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Faith and the family:

Family life and the spread of evangelical culture in the Scottish Gàidhealtachd,

c. 1790-c.1860¹

In 1835 there was a visitor at the manse in Bracadale. The minister of this parish in north-west Scotland was the famed and fearsome Roderick MacLeod, or Maighstir Ruaraidh.²

Despite his stern reputation, it seems he was a fond father. The visitor was delighted with the experience of joining the family as Maighstir Ruaraidh led Anne, six children, and the servants in their evening worship. He recalled

All the youngsters, to the youngest, were furnished with books. It mattered not that the majority had not yet learned to read ... As to their knowledge of music I speak not. As to their conscientious conviction that it was their solemn duty to *sing*, I became fully assured. Papa gave out the psalm. They all opened their books – some with the right end uppermost, some with the wrong ... The choristers seemed to give little heed to [Papa's] well-meant exercise as *leading* them. Each chose the air which was thought most appropriate, and was most admired by the performer ... Occasionally I was able, amidst the din, to catch the strains of our astute precentor. He seemed to perceive nothing whatever incongruous in the proceeding.³

¹ With thanks to Bruce Ritchie for inviting me to speak at the Highland Church History conference in Dingwall in September 2016, which provoked me to get to grips with the significance of family worship, to Mary MacLeod Rivett for her comments, and to the anonymous readers for their helpful thoughts and for pointing me to the work of Charles Taylor and Mary Jo Maynes.

² I have used first names or by-names for MacLeods so they are more easily distinguished. Placenames are given as in the primary sources.

³ Quoted in Rev. Dr Roderick MacLeod, 'The bishop of Skye', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 53 (1982-84) 174-209, at 179-180. Emphasis in the original. Ruaraidh is pronounced 'Ruary'.

In their own rather jolly way, the MacLeods were following the *Directory for Family Worship*, passed at the General Assembly of 1647.⁴ It instructed heads of families to conduct ‘communion with God’, morning and evening. They were to begin with prayer for church, nation and family members. Then they were to read scripture, ensuring everyone understood the passage. This daily practice developed within many reformed traditions throughout Europe and North America, including Britain.⁵ It was a practical way of implementing household religion. Scottish reformers tried to structure society as a godly commonwealth based on three institutions: school, church and family.⁶ Margo Todd explained how the family was critical in establishing and maintaining protestant culture. She pointed out that ‘family rather than the church was the primary guard against error and sin ... The extent to which the culture of protestantism came to permeate Scottish society ... was due in large measure to ... re-forming the family into an agent of the protestant gospel.’⁷ Family worship was part of the supervision and discipline of the whole household.⁸ It was within the family that the principles of the gospel would be instilled in the next generation. To fail in this duty to God was to fail in caring about your child’s spiritual destiny and potentially brought disaster on family and community.⁹ In this ideal, the family was a ‘seminary’, a patriarchal household where the father, gently, firmly and wisely, led wife, children and servants in

⁴ *The directory for family worship*, Assembly at Edinburgh, 24 August 1647, Sess. 10. Act for observing the directions of the General Assembly for secret and private worship, and mutual edification; and censuring such as neglect family-worship. A copy can be found on

http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_standards/index.html?mainframe=/documents/wcf_standards/p417-direct_fam_worship.html (accessed 19 December, 2016)

⁵ Janay Nugent, “‘The mistresse of the family hath a special hand’”: family, women, mothers, and the establishment of a “godly community of Scots”, in Stuart Macdonald and Daniel MacLeod (eds), *Keeping the Kirk: Scottish religion at home and in the diaspora* (Guelph, 2014), 39-62, at 40; Andrew Cambers and Michelle Wolfe, ‘Reading, family religion, and evangelical identity in late Stuart England’, *The historical journal* 47.4 (2004) 875-896, at 885-6; Gerald F. Moran and Maris A. Vinovskis, ‘The great care of godly parents: early childhood in puritan New England’, *Monographs of the society for research in child development* 50.4/5 (1985), 24-37, at 32.

⁶ Noted also in New England. Moran and Vinovskis, ‘The great care of godly parents’, 24-37, at 25.

⁷ Margo Todd, *The culture of protestantism in early modern Scotland* (New Haven and London, 2002), 313.

⁸ Kenneth Boyd, *Scottish church attitudes to sex, marriage and the family 1850-1914* (Edinburgh, 1980), 70.

