerical husbands, but also about perceptions of the ideal clerical wife in the period. Discussions about clerical hospitality were a flashpoint for larger arguments about the role, power and status of clerical wives. Contemporaries like the author of the 1575 bill tried to argue that clerical wives could be involved only in household activities that had no professional element, restricting them to female activities such as personal devotion and the education of children. Although it was the hospitality of senior clerics that came under the closest scrutiny, these debates had relevance for all clerical wives as contemporaries discussed whether wives should help husbands with

their pastoral duties or withdraw into a private piety. Contemporaries used the biblical story of two sisters – Mary and Martha of Bethany – to contrast alternative models of female piety. When Jesus visited their home, Martha rushed around providing food and drink for their guest while Mary sat at Jesus's feet, listening quietly. Even supporters of clerical marriage often shied away from celebrating wifely involvement in hospitality, aware of how contentious the topic could be. Although preachers praised Martha's 'good husbandry', clerical and lay wives were told to aspire to Mary's private devotions and to keep out of household affairs.[7] For many clerical households, however the reality was very different.

Clerical marriage was a significant innovation in early modern England, creating a new class of women who did not have a clear template of behaviour, at least for the first decades of Elizabeth's reign. The earliest discussions about an ideal minister's wife were focussed on her moral and sexual probity. After clerical marriage was legalised in 1559, a potential bride needed two letters testifying to her 'good fame and name' before bishops could issue a license to allow the marriage. The injunction was designed to avoid scandal, and as Anne Thompson has shown, the practice continued into the seventeenth century, sustaining a continued interest in the moral rectitude of clerical wives. This emphasis on sexual probity reflected polemical disputes about the value of clerical marriage, with the earliest Protestant writers justifying marriage as an alternative to clerical concubinage.[8] In the 1540 bestseller, *De Christlich Eestand* (translated as *The Christen State of Matrimonie*), Heinrich Bullinger defended clerical marriage with the argument that: 'the saying of Paul endureth unmoveable: it is better to marry than burn'. In his book defending clerical marriage, *An Apologie Fully Answering . . . Thomas Martin* (1566), John Ponet expanded Paul's dictum to argue that sexual corruption led to spiritual error, writing 'the first infectors of Christendom with erroneous opinions were unmarried priests'. Reading Ponet's book in Elizabethan Durham, Bishop Tobie Matthew (himself married), wrote a note in the margins: 'heresie and lecherie [are] ioyned together'.[9] Clerical marriage was to stand as the opposite of both, and throughout the period there was a sustained interest in the sexual standing of clerical wives. In 1609, William Perkins stressed that ministers must not marry 'a harlot . . . though she be repentant' because it 'may prejudice the dignity and respect' of the ministry and successive Elizabethan and Jacobean visitation articles enquired if the clergy lived with women who were reported to be 'incontinent'.[10]

More positive templates of clerical marriage, however, were hard to find for the first generations of clerical wives. The Bible was an obvious source, and Protestant reformers were keen to assert that clerical marriage was a biblical tradition. Bullinger reminded his readers that priests in both the Old and New Testaments were married.[11] Ponet repeated this in *An Apologie*, and his copy Tobie Matthew recorded that: 'Bishops and Priests in the Primitive Churche had wives, who were called Episcopa and Presbyterae'. Further on Matthew wrote a note to himself that St Peter had had a wife. When Matthew Parker oversaw the publication of *A Defence of Priests Marriage* in 1567, he also reminded readers that the apostles were married. St Paul's letter to Timothy, in which Paul compared the Church to the house of God, was a particularly useful source of inspiration for married ministers. Paul required clerical wives to 'be honest, not evil speakers, but sober and faithful in all things'. Furthermore, he drew parallels between the well-ordered household and the Church, ordering a bishop or deacon 'to rule his own house honestly, having children under obedience', asking, 'if any cannot rule his own house, how shall he care for the Church of God?'[12] What this meant in practice, however, was not always clear. Some believed that by promoting the household as a centre of faith, St Paul encouraged hospitality. In 1619, the clergyman John Favour praised Archbishop Tobie Matthew as being the ideal of the Pauline bishop, claiming that Matthew was 'diligent' in preaching and 'as affable in your entertainment'.[13]

Historians have recognised that in the earliest days of the Reformation clerical marriage reflected Evangelical beliefs, and even after clerical marriage was legal, marrying a clergyman continued to be a powerful statement of religious intent. One of the first clerical wives in England was Agnes Wellesburn, married to Bishop William Barlow during the reign of Henry VIII. Her children included Frances Matthew, who praised her mother's dedication to Protestantism in a memorial erected after 1595, celebrating Agnes's suffering in exile under Mary for 'gospel sake' and noting that she 'died in the Lord, whom she daily served'.[14] Clerical wives – particularly at the start of Elizabeth's reign – often had a deeply held commitment to Protestant reform. Bishop Richard Cox's second wife was a former Marian exile, Jane Turner, and Bishop Parkhurst's wife, Margaret, was in regular contact with Henrich Bullinger.[15] While clerical marriage became more normalised through Elizabeth's reign, it was still, however, one of the only ways in which women could exercise their Evangelical commitments. Into the seventeenth century, women