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In its infancy, Christianity was a religion of the household. Lacking dedicated buildings for worship, the congregations of the faithful met in domestic environments. Like the ancient Hebrews before them, early Christians instinctively described themselves using the language of kinship, equating their biological ties with blood relatives with the spiritual links they shared with fellow believers. In the pages of Scripture they spoke of the latter as their brothers and sisters and God as their loving Father. In the centuries since, the same vocabulary has repeatedly been utilized to conceptualize the Church as an institution and to delineate the relationship between the inhabitants of heaven and human beings on earth. The Holy Family has been the subject of enduring devotion and has offered a model for lay piety in the home. The household has also provided a blueprint for all kinds of religious communities: monastic orders, confraternities, reform movements, dissenting sects and evangelical organizations.

In the Christian West, as in other civilizations, the family and the household have long been regarded as microcosms of the social and political order, basic building blocks of the state and society. Hovering on the boundary between the public and the private, throughout history they have been a focus of both optimism and anxiety. They have simultaneously been seen as sources of sedition, corruption and moral degeneration and as key arenas in which to educate, nurture and indoctrinate the next generation. The connection between religious cultures and the household has been marked by an equally curious mixture of intimacy and tension. Surrounded by ambivalence, the family and the home have both buttressed and subverted the ecclesiastical status quo. They have fostered religious solidarity and cohesion, but they have also served to foment internal conflict and friction. They operate at once as symbols of stability and of danger.

It was with this rich range of possible avenues of enquiry in mind that 'Religion and the Household' was chosen as the theme for the Summer and Winter Conferences in 2012–13. These meet-

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ings attracted papers and communications on the household as a physical space and setting for collective prayer and personal meditation; as a network of people bound together by ties of kinship, emotion, service and obligation; and as a metaphor and symbol of structures and systems of authority that operated essentially outside it. Collectively they fostered lively discussion about the complex intersection between religion and the domestic realm from antiquity to the present day. This volume of essays endeavours to deepen our understanding of how that nexus has developed and how it has been shaped by the varying social and cultural conditions to which Christianity has been exposed in a wide range of geographical locations. While many of the papers published here concentrate on England, others investigate Germany, France, Italy, Africa, India and North America, as well as the biblical Middle East. The conferences also sought to foster fruitful reflection on the comparisons between the Christian Church and different religious traditions, especially Islam and Judaism, and this collection includes contributions that centre on these faiths, as well as upon indigenous religious practice in modern China. A further aim was to prompt consideration not merely of the household's role in the growth of Christianity, but also of the part played by the private home and family unit in its gradual eclipse and decline – in other words, in the processes of secularization that have gathered momentum in Western Europe over the last two centuries. This introduction offers a brief overview of the main themes that emerge from the chronologically arranged essays which follow. It highlights the wider, cumulative insights they yield and draws out a series of common threads that weave them together.

SITES OF RESISTANCE OR BULWARKS OF THE SOCIAL ORDER

The first of these is illuminated by the opening contribution to the volume, Kate Cooper's thought-provoking discussion of how the household became an 'ideological battleground' in the first centuries of the Christian faith. Initially presenting a challenge to the domestic hierarchies of Roman society, over time the new religion aligned itself with the values of the empire and became formally adopted by Constantine as its official creed. Where the earliest narratives celebrated the conscientious resistance of converts to their parental and patriarchal elders, later writings discouraged this

kind of pious disobedience. Cooper presents the Christian faith as a 'paradoxical formula', with the capacity both to unsettle the household and to resolve the 'tangle of potentially volatile tensions' it contained. She explores the process by which 'the family of faith was reconciled with the reproductive family', but also highlights the seeds for generational discord that were implicit in Christianity from the very beginning.

The contradictory tendencies Cooper detects in the patristic era continued into the late antique and early medieval period. Focusing upon domestic space and the material objects that occupied it, Julia Smith explores the worries that emerged about relics and miracles in the Carolingian Church and its efforts to assert institutional control over sources of supernatural power by transferring them from elite households into ecclesiastical ownership. The rise of the monasteries as the setting for saintly intercession and asceticism was accompanied by the retreat of the private chamber and home from prominence in early medieval Christian discourse.

