"Toilet-seat Prayers" and Impious Fathers: Interrogating Religion and the Family in Oral Histories of the Postwar Pacific Northwest[1]

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This article explores the place and meaning of religion within families during the post-World War II years. It draws selected examples from two completed oral history projects, one that focused on the nature of church life in Victoria, British Columbia, and another which examined the discourses and practices of secularism in the Pacific Northwest. Although they were conducted for different projects, both sets of interviews reveal the centrality of family to religious (and irreligious) practice and identity in postwar North America. Such moments also suggest that family religion often involved contestation and uncertainty, and that it was lived in ways that cannot be easily fit into discrete, either/or categories such as sacred/secular, elite/popular, or clergy/lay. The analytic concept of lived religion, which seeks to break down entrenched dualisms, offers a useful framework for understanding the complexity of family religion. This article argues that, despite the challenges it presents, oral history is especially useful for at least partly illuminating the complicated, disorderly way that religion was lived within families in the past.

In an oral history interview, Susan Young recalled her experiences growing up in a mining community in Washington State during the late 1940s and 1950s. When asked to describe a typical Sunday during her adolescence, Susan replied:

> Sunday morning was, you have to get up and prepare a meal for the day, put something together, figure out how you were going to get your meals, you know, whatever. So, it wasn't about church. And survival […] was the main concern. And, I know that we saw pictures of people going to church, and they got all dressed up on Sunday, and all of that, you know, and it was the smiling happy family kind of thing. Well, we never knew that, because we lived in a place that wasn't like that […]. It wasn't reality at all. It was, you know, gee

[1] I would like to thank my interviewees for so willingly sharing their memories. Without them, this article would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Lynne Marks for her guidance during my oral history projects, Stacey Zembrzycki and Katrina Srigley for their patient editorial assistance, and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive and insightful comments. Research for this article was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, and the Department of History at the University of Victoria.

> someday I might get to do that. And someday I might get to go to Oz too. What little we had went for the basic necessities. There wasn't money for new shoes. There wasn't money for dresses to go to church, or anything like that.[2]

As this excerpt suggests, Susan was struck by the disjuncture between her own family experience and the dominant images of cozy, comfortable Christian family life. This oral history moment points to the benefits of using oral sources to explore religion and the family. As this article shall argue, oral history holds particular promise for at least partly illuminating the place and meaning of religion within the household.[3] Oral narratives help to enrich our understanding of how real families actually engaged in, and disengaged from, religion. As Susan's story makes clear, oral sources are especially useful for revealing the ambiguities and contestations that made up family religion. Susan explicitly rejected the institution of the church and defined herself as non-religious; she also baptized her children, prayed for their protection, and sent them to Sunday school. Such complexity of belief and practice was not unique to Susan's narrative. Rather it was a more general characteristic of oral recollections of religion and the family. Increasingly, researchers are resisting the impulse to smooth out or reject the seeming contradictions between sacred and secular that erupt in everyday life. To ignore or dismiss such contradictions is to suppose that there was or is a singular or authentic way of being religious. Such apparent inconsistencies, as this article suggests, reflect the complex, disorderly ways in which religion was and is lived within families.

In reflecting upon the use of oral sources to study religion and the family, this article draws on selected examples from two completed oral history projects. The first project, a study of religion, family, and church life in the postwar era, involved interviews with twenty-four individuals who were members of a Pentecostal and a United Church in British Columbia.[4] The second project was a

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[2] Susan Young, interview by author, Port Angeles, WA, 30 October 2003. Note that pseudonyms are used throughout this article to protect the privacy of the interviewees.

[3] For discussions on using oral history to study religion, see Sarah Williams, "The Problem of Belief: The Place of Oral History in the Study of Popular Religion," *Oral History* 24, 2 (1996), 27-34; Hugh McLeod, "New Perspectives on Victorian Class Religion: The Oral Evidence," *Oral History* 14 (1987), 31-50; Tracy K'Meyer, "'I Just Felt Called…': Oral History and the Meaning of Faith in American Religious History," *Journal of American History* 86, 2 (September 1999), 724-733; Renée Bondy, "Roman Catholic Women Religious and Organizational Renewal: Telling Stories of Change," *Oral History Forum* 26 (2006), 52-63, http://www.canoha.ca/forum/Oral%20History%202006%20vol26.pdf, last accessed on 20 June 2009.

[4] For this project, which took place in Victoria, British Columbia (BC), I located interviewees with the help of the church secretaries and pastors, and was introduced to a few more participants along the way. To take part, individuals had to have been members of one of these churches at some

study of secularism in the Pacific Northwest. For this project, I interviewed forty-four Pacific Northwesterners who, in the postwar decades, considered themselves non-religious, did not attend or join a church or other religious institution, and/or left a church or other religious institution.[5] While the first project was based in Victoria, the second spanned five cities: Vancouver and Nanaimo in British Columbia (BC), Canada, and Seattle, Olympia, and Port Angeles in Washington, United States. For both projects, I interviewed an equal number of men and women who were members of the working and middle classes; it must be noted that most of my informants were white, and of Euro-Christian backgrounds. Not surprisingly, all of those who agreed to be interviewed for my project on church life considered themselves to be religious. Of the forty-four people interviewed for my study on secularism, sixteen self-identified as spiritual or religious, fifteen as atheists, and the remainder as non-religious. For both projects, I adopted what is often referred to as a "semi-structured" approach to interviewing.[6] In each case, I used a general interview guide, and asked my informants questions pertaining to a range of subjects, including the role (if any) of religious institutions and spirituality in their family lives. I used open-ended questions, and endeavoured to allow my informants to take the interviews in directions that were meaningful to them. I made every effort to provide my interviewees with detailed information

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point between 1945 and 1960, and to have reached at least 16 years of age by 1945. I analyze the results of these interviews more fully in T. Block, "Housewifely Prayers and Manly Visions: Gender, Faith, and Family in Two Victoria Churches, 1945-1960" M.A. Thesis, University of Victoria, 1999.

[5] For this study, participants were located primarily through newspaper advertisements. I interviewed people who were born in 1943 or earlier, and who had lived in BC or Washington State for all or part of the period between 1950 and 1971. I conducted interviews in five cities: Vancouver and Nanaimo in BC, and Seattle, Olympia, and Port Angeles in Washington. In the end, I interviewed twenty-two people who had lived in BC during the postwar decades, and twenty-two who had lived in Washington State during that era. These interviews formed the basis for my work titled: "Everyday Infidels: A Social History of Secularism in the Postwar Pacific Northwest" Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Victoria, 2006. As I address in the larger study, the term secularism is in some ways a fiction that obscures the complex commingling of sacred and secular in human experience. For this project, I used the term secularism flexibly (and interchangeably with other terms such as irreligion, secularity, and non-religion) to refer to the multiple behaviours, actions, and discourses that countered, in passive or active ways, specifically religious orderings. Conceptualized in this way, secularism includes, but does not equate to, atheism. For more discussion of the term see Wilfred McClay, "Two Concepts of Secularism," *Journal of Policy History* 13, 1 (2001), 58.

[6] See H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods* 3rd edition (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2002); Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994); Sarah Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

about the interviewing process, and spoke candidly with them about the objectives of my larger projects. As oral historians have long been aware, no amount of self-disclosure will diminish the fact that, in the end, the power to interpret rests with the interviewer.[7] There is an extensive, interdisciplinary literature on the merits and limitations of oral history.[8] It is well recognized that oral histories do not constitute a transparent window on the past; instead, such histories are filtered through the present and framed by the subjectivity of both the interviewer and the informant. While acknowledging that oral histories do not somehow embody the truth of the past, it is clear that such sources offer an invaluable (albeit mediated) view on religion, particularly as it played out within family contexts.

This article draws examples from two oral history projects that were undertaken at different times and with varying objectives. It uses selected and discrete examples from these projects not to present a comprehensive analysis of postwar family religion, but to highlight some of the benefits and challenges of using oral sources to explore religion within families. Despite the differences between the two projects, both were based on a range of church periodicals and quantitative materials, in addition to oral histories. Church writings, membership statistics, and census figures might point to the existence of certain religious behaviours and practices, but such materials tell us less about *why* people engaged in such behaviours and practices. Oral history is a helpful tool for moving beyond an exclusive focus on what the historian Sarah Williams refers to as the "formal outward signs" of religiosity, such as church attendance. As Williams and others have shown, popular religious cultures regularly take shape outside of institutions, as people engage with the sacred in the streets and within households, during festivals and on family occasions.[9] Recently, the concept of "popular religion" has

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[7] See Yow, *Recording Oral History*, 2; Maurice Punch, "Politics and Ethics in Qualitative Research," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 83-97. For evocative discussions on critical, self-reflexivity in religious research, see Robert Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3-21; Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), especially Chapter 6; Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2009), 29-30, 115-118.

[8] See, for example, Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*; Daphne Patai, "Ethical Problems of Personal Narratives, or, Who Should Eat the Last Piece of Cake?" *International Journal of Oral History* 8, 1 (1987), 5-27; Julie Cruikshank, "Oral Tradition and Oral History: Reviewing Some Issues," *Canadian Historical Review* 75, 3 (1994), 403-418.

[9] Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, 1. Also see K'Meyer, "Oral History and the Meaning of Faith," 727; Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Norman Knowles, "Christ in the Crowsnest: Religion and the Anglo-Protestant Working Class in the Crowsnest Pass, 1898-1918," in *Nations, Ideas, Identities: Essays in Honour of Ramsay Cook*, ed. Michael Behiels and

come under scrutiny for implying a fixed, impermeable division between elite and popular religion. Some scholars have adopted the newer analytic concept of lived religion, which is meant to capture the hybrid, shifting character of religion in all spaces of human experience. Cognizant that "theological practice cannot be gridded in any simple way along the axis of 'elite' and 'popular,'" lived religion theorists seek explicitly to avoid placing human behaviour into oppositional categories that have little resonance in the real world.[10]

In my own work, oral sources helped to break down entrenched dualisms by revealing, within ordinary families, the commingling of official and informal modes of spiritual expression, and of church-based and non-institutional religious practices. Postwar family religion did not simply mirror the idyllic images of Christian domesticity so prevalent in the era, nor did it develop entirely outside of the churches; as the oral sources suggest, either/or categories such as sacred/secular, elite/popular, and official/lay, fail to capture the multifarious, uncertain, and sometimes contradictory ways in which religion was lived within postwar families. As we shall see, the contradictions and uncertainties of family religion were often at least partly shaped by class and gender. Class and gender informed ideals and realities of domestic religion, and differentiated approaches to the sacred both within, and between, families. The class and gender meanings of family religion became clear to me during these oral interviews, as I listened to women describe their efforts to fit prayer into busy domestic schedules, men joke about being dragged to church by their wives, couples criticize the materialism of the churches, and secular mothers speak hesitantly about sending their children to Sunday School.

This article explores the complexities of family religion in varied contexts. After establishing the centrality of the family to religious identity and practice, I move on to examine the dissonance between prescriptions and practices of family religion in the postwar era. Through an analysis of how individuals, specifically as members of families, approached and made decisions about spiritual practice within the home, church involvement, and participation in religious rituals, this article highlights the messy, contested character of everyday religion. In focusing on religion in everyday life, this article joins a growing historiography in North America and Britain. Once preoccupied with institutional and intellectual developments, historians of religion are increasingly turning their attention to the spiritual imaginings and practices of ordinary people.[11] Working-class religion

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Marcel Martel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 57-72; Anne Brown and David Hall, "Family Strategies and Religious Practice: Baptism and the Lord's Supper in Early New England," in *Lived Religion in America*, ed. David Hall, 41-68.

[10] Orsi, "Everyday Miracles," 9.

[11] See, for example, Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century Small Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996);

has been a key area of debate and discussion; scholars are challenging the idea, so prevalent in early studies, that religion was either irrelevant or oppressive to the working classes. Researchers are beginning to uncover the rich textures of working-class religion in various eras.[12] While the historiography of working-class, popular, and lived religion is growing in Canada, it remains far more developed in the American and British contexts. With the exception of missionary-Aboriginal encounters, the religious history of the North American West more generally has drawn limited attention from scholars in Canada and the United States.[13] The social history of religion is limited not only by region, but

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James Opp, *The Lord for the Body: Religion, Medicine, and Protestant Faith Healing in Canada, 1880-1930* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005); David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgement: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Knopf, 1989); Teresa Anne Murphy, *Ten Hours' Labor: Religion, Reform, and Gender in Early New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Nancy Christie, ed., *Households of Faith: Family, Gender, and Community in Canada, 1760-1969* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); Robert Orsi, *Thank You St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[12] For theoretical discussions on the intersections between class and religion see, for example, David Hackett, et. al., "Forum: American Religion and Class," *Religion and American Culture* 15, (2005), 1-29; William Sutton, "Tied to the Whipping Post: New Labor History and Evangelical Artisans in the Early Republic," *Labor History* 36, 2 (1995), 251-281; Bryan Palmer, "Historiographic Hassles: Class and Gender, Evidence and Interpretation," *Histoire Sociale* 33, 65 (2000), 105-144; Lynne Marks, "Heroes and Hallelujahs-Labour History and the Social History of Religion in Canada: A Response to Bryan Palmer," *Histoire Sociale* 34, 67 (2001), 169-186. For studies that challenge the notion of working-class alienation from religion see Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*; Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*; Knowles, "Christ in the Crowsnest"; Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*.

[13] For discussions on the religious historiography of the North American west see Gail Edwards, "Writing Religion into the History of British Columbia," *BC Studies* 113 (Spring 1997), 101-105; Laurie Maffly-Kipp, "Eastward Ho! American Religion from the Perspective of the Pacific Rim," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 127-148; Patricia O'Connell Killen, "Writing the Pacific Northwest into Canadian and U.S. Catholic History: Geography, Demographics, and Regional Religion," *Historical Studies: Canadian Catholic Historical Association* 66 (2000), 74-76. For studies of mission work in Canada see, for example, Susan Neylan, *The Heavens are Changing: Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missions and Tsimshian Christianity* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003); Clarence Bolt, *Thomas Crosby and the Tsimshian: Small Shoes for Feet Too Large* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992); Myra Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man's God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002). In the American context, see Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Converting the West: A Biography of Narcissa Whitman* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991). For important studies of religion in the North American west see, for example, Patricia O'Connell Killen and Mark Silk eds., *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2004); Robert Burkinshaw, *Pilgrims in Lotus Land: Conservative Protestantism in British Columbia, 1917-1981* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995); Lynne Marks,

also by subject matter. For instance, scholars have long debated the issue of secularization, but apart from recent, innovative studies by Callum Brown and Hugh McLeod, few have approached secularization through the framework of social history.[14] Although it does not directly address the subject of secularization, my work reveals the persistent entanglement of sacred and secular in everyday life, a finding that complicates any easy or linear interpretation of religious change.

There is a rich literature on the white, heterosexual, middle-class family ideal that predominated in the cultural narratives of postwar North America. In the popular imagination, postwar families were made up of homemaking mothers, breadwinning fathers, and happy children behaving in gender-appropriate ways, and living in affluent suburbia. Scholars have shown this to be a largely unrealizable ideal that obscured the actual complexity of family relations following the war; the religious implications of this ideal, however, have drawn little attention.[15] Nancy Christie recently observed that while the field of family

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"Exploring Regional Diversity in Patterns of Religious Participation: Canada in 1901," *Historical Methods* 33, 4 (2000), http://weblinks2.epnet.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca, last accessed on 22 January 2004; Carl Guarneri and David Alvarez eds., *Religion and Society in the American West: Historical Essays* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987).

[14] Both Brown and McLeod focus on the British context and use oral history to explore the issue of secularization; see Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*; Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For key works on secularization in English Canada, see David Marshall, "Canadian Historians, Secularization, and the Problem of the Nineteenth Century," *Historical Studies: Canadian Catholic Historical Association* 60 (1993/1994), 57-81; David Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996); Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985). In the American context see, for example, Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991); T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); John Bukowczyk, "The Transforming Power of the Machine: Popular Religion, Ideology, and Secularization among Polish Immigrant Workers in the United States, 1880-1940," *International Labor and Working Class History* 34 (1989), 22-38.