Bernard Hamilton's study of the Cathar heresy in twelfth- and thirteenth-century southern France sheds light on an intriguingly different pattern of development. Suspicious of sex and procreation as mechanisms by which evil overtook the world, Cathar theology fostered the creation of celibate communities of initiated perfect living in ordinary houses but aloof from secular society, which formed the only true households recognized by its hierarchy. After the onset of the Albigensian Crusade and the introduction of the Inquisition, however, Cathar leaders were compelled to recognize that families of married believers and their dependents were critical to their Church's survival. Lay residences likewise provided a place of asylum for the Bridgettine monks and nuns expelled from Syon Abbey after its suppression by Henry VIII in 1539, as Peter Cunich shows, but once again the secular household could only provide a temporary solution for a community dedicated to cloistered contemplation, offering shelter during a time of intense crisis, yet eroding the distinctiveness of monastic life as it did so.

The blurred boundary that often exists between church and household, family and sect is also evident in the case of Lollardy. Household conventicles in which Lollards prayed together, read the Bible and engaged in other forms of spiritual sociability were a vital but divisive element of the ecclesiological legacy of the

Lollard heresy: ‘privy assemblies’ were at once an edifying echo of the primitive *ecclesia* and an inspiration for extra-parochial gatherings which the Elizabethan regime regarded as insidious and subversive. Susan Royal’s careful scrutiny of how John Foxe represented them in his *Actes and Monuments* casts fresh light on the radicalism of the martyrologist’s religious outlook. My own essay explores some of these competing impulses as they were played out on both sides of the confessional divide erected by the Reformation. It examines the significance both Protestantism and Catholicism attached to the household as a haven for churches under the cross alongside the fraught relations that the experience of being a repressed minority sometimes engendered between wives and husbands, parents and children. It probes warm endorsement of the home as a site for cementing orthodox piety in tandem with ongoing concern about its capacity to become a hotbed of separatist dissent. And it assesses how an institution the authorities regarded as critical to enforcing religious uniformity ironically became one of the means by which English society found ways of accommodating diversity.

Some of these suggestions find unexpected parallels in other periods and distant regions of the world. Adam Chau analyses the importance attached to household sovereignty in modern Chinese culture and its uneasy relationship with external forms of religious authority from an anthropological perspective. He suggests that the resilience of a household idiom of religious engagement, centred on the hosting of spirits, is not merely a function of the unwillingness of the state to sanction the erection of places of worship but also of the persistent desire of people to venerate these divinities in domestic environments. The Christian Church, by contrast, proved to be far more successful in usurping the independent agency of the household as a locus for liturgical activity. Justin Jones’s sophisticated study of the evolution of a programme of reform of the Muslim home in nineteenth-century north India is alive to similar ambiguities. Fearing that such households were sites of rebellion and fanaticism, the colonial state subjected them to increased scrutiny; this was the other face of the Victorian cult of domesticity, which in turn coloured Islam’s own efforts to police morality and renew spirituality within the family. Regarded as a terrain in which religious purity could be recovered, the Muslim home testifies to forms of ‘cross-cultural pollination’ that defy the hostile polarities

which have dominated the historiography of colonial encounter in the Indian subcontinent.

THE SPIRITUALIZATION OF THE HOUSEHOLD: NURSERIES OF
MORALITY AND PIETY

A second theme running through this volume is the significance of the household as a forum for religious education and didactic instruction. Andrew Atherstone's essay highlights the resurgence of this idea in pre-Thatcherite Britain in the guise of the vigorous campaign waged by the Nationwide Festival of Light and its Anglican lay director, Raymond Johnston, in the 1970s and 1980s. Johnston's reassertion of the home as a 'microchurch' and a bastion of Christian values was a conservative reaction to its perceived erosion by the combined forces of communism, feminism, liberalism, television and cinema. In seeing the old-fashioned family as the key instrument for restoring a sick society to health, this movement mimicked many earlier attempts to bring about what Christopher Hill famously called the 'spiritualization of the household'.