[15] For studies that explore postwar family ideals and realities see, in particular, Joy Parr, ed., *A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945-1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Catherine Gidney, *A Long Eclipse: The Liberal Protestant Establishment and the Canadian University, 1920-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); Mona Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling, and the Family in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988). For

history is growing in Canada, "there has been no ongoing exploration of the way that religious discourse has idealized the family or how spiritual practices within families have shaped the institutional church."[16] Indeed, the historiography of religion and the family is just getting underway in Canada. Historians such as Marguerite Van Die and Hannah Lane have fruitfully explored the intersections of faith and family in nineteenth-century Canada, yet we know far less about the nature of such intersections in the postwar context.[17] In addition, perhaps because it is often imagined as a place of "heroic, loner white guys," the North American west has drawn little attention from historians of the family.[18] The historiography on the family more generally has been limited by the difficulty of finding sources that illuminate the inner world of the household. Oral history offers an important, if invariably partial, lens on what one historian has referred to as the "dark corners" of family life, including religion.[19]

Despite differences in subject matter and focus, both of my oral history projects powerfully revealed the centrality of the family to postwar religion. Whether atheists or evangelicals, churchgoers or critics of organized religion, people tended to construct and convey their religious histories in relation to the family. That religion was typically described in familial terms is not, of course, a startling revelation, nor was it unique to the postwar years. As several scholars have shown, the link between religion and the family was well established in the

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studies that do explore the religious implications of the postwar domestic ideal see several articles in Nancy Christie, ed., *Households of Faith*; T. Block, "'Families that pray together, stay together': Religion, Gender, and Family in Postwar Victoria, British Columbia," *BC Studies* 145 (Spring 2005), 31-54.

[16] Nancy Christie, "Introduction," in *Households of Faith*, 3.

[17] Marguerite Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada: The Colbys of Carrollcroft* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005); Hannah Lane, "Tribalism, Proselytism, and Pluralism: Protestants, Family, and Denominational Identity in Mid-Nineteenth Century St. Stephen, New Brunswick," in *Households of Faith*, ed. Nancy Christie, 103-137. Also see Lynne Marks, "'A Fragment of Heaven on Earth'? Religion, Gender, and Family in Turn-of-the-Century Canadian Church Periodicals," *Journal of Family History* 26, 2 (2001), 251-271; Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*; in the American context, see Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street;* Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victoria America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

[18] Susan Armitage, "Tied to Other Lives: Women in Pacific Northwest History," in *Women in Pacific Northwest History*, ed. Karen Blair, 2nd edition (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 5.

[19] Cynthia Comacchio, "'The History of Us': Social Science, History, and the Relations of Family in Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 46 (Fall 2000), 217. Scholars of American and British history have been more apt than those in Canada to use oral history to explore religion within the family; see, for example, Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*; McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*; Orsi, *Thank You St. Jude*; Griffith, *God's Daughters*; Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture.*

Victorian era.[20] Despite certain continuities, the postwar family was in some ways distinct. Following the war, the family was defined more than ever before in terms of its emotional and spiritual rather than its economic functions. Also, as is well established, this was an era of unprecedented emphasis on home and family life.[21] After surviving years of economic uncertainty and war, postwar Canadians were urged to seek comfort and meaning in the domestic realm. As Cynthia Comacchio suggests, the Second World War "gave rise to the most domestically oriented generation of young Canadians that the twentieth century would know. Those who survived these years of economic and military emergency would reinstitute a version of the cult of domesticity that prevailed a century earlier."[22] In this relatively affluent era, Canadians formed families and purchased homes at a greater rate than at any other time in their history. The postwar domestic revival also occasioned a revival of churchgoing. The Christian family ideal reached its height in these Cold War years, as commentators regularly affirmed the significance of churchgoing to stable families, and identified domestic religion as a bulwark against "atheistic-communism."[23]

Both sets of oral interviews suggest that the link between family and religion was well entrenched in the postwar years. When asked to discuss where she developed her views on religion, Nancy MacEwan began: "Within my own family, and I can speak to that, because that's the closest thing to me, and what I lived on a regular basis."[24] Nancy's simple yet telling remark underlines the enduring connection between religion and family in the postwar world. Like Nancy, other narrators crafted their religious stories in relation to "the closest thing to them": their families. Most often, they attributed their perspectives on

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[20] See, for example, Marks, "'A Fragment of Heaven on Earth?'"; Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada*, 188; Lane, "Tribalism, Proselytism, and Pluralism," 104; Marguerite Van Die, "Revisiting 'Separate Spheres': Women, Religion, and Family in Mid-Victorian Brantford, Ontario," in *Households of Faith*, ed. Nancy Christie, 242.

[21] Joy Parr, "Introduction," in *A Diversity of Women*, ed. Joy Parr, 7; Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal*; Veronica Strong-Boag, "Canada's Wage-Earning Wives and the Construction of the Middle Class, 1945-1960," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29, 3 (1994), 5-25; May, *Homeward Bound*; Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 175; Veronica Strong-Boag, "'Their Side of the Story': Women's Voices from Ontario Suburbs, 1945-60," in *A Diversity of Women*, ed. Joy Parr, 66-68; Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 106-109.

[22] Cynthia Comacchio, *The Infinite Bonds of Family: Domesticity in Canada, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 148.

[23] Rillmond Schear, "The Stone Cold Spirit that Stalks Seattle's Churches," *Seattle Magazine*, December 1965, 66; "Suggestion for Prayers to Open School Day Stirs up Sharp Controversy in New York," *Port Angeles Evening News*, 1 December 1951, 1.

[24] Nancy MacEwan, interview by author, Victoria, BC, 19 September 2003.

religion, whether positive or negative, to their parents.[25] Echoing many of his contemporaries, Robert identified his mother as the main religious influence in his life: "Well, I suppose my mother because, you know, if it hadn't been for her I wouldn't've even gone to church to begin with. She planted the seed."[26] Typically, the most painful and joyful religious memories recounted in the oral testimonies centred on relations with family. My informants recalled resenting their parents for "sentencing them to church," arguing with their in-laws about religion, and worrying about the spiritual lives of their children. They also remembered the pleasures of participating in sacred family rituals, and the comforts of spending time with children and parents on religious holidays. From dramatic tales of religious estrangement to ordinary accounts of churchgoing, the family was at the nexus of religious memory.

More than simply a recurrent topic of conversation, the family figured as a common reference point for the articulation of religious identity. In my projects, the oral testimonies were probed not only for what was said, but also for how it was said. How certain subjects are discussed (or avoided) reveals much about the taken for granted idioms, norms, and habits of particular cultures.[27] While filled with content on the family, the oral histories were most revealing in *how* memories of religion and the family were told. In effect, these oral histories were narratives of religion and family at once; religion was made sense of in terms of the family, both ideal and lived. For most of my informants, regardless of their social positions or geographical locations, the religious influence of family members far outweighed that of friends, neighbours, or colleagues. Nanaimo homemaker Jean Stewart took for granted that religion was a family matter: "[You're] bound to be influenced by your family, and what goes on within the family."[28] Most people, believers and non-believers alike, defined themselves, religiously, in relation to their parents and their experience of the sacred in childhood. Although my churchgoing informants were the most apt to claim the denominational affiliation of their parents as their own, a substantial minority of my non-religious interviewees also did so. Moreover, many of my non-religious informants invoked the family in their stories of secular "awakening" to mark the ideological distance they had traveled to carve out a new identity in or against religion. They described themselves in relational terms, as having "broken from,"

[25] Several scholars have also shown the importance of parents to individual religious identities. See, for example, Thomas Davenport, *Virtuous Pagans: Unreligious People in America* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1991), 206.
[26] Robert Taylor, interview by author, Victoria, BC, 17 October 2003.
[27] Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, 19.
[28] Jean and Donald Stewart, interview by author, Nanaimo, BC, 23 June 2003.