One particular phase of Christian history in which this impulse can be discerned is the late Middle Ages. Lucy Wooding examines the Bridgettine monk Richard Whitford's bestselling *Werke for Housholders* (1530). Reflecting clerical awareness of the lay demand for guidance in domestic affairs, Whitford's work also served to diffuse monastic ideals about prayer, work, piety and discipline beyond the cloister. Wooding proposes that rather than seeing humanism as the precursor of the godly Protestant household, the latter should perhaps be regarded as the 'left-over wreckage' of aspects of traditional religion that were too valuable to be completely abandoned. Jonathan Willis examines another species of the prolific early modern English literature on domestic devotion: tracts on the Decalogue. If their discussions of the fifth Commandment ('Honour your father and your mother') laid unprecedented stress on obedience to patriarchal authority, they also acknowledged that heads of households had reciprocal obligations to their inferiors. Amanda Pullan investigates a novel and neglected medium of moral instruction: the art of embroidery. Needlework was an activity that not only embodied the duty of eschewing idleness, but also inspired young women to emulate the example of the biblical

figures who were often their subjects. As a model of industry and virtue, modesty and motherhood, the story of Rebecca was particularly popular, but sometimes it also enabled those who stitched it to articulate alternative messages regarding female behaviour.

The notion of the family as an effective nursery of piety retained its purchase in eighteenth-century elite society, as Bill Jacob's wide-ranging assessment of the Church of England in this period demonstrates. His concluding speculations about the role of Methodism in offering a rival focus for the religious experience of servants, and in consequently contributing to the decline of ideals of domestic piety, would repay fuller investigation. In evangelical circles, however, these ideals continued to exert formative influence. Bridging the gap between prescription and practice, David Bebbington uses the annotations in Anne Gladstone's Bible to illuminate the religious ethos that shaped the everyday life of the future prime minister and his sister, while Anthony Fletcher's poignant retelling of the story of Charlotte Bloomfield casts light on how her terminal illness at once tested and strengthened the piety of her household. Transforming this family tragedy into a triumph, the manuscript narrative of the death of this child became a memorial but also a manual for the instruction of later generations. Gareth Atkins, by contrast, focuses upon the threats to the integrity of the religious family presented by 'idle reading' of sensational novels. He shows how evangelical authors and godly households responded to the spread of consumer culture and envisaged the home as a safe environment in which the young could be nurtured to resist infection by secular values.

As Lucy Underwood's investigation of the 'children's exercises' surviving in the Blundell papers reveals, Roman Catholics developed their own modes of domestic pedagogy and catechesis, including autodidactic drama performed by boys and girls in recusant households. Offering a glimpse of the child's perspective, these texts illustrate how civility and decorum were taught through contained misbehaviour and how play could be an agent of socialization. They underline the centrality of the home in what Underwood calls 'the domestication of emergency'.

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PRIVATE SPACES AND PUBLIC PLACES

A third theme that repeatedly emerges in this collection is the fluidity of the boundary between the private household and the public world. The existence and rigidity of the division between these two spheres, and their gendered dimensions, have been much discussed, especially in the context of the nineteenth century. The increasing consensus that the distinction was far more nuanced and complex than often assumed is reinforced by Linda Wilson's exploration of the Nonconformist Bible Christian Church and the household of the Bristol couple William and Sarah Terrett. Comradeship rather than difference emerges as the keynote of the Terretts' relationship, and Wilson also highlights how women repeatedly broke out of their allotted 'female' role in the home to participate in philanthropy, business and forms of social activism such as the temperance movement. Jones's discussion of India also underlines the porosity of the public/private divide in this society, in which Victorian dichotomies clashed with prevailing Mughal ideas. It is equally difficult to sustain these distinctions in the medieval and early modern eras. The early thirteenth-century papal household of Innocent III examined by Brenda Bolton was at once 'a consummate private space' and 'secretive enclave' and a public space from which the pontiff dispensed charity and alms to impoverished visitors and in which he projected himself as a shepherd of the faithful. In the post-Reformation period, as Tara Hamling observes, the domestic environment was likewise 'the meeting place of public and personal lives and agendas'. The word 'family' was used expansively to encompass not merely the nuclear unit of parents and children, but also servants and co-resident kin.