"left," "rejected," or "drifted from" the religion of their parents.[29] For Joanne Smith, whose father was a professor, the absence of religion in her childhood home mattered most to her secular self-understanding: "Well, you know, if you really aren't raised in religion, you aren't exactly an atheist. It's irrelevant. It really is a very different thing. It just doesn't occupy my brain at all, unless somebody starts imposing upon me."[30] Richard, a public servant, told me that his wife is "just ambivalent, period" about religion because she "wasn't raised in a church."[31] Similarly, Charles attributed his religious apathy to a secular upbringing: "It just was not important to me. Because my parents weren't that way, so there's no environment of being involved in church, and no feeling of guilt if I didn't go, and so, I didn't really need it."[32]

Many of my non-religious informants recalled that moving away from their parents had "liberated" them from religious practice. Through his teenage years, Thomas lived in Tacoma with his father and "churchy" mother, and spent much of his time involved in Protestant youth organizations. Gradually, through discussions with a friend, Thomas became an atheist at the age of eighteen. He recalled feeling anguished about his newfound atheism:

> One of the biggest agonies that I had was keeping all of this secret from my family. I mean, my interest in sex, of course, was somewhat comparable. But religion was bigger […]. There was so much, I don't know, trauma associated with my taking this position, and living at home, you know. I felt like […] I used to say, if my mother learned I was an atheist, it would kill her. I felt so strongly about it […]. So, I had to live a double life.[33]

Compelled to lead a "double life" while living with his parents, Thomas felt comfortable shedding his religious façade only after he had moved away from his family. Several other interviewees recalled that moving away from their parents had "liberated" them from religious practice. Robert stopped attending church after he moved away from his mother; although his experience was not characterized by anxiety, Robert, like Thomas, based his own religious participation on the proximity of family.[34] David, a physician, shared a similar inclination, confessing that he left home "to have a damn good time, where a

[29] For a fine discussion of the youth rebellion during the Quiet Revolution in Quebec see Michael Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec's Quiet Revolution, 1931-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), especially Chapter 4.
[30] Joanne Smith, interview by author, Seattle, WA, 30 March 2004.
[31] Richard Petersen, interview by author, Olympia, WA, 22 March 2004.
[32] Charles Moore, interview by author, Seattle, WA, 30 October 2003.
[33] Thomas Brown, interview by author, Port Angeles, WA, 11 November 2003.
[34] Taylor, interview.

church or a mother wouldn't be looking at me [laughs]."[35] There was a distinct gender dimension to these stories: men were far more likely than women to describe their experience of moving in terms of liberation, freedom, and individualism. George told me that he left his Ontario home, and the church of his childhood, because of his "sense of adventure": "It was sort of the 'go west, young man,'" message, he admitted.[36] Calling upon the central myths and images of Northwest culture, George joined with other men in framing the experience of moving as a narrative of frontier adventure and liberation from both church and family.[37]

In the postwar decades, North American newspapers reported on what appeared to be a growing disdain for the apparent hypocrisy of organized religion; as one reporter observed: "Young people are turning from the seemingly hypocritical teachings of the established churches."[38] The "mounting tide of criticism" toward the churches even drew frequent comment from religious leaders themselves.[39] My interviews with secular Northwesterners suggest that charges of hypocrisy very often centred on the family. Homemaker Nancy MacEwan, the daughter of missionary parents, explained why she left the church as an adult:

> A real issue for me became – and I'll just spell it out real clear – the hypocrisy, okay, that I saw amongst people who call themselves Christians, and conducted what one could call, I guess, a life of religious commitment where there was attending church on a regular basis, being a very involved member in the church, etcetera, etcetera. And, it's very, very sad to say, but I even saw it in my own family. The lack of consistency. I have trouble with people who say one thing, and do another. I just, to this day, I have difficulty digesting it.[40]

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[35] David Becker, interview by author, Olympia, WA, 24 March 2004.
[36] George Thompson, interview by author, Vancouver, BC, 21 October 2003.
[37] Allan Pritchard, "The Shape of History in British Columbia Writing," *BC Studies* 93 (1992), 57; Armitage, "Tied to Other Lives". In his research on Britain, Callum Brown also found that the process of leaving the churches or Christianity was distinctly gendered; see Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 193.
[38] Paul Lindemuth, "Letter to the Religion Editor," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 6 February 1971, 4. Also see Jurgen Hesse, "'Fringe' Forgets Worship of God," *Colonist*, 29 December 1962, 1-2; Meg Grant, "Who's New in the Pew: The Post-War Generation Rediscovers Religion," *Weekly (Seattle)*, 17 September 1986, 33.
[39] For a discussion of such criticism see, for example, United Church of Canada, Board of Evangelism and Social Service, *Annual Report* (1966), 18, 24; Schear, "The Stone Cold Spirit," *Seattle Magazine*, December 1965, 20; William Portman, "Priest Quits Parish: Seeks Christ of the Streets," *Canadian Churchman*, April 1968, 24.
[40] MacEwan, interview.

Several of my informants, regardless of social class, echoed Nancy in expressing their contempt for the religious hypocrisy of family members. Like Nancy, Susan experienced deep hurts around religion within her own extended family. Susan, a teacher, complained that people "think if they go to church on Sundays, it doesn't matter what they do during the week [laughs]. You know, they can be S.O.B.'s and thieves, as long as they go to church on Sundays."[41] Although criticism of organized religion grew ever more frequent in the years after the war, denunciations of religious hypocrisy did not suddenly emerge in this era. Historian Sarah Williams contends that churchgoers were regularly charged with hypocrisy in nineteenth-century Southwark; she points to the ingrained idea in this London borough that the "non-church attender could in fact live more closely to an ideal of true Christianity than a regular attender."[42] For many of my informants, particularly those who were outside of the churches, it was better to reject organized religion altogether than to be superficially or insincerely religious. Indeed, to some, churchgoing was entirely separable from "true religion."[43] That understandings of "true religion" could vary within families underscores the tensions and conflicts that characterized religion in some postwar households.

Interestingly, even those who were critical of, or indifferent to, the churches tended to see these institutions as central to family life. The family was so widely held to be the cornerstone of religion, that the absence of family provided an easy explanation for religious indifference. Patrick claimed that he was not religious because he lost both of his parents as a young child, and "didn't have that parental guidance that most normal people get."[44] To Seattle resident Frank Williams, an atheist who never married, being single and religiously uninvolved went hand in hand: "If I were in a church, I'd probably be married by now [laughs]. I would probably have some sort of a relationship with a woman, especially if they agreed with me in my religious principles."[45] While it justified the irreverence of some, the absence of family was used to explain the religious

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[41] Young, interview.

[42] Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, 113-115. For further studies which reveal the disjuncture between official and popular understandings of religion, see, for example, Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Hugh McLeod, *Piety and Poverty: Working-Class Religion in Berlin, London, and New York, 1870-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1996); Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*.

[43] For similar findings see Reginald Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin Publishers, 1987), 83.

[44] Patrick O'Connor, interview by author, Nanaimo, BC, 3 September 2003.

[45] Frank Williams, interview by author, Seattle, WA, 28 March 2004. For an insightful study that reveals the churches as spaces of courtship at the turn of the twentieth century see Nancy Christie, "Young Men and the Creation of Civic Christianity in Urban Methodist Churches, 1880-1914," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 17 (2006), 91-94.

involvement of others. For instance, Mary Smith described her reason for seeking out the Pentecostal Church: "I had lost my mother when I was 15, so I felt very, I guess abandoned, really."[46] Oral histories powerfully demonstrate the importance of the family to religious memory and identity. The impulse to construct one's religious (or secular) identity in relation to, and sometimes against, the family, was widely shared across lines of class and gender. In their histories, my informants revealed the association between religion and family to be a deeply ingrained part of their commonsense social world.

Oral histories are invaluable for research on religion, not least because they so powerfully convey the significance of the family to religious identity and practice. As historians have shown, oral sources are especially useful for taking us behind and beyond prescriptive ideals of Christian family life.[47] My own research suggests that images of spiritually united families, worshipping together in church and home, were prevalent in the postwar era. Cultural media disseminated taken for granted ideas about the innate piety of women, the religious harmony of the household, and the sacralizing effects of family. Such ideas were often based more on unexamined essentialisms – on what was already "known" about the religious lives of families – than about what was actually happening in ordinary households. Although many of my churchgoing informants aspired to fulfill Christian family ideals, they also often found such ideals to have little resonance in everyday life. For instance, I spoke with one woman who acknowledged the importance of establishing a formal family altar; during the course of the interview, however, she admitted that as a busy young mother, it was often all she could do to make her children say their prayers while they were "on the toilet seat" to save time.[48] The commingling of prayer with domestic and childcare responsibilities was especially striking in my interviews with women. Many women recalled praying "on the run" as they completed their myriad of domestic tasks. Pentecostal Doris MacDonald recalled: "[When] it came to praying, I couldn't seem to get all my praying done. So I had a lot of ironing, because there was no drop-dry in those days, so I can remember different times while I was

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[46] Mary Smith, interview by author, Victoria, BC, 27 July 1998. Another informant, Ruth Jensen, similarly attributed her attraction to Pentecostalism to the fact that she was orphaned as a child; Harold and Ruth Jensen, interview by author, Victoria, BC, 11 August 1998.

[47] See, for example, Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street* and *Thank you St. Jude*; Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*.