Furthermore, the home was an environment into which outsiders regularly penetrated. Despite the image of homogeneity and cohesiveness conveyed by our sources, families and households were also arenas in which there was scope for interaction with people of different denominations and faiths. They are laboratories in which we can learn much about interconfessional relations and about religious coexistence and toleration. Elisheva Baumgarten illustrates how the everyday routines of medieval northern European Jewish households entailed cooperation with the Christians among whom they resided in an era prior to the advent of the ghetto. Jews lived 'an entangled existence in which they were both

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part of their surroundings and a distinct minority' and in which negotiation rather than aggression was the *Leitmotif* of social relations. Forms of cooperation and exchange that belie claims of stark separation are also highlighted in Sophie Mann's study of religion and medicine in the early modern English household. The plurality of the religious landscape was matched by an equally complex medical marketplace. Catholics and Protestants were eclectic in the remedies to which they resorted and their interactions with a range of practitioners sometimes provided proselytizing opportunities. The same was true of the missionary households in Belgian Congo discussed by David Maxwell: these were sites for contact between Western evangelists and Africans.

EVERYDAY LIFE, IDENTITY FORMATION AND THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENTS

At the same time, the household was a critical forum in which religious identities were forged. As Baumgarten demonstrates, the rituals that developed around bread, water, cloth and candles demarcated Jews culturally from the Christian majority. The picture that Hamling paints of domestic life in Protestant England is one in which everyday practices were similarly transformed into devotional acts. The quotidian rhythms of life in the home (from cooking and eating to sleeping and reading), as well as the rooms in which they took place (bedchambers, closets, kitchens and parlours), acquired spiritual meaning and moral significance. They too operated as confessional markers, distinguishing adherents of the reformed religion from those loyal to the Church of Rome. Emilie Murphy offers insight into the other half of this equation by investigating how music was implicated in Catholic processes of identity formation. She shows how the performance of martyr narratives within the household assisted in sacralizing domestic space and fostering a sense of belonging to a heroic but persecuted faith.

These and other essays reflect an interest in how the material culture of the domestic environments (their architecture, furniture, fabric and accessories) shapes, and is in turn shaped by, religious belief and praxis. Smith's study of the place of relics in Carolingian households finds echoes in Hamling's work on how English Protestants lived in close proximity with the Bible, laying it beside

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them at the dinner table, like early medieval men and women who kept holy objects in their private *cubicula*. Michael Ashby uses surviving physical evidence and antiquarian notes to reconstruct the changing appearance of the episcopal household at Ely between 1500 and 1800. He demonstrates how its iconographical schemes reflected the self-conception of bishops as examples of self-restraint and as godly patriarchs and the changes in style and taste that accompanied the growth of consumption in the eighteenth century. He rightly warns against regarding the latter as a reliable barometer of the rise of secular values within society and the Church and stresses the continuing role of interior decoration as a source of religious edification.

ECCLESIASTICAL HOUSEHOLDS

While many essays in this collection focus on the households of the laity, a substantial cluster place their ecclesiastical counterparts under the microscope. Bolton casts fresh light on how Innocent III sought to reincarnate the apostolic virtues of the sixth-century pope Gregory the Great, and to present himself as a *paterfamilias*. Thomas Smith inspects the College of Cardinals of Honorius III, elected in 1216, and questions whether this was literally as well as metaphorically a 'household of brothers'. Although the ties that bound its members involved kinship as well as merit and political alliance, Smith concludes that Honorius does not deserve his reputation as a shameless nepotist. Monastic communities, meanwhile, operated as surrogate families for men and women who took vows of chastity that separated them from the rest of humanity. In turn, these supplied a template for the lives of the devout laity. And when monks and nuns were expelled from their religious houses, as Cunich demonstrates, the homes of the pious gentry and nobility provided a natural place of refuge. Such intersections underline the reciprocal influences exerted by the cloister on the world and vice versa. These also emerge from Sarah Foot's study of the cult of St Edmund in Anglo-Saxon East Anglia: the 'new social brotherhood' and 'holy kindred' formed by those who renounced blood ties to enter monasteries paralleled the multifarious ways in which their lay neighbours articulated their emotional attachment to their local saint. Together they formed 'an imagined household', 'a spatially scattered network' that functioned as a kind of *familia*.