[48] June Peterson, interview by author, Victoria, BC, 2 September 1998. For a more in-depth discussion of the contrast between family altars and "toilet-seat prayers," see T. Block, "'Families that pray together, stay together.'" Also see Margaret Bendroth, *Growing Up Protestant: Parents, Children, and Mainline Churches* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 110. For an insightful discussion on how the rise of companionate marriage affected the religious socialization of children within families in Britain see McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, especially Chapter 8.

ironing, I hardly needed a steam iron because I used to be weeping while I was praying. I think a lot of my life I've had a very tender heart for the things of God."[49] As this example suggests, postwar women, like their nineteenth-century counterparts, were adept at interweaving the spiritual with the practical in day-to-day life.[50] The oral histories indicate that praying certainly occurred in many homes, but it typically did so in ways that were far more hurried, sporadic, and unceremonious than church writings described.

Oral history is useful for revealing the dissonance between religious prescription and practice, between what religious leaders said and what ordinary people actually did with religion. This dissonance was especially evident in the oral recollections of Pentecostal women. In the postwar years, Pentecostal literature and sermons vigorously affirmed the patriarchal family. A 1945 article in the *Pentecostal Testimony* described the bible as "so complete a system that nothing can be added or taken from it […]. It sets the husband as Lord of the household, and the wife as mistress of the table – it tells him how to rule, and her how to manage."[51] In Pentecostal discourse, male authority within the household was considered divinely ordained. Women learned that they were to be "obedient to their own husbands, that the Word of God not be blasphemed."[52] Interestingly, Pentecostalism has also held particular appeal to women. While Pentecostal officials clearly dictated male leadership within the home, Pentecostal doctrine itself emphasized the spiritual equality of all believers. My research suggests that Pentecostal women were drawn to this evangelical religion, in part, because of its emphasis on gender equality before God.[53] In addition, male power within the household was blunted by the fact that, in Pentecostalism, the individual's relationship with God was to take primacy over earthly relationships. My female Pentecostal informants made sense of themselves as "daughters of God," which

[49] Doris MacDonald, interview by author, Victoria, BC, 13 August 1998.
[50] For the Victorian context, see Van Die, "Revisiting 'Separate Spheres'," 243.
[51] *Pentecostal Testimony*, 15 January 1945, 2.
[52] Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, *Circular Letter* 9 (1958), 7.
[53] MacDonald, interview; Jensen, interview; Maureen Graham, interview by author, Victoria, BC, 7 October 1998. For studies which explore the appeal of Pentecostalism and other patriarchal religions to women see, for example, Salvatore Cucchiari, "Between Shame and Sanctification: Patriarchy and its Transformation in Sicilian Pentecostalism," *American Ethnologist* 178, 4 (November 1990), 687-707; Lesley Gill, "Like a Veil to Cover Them: Women and the Pentecostal Movement in La Paz," *American Ethnologist* 17, 4 (November 1990), 708-721; Susan Rose, "Women Warriors: The Negotiation of Gender in a Charismatic Community," *Sociological Analysis* 48 (1987), 245-258; Marguerite Van Die, "A Woman's Awakening: Evangelical Belief and Female Spirituality in Mid-Nineteenth Century Canada," in *Canadian Women: A Reader*, ed. Wendy Mitchinson, et.al. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1996), 49-67; Orsi, *Thank You St. Jude*; Griffith, *God's Daughters.*

empowered them, in certain cases, to challenge their husbands.[54] Oral history allowed for rare insights into the appeal of Pentecostalism to women, and especially wives, and for a fresh look at how religious doctrine was actually understood and lived by laywomen.

Interestingly, oral histories were also helpful in illuminating the very existence of secular motherhood. In the postwar era, as in earlier times, gender significantly shaped assumptions about the nature and meaning of religiosity. As historians have shown, taken for granted ideas about womanly piety were well established in the nineteenth century.[55] Such ideas persisted into the postwar era, as the domestic ideal reproduced and entrenched woman's responsibility for the spiritual and moral life of the family.[56] My oral interviews suggest that women indeed played a greater role than men in the nurturing of family piety, and in the religious education of children. My project on Northwest secularism, however, also compelled me to take seriously the role of mothers in reproducing secular families. Sharon Davis recalled that she refused to teach religion to her children: "I wouldn't want them to have to go through all that – it was a lot of mumbo jumbo, and a waste of time."[57] Despite the valorization of the Christian home, and of women's role within it, the oral recollections suggest that, in at least some postwar homes, religion was rarely discussed, prayers were not uttered at dinner or bedtime, and children were not pressured to believe. Constructed in the dominant discourse as naturally pious and sacralizing, mothers have generally been overlooked in studies of secularism.[58] Oral sources have the advantage of

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[54] MacDonald, interview; Peterson, interview; Graham, interview. For a more detailed discussion of how women used Pentecostal doctrine to challenge male authority see T. Block, "Families that pray together, stay together," 38-42.

[55] On the ideal of womanly piety see, for example, Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community*, 5; Van Die, "Revisiting 'Separate Spheres,'" 238; Lane, "Tribalism, Proselytism, and Pluralism," 122, 124; Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 169; Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Edinburgh Gate: Pearson, 2006), 13-14. For a more detailed discussion of secular motherhood, see T. Block, "'Going to church just never even occurred to me': Women and Secularism in the Postwar Pacific Northwest," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 96 (Spring 2005), 61-68.

[56] Several of my interviewees, religious and non-religious, took for granted that mothers were responsible for the religious education of children. For published references to the ideal of motherly piety see, for example, Amy Haufschild, "What Do Children Do On Sunday Afternoon," *United Church Observer*, 15 April 1957, 19-20; "Parents," *Canadian Churchman*, 4 August 1955, 359; "Up-Island Visitors Gather in City," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 2 December 1966, 6; "Be it ever so Humble there is no Place Like Home," *The Torch*, March 1950, 3-4.

[57] Sharon Davis, interview by author, Victoria, BC, 22 September 2003.

[58] In *The Death of Christian Britain*, Callum Brown attributes the secularization of Britain in the 1960s primarily to women leaving the churches. He argues that this decade witnessed the "discursive death of pious femininity"; see Brown, 179. Brown notes that Canada and the United States do not fit the British model of religious decline, as "piety and femininity are still actively enthralled to each other, holding secularisation in check"; see Brown, 197. Although further

directing the researcher toward topics that might not have been considered, such as secular motherhood. Such sources also suggest that secular mothering was sometimes fraught with anxiety and uncertainty. Many non-religious women worried that to not expose their children to religion was to deprive them of choice. In emphasizing the importance of providing choices for their children, my informants echoed and reproduced wider ideals of democracy within the family. As several scholars have shown, after the war parents, and mothers in particular, were urged to raise their children "more democratically."[59] My informants worried that in not exposing their children to religion, they were making their minds up for them. Karen, a nurse and ardent atheist, reflected upon why she sent her children to Sunday school: "I guess I felt that […] you know, some people say, I send my children to church or Sunday school so they can make up their own minds. I suppose it was something along those lines, because they didn't become rigid churchgoing people later."[60] Similarly, Ruth McCallum, an administrative assistant, commented: "I thought they should have some kind of exposure to something. I just thought it was the thing to do, and then they could make up their own mind, which they did." [61] In sending their children to Sunday school, many Northwest mothers were deeply influenced by the democratic family ideal, a "powerful trope" in the years following World War II.[62] The complex, hybrid character of postwar family religion is further illustrated in the uncertainties of secular mothers.

It is well known that church membership and attendance grew quite dramatically in North America in the fifteen years following World War II.[63] This

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research is needed on the gender dimensions of secularization in the North American context, my work suggests that women played a key role here in religious, and secular reproduction.

[59] Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal*, 140; Annalee Golz, "Family Matters: The Canadian Family and the State in the Postwar Period," *Left History* 1, 2 (1993), 27; Mariana Valverde, "Building Anti-Delinquent Communities: Morality, Gender, and Generation in the City," in *A Diversity of Women*, ed. Joy Parr, 22; Bendroth, *Growing Up Protestant*, 107.

[60] Karen Morrison, interview by author, Port Angeles, WA, 19 November 2003.

[61] Ruth McCallum, interview by author, Vancouver, BC, 21 October 2003.

[62] Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal*, 140.

[63] For example, between 1941 and 1961 there was a fourfold increase in Pentecostalism in BC, and between 1945 and 1966, the United Church of Canada built 1500 new churches. See Burkinshaw, *Pilgrims in Lotus Land*, 169; John G. Stackhouse, "The Protestant Experience in Canada since 1945," in *The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1760-1900*, ed. George Rawlyk (Burlington: Welch Publishing Company, 1990), 200. According to Stackhouse, in the 1940s and 1950s Canadian Protestant churches underwent their largest rate of growth in the 20th century. For further discussion on the postwar increase in religious and church involvement in varied contexts see McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 61; Kevin Kee, *Revivalists: Marketing the Gospel in English Canada, 1884-1957* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 61; Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 106-109. Several of my churchgoing informants admitted that attending church was simply the "thing to do" during the postwar years; Anne and Gordon Watson, interview by author, Victoria, BC, 3 September 1998; Barbara Griffith, interview by author,

statistical growth, together with images of the fifties family as happily churchgoing, has obscured an awareness of some of the tensions and conflicts of church involvement in this era. As we have seen, even non-religious individuals took the connection between church and family for granted. Typically seen as mutually supporting, church and family were occasionally viewed in more oppositional terms. For instance, Sylvia Henderson, whose husband worked at a Nanaimo pulp mill through the postwar years, recalled the difficulties of fulfilling the economic requirements of both family and church:

> I used to get letters with envelopes in to put my donation in, but no way [laughs]. Make your pledge for the year, and I thought no, I'm not doing it. And another thing too, in the '60s, although my husband was making fair wages, but raising four children, we didn't have the extra money to put in as a […] you know, so much a month […]. When they started sending the envelopes to fill out for the year, you know, I thought well, what's more important the family or the church? And at that time the family was.[64]

For Sylvia, family survival came before the needs of the church. Similarly, Margaret Ferguson and her husband left their Vancouver church because they were "struggling financially" and found that "the church [was] never […] satisfied with what they were getting."[65] As this example suggests, family economic priorities, particularly at that critical intersection of life, when careers were beginning and babies were being born, could push church involvement to the wayside. References to the monetary obsessions of the churches and the "wealth of priests and ministers" echoed through several of the oral histories.[66] This common criticism was at least partly grounded in widely held assumptions about the meanings of "true religion." As Robert Orsi suggests, because religion has typically been understood as something disconnected from, and untainted by, "material things," it is often upsetting to people when "money makes an appearance in the space of the sacred."[67] The notion that money necessarily taints "true religion" appeared in many of the recollections, even of those with the most secular of sensibilities. Complaints about the materialism of the churches were not unique to the postwar years, but expectations around such things as giving and

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Victoria, BC, 30 October 1998; William and Diane Brown, interview by author, Victoria, BC, 29 July 1998.

[64] Sylvia Henderson, interview by author, Nanaimo, BC, 22 October 2003.

[65] Margaret Ferguson, interview by author, Nanaimo, BC, 10 September 2003.

[66] Anne Carlson, interview by author, Victoria, BC, 16 September 2003; Muriel Thompson, interview by author, Vancouver, BC, 21 October 2003; Watson, interview.

[67] Orsi, "Everyday Miracles," 6.

wearing fine Sunday clothing may have been heightened in this era of relative affluence and consumerism.[68] As we saw in the opening excerpt of this article, those without "money for dresses" felt excluded by the middle-class, materialistic image of churchgoing. By revealing that some families were marginalized and compelled to choose between their own survival, and that of the church, the oral histories do much to complicate the dominant postwar image of well-dressed families contentedly filling the pews on Sundays.

While statistical sources indicate that church involvement grew in postwar North America, such sources tell us less about *why* people joined and attended churches during these years. The oral histories challenge any easy assumption that people were drawn to the churches for wholly sacred reasons. Many of my male informants, in particular, tended to define their church involvement in rather profane terms. Charles Moore, a professor, recalled his brief period of church involvement: "I went to church, primarily because the minister – I think it was Presbyterian – because I liked his daughter, she was a pretty girl. And then they brought in a new Presbyterian minister from Scotland, Reverend [name withheld], and I told my mother I didn't like him."[69] For Charles, like many of my male informants, reference to the churches called up memories of heterosexual, rather than strictly spiritual, relations. According to Richard Petersen, the church gradually became "irrelevant" as he acquired a new means of meeting women: "I still did things with the church, because it was still a good place to meet girls – and one never throws that out. So, I went to church things until, I think until I got into high school, and then I had jobs that caused me to work on weekends, so church just didn't fit in anymore. And I had a car, so I had other bait to troll for girls."[70] Bill Wilson playfully recounted the churchgoing habits of a childhood friend in Dawson, Yukon Territory: "He tried to date pretty near every girl in Dawson. If he was trying to get friendly with a girl in the Church of England, St. Paul's, he would go there. If he was trying to get friendly with a girl in the Presbyterian Church, he'd go there [laughs]."[71] Patrick O'Connor, a retired bartender in Nanaimo, similarly established a brief relationship with the church for the purposes of heterosexual courtship: "I went to church one time when I was about 13 because the Smith sisters both were going to church, and I had a crush on one of them and so I went, so I had an ulterior motive [laughs]. Church had

[68] For a path-breaking discussion on the materialism and class-basis of Protestant churches in nineteenth-century Ontario see Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, especially Chapter 3. In *Growing Up: Childhood in Canada from the Great War to the Age of Television* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), Neil Sutherland suggests that during the postwar years, children's Sunday clothing became more differentiated from school clothing; see Sutherland, 31.
[69] Moore, interview. Also Thomas Marshall, interview by author, Victoria, BC, 3 July 1998; Watson, interview; Maxwell, interview.
[70] Petersen, interview.
[71] Beverley and Bill Wilson, interview by author, Victoria, BC, 4 September 2003.

nothing to do with it!"[72] Patrick's ironic assertion that "church had nothing to do with it" captures the nature of many men's relationships with churches in the postwar era. As scholars have shown, both women and men have sought and found opportunities for heterosexual courtship in the churches and other religious venues through history.[73] My oral history projects revealed a clear gendered discrepancy in this regard: the subject of heterosexual relations predominated in men's, but not women's, memories of the churches. In focusing on courtship, men conveyed both their ambivalence about church involvement, and their understanding of the churches as feminine spaces.

According to Callum Brown, in postwar Britain "women were critical to the churchgoing habits of the population as a whole."[74] My oral interviews suggest a similar gender pattern in the Canadian context. Several men attributed their (sporadic) church involvement to their relationships with women in the context of marriage, as well as courtship. Port Angeles agnostic Gary Nelson, who long ago married a devout Catholic, reflected that he had occasionally attended worship services over the years because he was "dragged there" by his wife.[75] James, a salesman, related a similar situation in his postwar household:

> [My] wife was up at eight o'clock every morning, and she'd make me breakfast or make me coffee or something, and a lot of times I would argue with her, she'd ask me if I'm going to church with her, and I'd say no, because I was a little lazy myself, I wanted to sleep in. So I said no. But there was a lot of times I did go to church with her, rather than have an argument, I kept the peace around the house. My wife wanted to drag me to church and make a good boy out of me. So I went to church with her on some Sundays […]. But I don't think I went to church to pray, it was just part of the scene, I just stood there like the rest of the people. I don't think I said any prayers, or anything like that.[76]

Richard also endured the occasional worship service to please his wife: "[Every] so often my wife would get all excited, 'we ought to go to church because it's Easter or Christmas' […]. I'd say, 'okay sure'. Or, once in awhile,

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[72] O'Connor, interview.
[73] See, for example, Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 175-77; Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 143; Christie, "Young Men and the Creation of Civic Christianity," 84, 91-94.
[74] Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 159. Also see Brown, *Religion and Society*, 30, 203.
[75] Gary Nelson, interview by author, Port Angeles, WA, 19 November 2003. Several of my churchgoing informants also noted that wives were responsible for bringing their husbands to church. Frank and Marion Stevens, interview by author, Victoria, BC, 10 August 1998; James Ingram, interview by author, Victoria, BC, 10 June 1998; Marshall, interview; Watson, interview.
[76] James Anderson, interview by author, Vancouver, BC, 22 October 2003.

she'd get spun up, spring-time, spring-cleaning, let's go to church. But it never stuck, so I just had to be patient, and it would go away."[77] In their oral narratives, men imparted and entrenched wider cultural assumptions of churchgoing as, fundamentally, a "woman's thing." In constructing the churches as female spaces, and in identifying their own deep reluctance around church involvement, these men helped to challenge any suppositions about the spiritual unity of families in their homes and the pews.