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By rejecting clerical celibacy, the Reformation created a new kind of family comprising a married minister and his wife and children. The biographies of some of these divines are treated briefly in my own essay, which emphasizes how difficult it is to extract the lived reality of these paragons of patriarchal zeal and religious moderation from the pious myths that have accumulated around them. In her contribution, Sara Slinn examines the role played by Georgian clerical households in preparing non-graduates for ordination. Although they were eventually superseded by theological colleges, these domestic seminaries had a significant impact on the spiritual and intellectual formation of several generations of Anglican clergy. In this respect, they bear comparison with the Dissenting academies that burgeoned in the same era. A century later, as John Tomlinson's analysis of the 1881 census returns for Lincolnshire indicates, some vicarages still doubled as informal educational institutions, taking in students of theology as boarders, as well as younger pupils for private tutoring. Parsonage families in this period were distinguished by their mobility, private wealth, resident servants and the older age of their male heads. The Oxford Movement is usually associated with the rejection of marriage and the embrace of sexual asceticism, but John Boneham's study of the writings of John Keble, Isaac Williams and Edward King reveals that they held a more positive view of family life. Like medieval religious these men believed that single life offered the best means of building a close relationship with God, but they also recognized the household as a location in which faith and sanctity could be cultivated.

CHRISTIANIZATION, DECHRISTIANIZATION AND THE FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD

The final theme explored in this collection is that of the role of the family and home as a site of spiritual conversion and its alter ego, self-conscious rejection of religion. For early Christians, medieval heretics and early modern Protestants and Catholics alike the household was a critical forum in which people experienced internal religious change and were persuaded to embrace an alien faith as their own. David Maxwell's essay focuses upon the domestic dimensions of an early twentieth-century Pentecostal mission to the Belgian Congo. He shows how the missionary home was an

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arena for 'intimate evangelism' as well as ethnographic observation and how Western values struggled to sustain themselves in a challenging environment. Death and disaster sometimes deprived the missionaries of their own children, but also created strong attachments with indigenous orphans. Maxwell's research shows how African Christianity developed an internal dynamic of its own and how the Western Pentecostals' encounters with the inhabitants of central Africa fundamentally transformed them in turn.

Maxwell's emphasis on the crucial part played by gender relations in these processes resonates with Callum Brown's essay on the breakdown of 'the family chain of memory' and its role in dechristianization since the 1960s. Building on his earlier thesis that women were key agents of secularization in the era of demographic revolution brought about by sexual liberation and mass contraception, Brown's analysis of the self-narratives of British, Canadian and American women uncovers a clear link between rejection of family and loss of faith, often catalysed by a feminist awakening. The life stories of the women he interviews contain intriguing echoes of the intergenerational tensions and hierarchical inversions examined by Cooper in the context of the late Roman empire. The decline, no less than the rise, of Western Christianity has been accompanied by conflicts within the household and has given rise to moments in which unbelieving parents are converted by contact with their more religiously committed children. Brown's essay is a preliminary report on a wider project, but it lays a suggestive foundation for future studies of post-Christian society. It is hardly surprising the household has been identified as a key space in which to investigate these developments. Gay marriage, infertility treatments, surrogacy and techniques of genetic manipulation are effecting dramatic changes in the ways families are created, redefining the relationships between their constituent members, and altering the parameters of everyday life. And once again these shifts are provoking political comment, moral controversy and ecclesiastical division. The nexus between religion and the household and between the family and the Church continues to be both compelling and fraught.

Inevitably, this volume cannot explore these connections from every angle and direction. There are numerous aspects of the topic that require deeper evaluation. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this collection will stimulate further work and encourage compara-

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tive discussion of many other periods, traditions and contexts. The conversations initiated at Bangor and at Dr Williams's Library in 2012–13 have yielded many important insights and have revealed the rich potential of this field of enquiry.

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