Oral narratives must not be approached as unmediated reconstructions of the past, but as cultural constructions shaped by the present. Historian Sarah Williams suggests that in oral history analyses, "when the focus of the endeavour becomes the way in which memory is constructed and the manner of the telling is treated as equally important as that which is told, then the way is opened for the source to yield its unique value, which lies in the first instance in its expression of culture."[78] When we turn our attention to the "manner of the telling," oral histories on religion and the family prove especially revealing. Tracy K'Meyer notes that one of the challenges of conducting oral research about religion is that people are sometimes "hesitant or unable to talk about their beliefs."[79] One of the most striking instances of this in my own research occurred during my conversations with non-religious women; although many of these women expressed pride in raising their children outside of formal religious strictures, most stopped short of calling themselves atheists or of teaching atheism to their children. Indeed, women and men spoke different languages of atheism, revealing the powerfully gendered character of belief and unbelief in the postwar world. While many men matter-of-factly proclaimed the identity of "atheist," several women – many of whom were ardent unbelievers – described "atheist" as a cruel, harsh, and hated label.[80] According to historian Denyse Baillargeon, "if memory is not strictly speaking, sexually determined, the way it is structured depends on individual experience, which is itself determined by gender."[81] When asked if she considered herself an atheist, Beverly Wilson cautiously replied: "Well, no, I wouldn't probably say I was an atheist but I'm just […] I'm not religious, you know."[82] Many of my female informants described their lack of belief in faltering, uncertain terms. Sharon Davis admitted that as a homemaker and part-time public servant in the postwar decades, she evaded discussing her atheism publicly: "I think that was a word that people didn't like. I probably didn't […] I really didn't

[77] Petersen, interview.
[78] Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, 19; also see Cruikshank, "Oral Tradition and Oral History," 408.
[79] K'Meyer, "Oral History and the Meaning of Faith," 732.
[80] Davis, interview; Edna Simpson, interview by author, Olympia, WA, 25 March 2004.
[81] Denyse Baillargeon, *Making Do: Women, Family, and Home in Montreal during the Great Depression* Trans. Yvonne Klein (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), 15.
[82] Wilson, interview.

discuss it, you know, with anyone, except to say 'no, I don't believe anything.'"[83] In his research on Britain, Callum Brown found that while men might reject Christianity, "for women, this type of personal journey away from religion was extremely difficult and comparatively rare before the 1950s. It was difficult because a woman could not just 'drop' religion as a man could; her respectability as a woman, wife and mother, whether she liked it or not, was founded on religion whether she went to church or not."[84] As Brown suggests, women spoke more uncertainly about their unbelief because of the ongoing influence of norms of feminine piety. Women's hesitance around atheism, along with many other subtleties of culture, would be missed if we looked only to statistical and published sources.[85]

In her study of popular religion in Southwark, Sarah Williams found that oral interviews allowed "access to the ephemeral world of the joke, the rumour, and gossip."[86] In my own research, I discovered that jokes and humour often accompanied discussions of fatherly impiety. Nanaimo resident Jean Stewart recalled that in the postwar decades, there "were always jokes about people falling asleep in church."[87] My research suggests that such jokes were distinctly gendered. Personal, humorous memories of irreligious fathers punctuated many of the oral histories in my studies; while anecdotal on their own, taken together such memories hint at the taken for granted, even comic, nature of male religious apathy in the wider postwar world. Shirley Clark, who worked as a nurse and homemaker in postwar Olympia, reflected with laughter: "I think that my dad didn't believe in anything. He'd go to church with her because she liked to go to church, and she liked to sing – she had a lovely voice. But dad would sleep all through the sermon. And I thought that was great! "[88] Bill Wilson, a miner, similarly found humour in his father's tendency to fall asleep during worship services: "Well, my old man, he wouldn't go to church because my mother said that he went to sleep, and my mother had to poke him."[89] Several of my informants adopted a notably humorous tone when telling stories of religiously indifferent fathers. Edna laughed as she described her father's role in her religious upbringing: "My father would take us to church. He would not go, I mean he would not go inside, he'd stay outside […]. There were lots of men waiting outside, he wasn't the only one! They probably had a craps game going!"[90]

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[83] Davis, interview.
[84] Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 183.
[85] For a more detailed discussion on my informants' gendered approaches to atheism see Block, "Going to church just never even occurred to me," 64-68.
[86] Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, 21.
[87] Stewart, interview.
[88] Brian and Shirley Clark, interview by author, Olympia, WA, 22 March 2004.
[89] Wilson, interview.
[90] Simpson, interview.

Historian Robert Rutherdale argues that "personal pasts are simultaneously embedded in social pasts": memories that appear idiosyncratic within a single life story, take on wider cultural significance when they recur across several narratives.[91] Playful, humorous memories of religiously indifferent fathers recur across many of the oral histories. Such memories hint at the cultural acceptance of fatherly impiety as predictable, and not to be taken too seriously.[92] Like the hesitations of atheist women, jokes about irreverent fathers are not sidelines to the main story of family religion. If we approach oral histories as cultural constructions, rather than unmediated windows on the past, such hesitations and jokes become revealing evidence about the gendered meanings of religious practice and identity. In the "manner of the telling," the oral narratives suggest that ingrained assumptions about the innate piety of women and the religious indifference of fathers constituted part of the commonsensical world of my informants.

Oral sources are useful for revealing the complex, often contradictory nature of family religion; such sources also, of course, embody contradictions and ambiguities of their own. For my projects, I interviewed atheists who baptized their children and were married in churches, Christians who were ambivalent about churchgoing and family worship, and agnostics who turned to prayer in times of domestic crisis. Clearly, family religion was lived in ways that cannot be easily fitted into oppositional categories such as sacred versus secular or official versus popular. Wade Clark Roof writes that "religious worldviews are not created in a cultural vacuum – nor are they tightly integrated dogmatic systems; they are better thought of, in fact, as a hodge podge of beliefs and affirmations, a set of cultural themes and elements often inconsistent in a strict cognitive sense but which blend into some meaningful coherence for the individual believer."[93] As Roof suggests, religion is lived, understood, and practiced by ordinary human beings in ways that often appear inconsistent, and that invariably spill outside the bounds of any "tightly integrated dogmatic system."[94] The contradictions and seeming inconsistencies of religious practice certainly distressed Christian leaders in the postwar years. Church officials regularly bemoaned the tendency of

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[91] Robert Rutherdale, "Fatherhood and the Social Construction of Memory: Breadwinning and Male Parenting on a Job Frontier, 1945-1966," in *Gender and History in Canada*, eds. Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld (Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd., 1996), 372.

[92] In *The Death of Christian Britain*, Callum Brown also notes the taken for granted character of masculine and fatherly impiety, 136-142. For further discussion on the role of fathers in the religious life of the family see Patricia Dirks, "Reinventing Christian Masculinity and Fatherhood: The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1900-1920," in *Households of Faith*, ed. Nancy Christie, 290-316.

[93] Wade Clark Roof, "Religion and Narrative," *Review of Religious Research* 34, 4 (June 1993), 303.

[94] Ibid.

ordinary people to disassociate church involvement from religiosity. According to an article in a 1958 edition of the *Canadian Churchman*, those who saw churchgoing and religiosity as separable were, quite simply, "muddle-headed and incorrect." The writer offered the "true" definition of religion: "Religion consists of being trained by regularity at church and prayer and a definitely planned spiritual growth and development […]. A religious person is one whose daily life is so planned that his or her spiritual training and duties takes precedence over everything else."[95] Church-centred definitions of religiosity fail to capture those diverse spiritual behaviours and ideas that have taken shape outside of the institutional realm.

Theorists of lived religion point to the inherently polysemous character of religion, and urge scholars to resist the impulse to "abridge, even to censure, the messiness that leaks into everyday life."[96] Oral histories suggest that religion was especially messy within the realm of the household; indeed, the ambivalences and inconsistencies that characterize lived religion became most evident when conversations turned to the subject of family. This was made clear to me in an interview with Vancouver homemaker Muriel Thompson. Born and raised in London, England, Muriel moved to Toronto in 1955 at the age of nineteen, and settled in Vancouver, BC, the following year. Through her life, Muriel never attended church and understood herself as non-religious. While she confessed that religion was "unimportant" to her and that she did not "think about it very often," religious encounters and events punctuate her narrative.[97] She recalled attending Sunday school as a child, having a church wedding, and sporadically praying for the health and safety of her children. While unique and personal, Muriel's story echoes others in its emphasis on the family. Like Muriel, many of my informants eschewed regular church attendance, but entered the churches periodically for family-centred rites and holidays. That the churches were regularly used for family rituals but not worship frustrated religious leaders in postwar North America. In 1960, a writer for the *Olympia Churchman* grumbled that the "hitchhiker is a symptom of an age when all too many people are chiselers – out to get something for nothing. The Church has its hitchhikers, too; people who use it for burials, baptisms and weddings, but who do not support it and who rarely think of it at other times."[98] From the perspective of the clergy, the fact that people used the churches for family rituals and not for worship revealed the superficial character of postwar religion. A Canadian Anglican priest, concerned that the churches were being used for "festivals" and "family occasions" but not worship, remarked: "Religion, real religion, isn't too popular today […]. To omit

[95] "Reaching the Unreached," *Canadian Churchman,* 20 February 1958, 79-80.
[96] David Hall, "Introduction," in *Lived Religion in America*, x.
[97] Muriel Thompson, interview.
[98] Fr. James F. Bogarus, "Hitch-Hiking to Heaven?" *Olympia Churchman*, October 1960, 2.

the work of worship is rather like filing off the sharp edges of the Cross, rendering Christianity into something weak and harmless, sentimental and palsy-walsy."[99] This Anglican priest, like many of his contemporaries, viewed those people who entered the churches occasionally for baptisms and weddings, but not for Sunday services, as not "really" religious. The oral histories speak to a more complicated interpretation.

In postwar North America, far more people opted for church weddings and baptized their children than were found in regular attendance at church.[100] However, as Sarah Williams argues in a different context, the widespread use of the churches for weddings and baptisms "constituted a distinctly popular religious response."[101] Muriel, who considered herself non-religious, explained her reasons for getting married in a church: "[There] were some things, even if you say you're not religious, I've heard people say that if you get married at City Hall, it's like going and getting a driver's license, and getting married in a church feels like real commitment. I think a lot of people feel this way, even if they're not churchgoers."[102] Many of my non-religious informants opted for church weddings out of a sense of obligation to extended family members. The significance of family is evident in Edward Lewis's narrative. Edward, a public servant who considered himself an agnostic through his life, recalled why he was married in a church: "Well, mainly I think because both mothers [laughs] thought that we should be married in a church […]. They seemed to be quite interested in how things should go [laughs]. And then we wanted my sister to come, too, and she would've been very upset if it hadn't been in a church."[103] The oral histories suggest that baptisms, like church weddings, were often inspired by extended family members. Patrick O'Connor defined himself as non-religious, but agreed to have his children baptized to please his family: "I basically think that was to accommodate my wife at the time. And the family, who said you should have your children baptized or christened. So, fine and dandy, we did that."[104] Baptisms and church weddings must be judged on their own terms, rather than against some normative standard of regular church involvement. The oral histories reveal that religion was (and is) inextricably bound to other facets of human experience, including those involving the family. As Williams argues with respect to family-based religious rites in nineteenth-century London: "Both the social sentiment and the spiritual formed parts of a single religious expression

[99] "Country Club Religion No Remedy for these Times," *Canadian Churchman*, January 1961, 10.
[100] Bibby, *Fragmented Gods,* 55, 76-77. For similar findings in the British context see Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 166; McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 62.
[101] Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, 163.
[102] Muriel Thompson, interview.
[103] Edward Lewis, interview by author, Nanaimo, BC, 26 August 2003.
[104] O'Connor, interview.

which was too closely interwoven to be separated."[105] A mix of sacred and secular motivations underscored the religious practices of postwar families. This complexity runs counter to normative definitions of true religion, but is clearly reflected in the memories of the people themselves.

My oral history research not only challenged singular or normative definitions of true religion, but also complicated the statistical evidence on religion in the Pacific Northwest. Scholars have well established that the Pacific Northwest was, and continues to be, in statistical terms, the least religious region in North America. Census, survey, and church affiliation figures show that people in this region have historically been far less likely to join religious institutions, and far more likely to claim that they have "no religion," than residents of other regions.[106] Oral histories suggest that the story of religion in the Pacific Northwest is far more complex than the "no religion" statistics indicate. Statistics on religion present not only a narrow but also a fixed picture of beliefs and behaviours that are, in fact, fluid and impermanent. Several scholars have demonstrated that conventional measures miss much of the texture and disorder of human experience in the religious realm.[107] As I discovered in my interviews with non-religious people in the region, even the most ardent of atheists encountered, and sometimes engaged, the sacred in the context of their everyday lives. Such encounters often occurred in times of family crisis, particularly those relating to illness and death. Edward, an agnostic who had never prayed, felt compelled to do so for his dying wife: "[There] was one bit of funny thing happened before [wife] died. She wanted me to pray for her. And I said, 'well, I think you know how I feel about this'. And she said 'yes, but would you do that for me?'And so, I

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[105] Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, 10

[106] As with all regional categories, the "Pacific Northwest" has competing definitions. The term is most commonly used to refer to Washington, Oregon, and BC; although my own research is centred on BC and Washington, I cautiously extend my conclusions to include Oregon. For references to the statistical secularity of the Pacific Northwest see, for example, Bob Stewart, "That's the B.C. Spirit! Religion and Secularity in Lotus Land," *Canadian Society of Church History Papers* (1983), 22-35; Patricia O'Connell Killen and Mark Shibley, "Surveying the Religious Landscape: Historical Trends and Current Patterns in Oregon, Washington, and Alaska," in *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest*, eds. Patricia O'Connell Killen and Mark Silk, 25-50; J.E. Veevers and D. F. Cousineau, "The Heathen Canadians: Demographic Correlates of Nonbelief," *Pacific Sociological Review* 23, 2 (1980), 199-216; Marks, "Exploring Regional Diversity"; Block, "Everyday Infidels."

[107] For an eloquent discussion of the wide range of religious practices and beliefs that are missed by statistical measurements, see the introductory chapter in Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*. Also see Callum Brown, "The Secularisation Decade: What the 1960s Have Done to the Study of Religious History," in *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000*, eds. Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 42; Brown, *Religion and Society*, 36, 314.

did."[108] Many of my informants, like Edward, recalled praying for ailing family members. For Robert Taylor, prayer was something broached only in relation to family crises: "Obviously when my mother was ill, I said silent prayers for her. Same with my brother, when he died in '49."[109] Likewise, Sylvia's efforts to come to terms with family illnesses spurred sporadic prayers through her life: "My husband was very ill, and you wonder why is this happening and what am I supposed to do. And when my mother was ill, it was a very painful cancer, and then she got shingles on top of it, and for her last two years she was in pain every day, and I prayed for her to die."[110] Reflexive, sporadic moments of prayer, usually tied to family crises, emerge in many of the oral interviews, even of those who likely checked "no religion" on the census form. Such moments remind us that the boundary between sacred and secular was often blurred in ordinary human experience, particularly in the realm of the family.

Neither the normative ideal of true religion found in the church records, nor the image of secularity painted by statistics, fully captures the complex mix of sacred and secular within postwar households. I do not mean to suggest that oral history is somehow more authentic or less problematic than other sources; like all primary materials, oral sources are deeply bound up with the cultural positions and views of their creators. In my own research, I found that my three sets of sources – printed, statistical, and oral – spoke to each other, offering different, and sometimes competing, views on religion in the postwar world. While oral histories do not somehow embody the truth of the past, in my projects they did help to complicate both the stylized depictions of the family in prescriptive writings, and the seeming straightforwardness of statistical categories. Of course, as we have seen, oral histories often contain many religious contradictions of their own. The concept of "lived religion," which acknowledges the commingling of sacred and secular in everyday life, offers a useful theoretical framework through which to approach oral histories on religion and the family. From a lived religion perspective, the anxieties of secular mothers and the church weddings of atheists appear, not as departures from some essential true religion, but as elements of family religion as it was actually lived in ordinary households. Such a perspective compels us to accept and study, rather than dismiss or ignore, those moments when the mundane intersected with the sacred; it urges us to take toilet-seat prayers, jokes about fatherly impiety, and other everyday practices seriously, as part of, rather than anomalous to, the history of religion within the family.

[108] Lewis, interview.
[109] Taylor, interview.
[110] Henderson, interview.