⁹ Steven Ozment, *When fathers ruled: family life in reformation Europe* (Cambridge, 1983), 153, 170; Nugent, “‘The mistresse of the family’”, 39-62, at 44.

godliness.¹⁰ While the key moment for protestantism in Lowland Scotland was the Reformation of 1560, the ‘religious revolution’ of Highland Scotland was the evangelical turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹¹ Preachers, missionaries and teachers introduced ideas but it was the family, particularly through family worship which embedded reformed principles in the hearts, minds and culture of the Gaels.¹²

The relationship between protestantism and the family is well researched in Europe, North America and Anglophone Britain, but not in Gaelic-speaking Scotland. While protestantism was undoubtedly an influence from the late sixteenth century, it did not become a mass movement until much later. Institutions of church and school were far weaker in large, mountainous parishes, there was a persistent lack of clergy in some areas after the Reformation, and the Church of Scotland failed to translate and distribute key texts into the vernacular, all meaning it was difficult to practice family devotions - a key plank of social reformation. The New Testament was only translated into a dialect of Scots Gaelic in 1767, and the Old Testament translation was not completed until 1801. Research on Highland religion is well developed around some themes, such as land issues, interdenominational conflict and revivalism, but despite the ongoing influence of family worship, even John MacLeod’s survey of spirituality in Lewis and Harris only mentions it in passing.¹³ However, to understand how evangelical protestantism became such a powerful influence we would do

¹⁰ J.H.S. Burleigh, *A church history of Scotland* (London, 1960), 304.

¹¹ William Ferguson, ‘The problems of the established church in the west Highlands and Islands in the eighteenth century’, *Records of the Scottish church history society [hereafter RSCHS]* 17.1 (1969) 15-31, at 30.

¹² The rise of this type of piety in the Gàidhealtachd as part of what Charles Taylor has called the ‘rise of the disciplined society’. Charles Taylor, *A secular age* (Boston, 2007).

¹³ Most importantly: Allan W. McColl, *Land, faith and the crofting community: christianity and social criticism in the Highlands of Scotland, 1843-1893* (Edinburgh, 2006); David Paton, *The clergy and the clearances* (Edinburgh, 2006); Donald E. Meek, ‘The land question answered from the bible: the land issue and the development of a Highland theology of liberation’ *Scottish geographical magazine*, 103.2 (1987), pps 84-88. John MacLeod, *Banner in the west: a spiritual history of Lewis and Harris* (Edinburgh, 2010), 326.

well to examine the role of the family in weaving it into the social and cultural fabric.¹⁴ While David Reid argues, based on Lowland and urban sources, that the practice of family worship declined from the 1780s, it is in this era that it becomes a significant feature in Gaelic religious life.¹⁵ The growth of evangelicalism from the eighteenth century in the far north (Ross-shire, Sutherland and Caithness), and from the 1810s in the west, meant family life was increasingly constructed as the primary site for religious teaching and internalisation. As revivalism swept the region, daily worship was adopted by Gaels, significantly changing the rhythm and nature of family and community life.

Despite variations in religious gender roles over place and time, the weight of responsibility for their family's spiritual life lay primarily on the shoulders of men.¹⁶ In Scotland debate about how protestantism was gendered has circled around issues of church discipline, mainly in the early modern period.¹⁷ Janay Nugent has moved this discussion from church structures

¹⁴ The theological characteristics of Evangelicalism as defined by David Bebbington in *Evangelicalism in modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989):

Conversionism - emphasises the conversion experience, received by faith alone given by God through grace alone.

Biblicism – The Bible is God's revelation to humanity and the primary source of religious authority.

Activism - promulgation of the gospel.

Crucicentrism - central focus on Christ's redeeming work on the cross as the only means for salvation.

Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff describe the social characteristics of evangelicalism in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century southern England as focused on the conversion experience, the individual spiritual life, the activity of God beyond as well as within the walls of churches and the family and household as the primary setting for maintaining faith. *Family fortunes: men and women of the English middle class 1780-1850* (London, 1987, 2002), 83, 89.

¹⁵ David Reid, 'Spirituality', in Susan Storrier (ed), *Scotland's domestic life: Scottish life and society: a compendium of Scottish ethnology*, vol. VI (Edinburgh, 2006), 197-222, at 210.

¹⁶ Melissa Hollander, 'The name of the father: baptism and the social construction of fatherhood in early modern Edinburgh', in Elizabeth Ewan and Janay Nugent (eds), *Finding the family in medieval and early modern Scotland*, (Aldershot, 2008), 63-72, at 63, 68-70; David G. Mullan, *Narratives of the religious self in early modern Scotland* (Farnham, 2010), 159; David G. Mullan, 'Parents and children in early modern Scotland', in Ewan and Nugent (eds), *Finding the family*, 73-84, at 77-8; Ozment, *When fathers ruled*, 132-3, 153, 170.

¹⁷ Michael F. Graham, 'Equality before the Kirk?: church discipline and the elite in reformation-era Scotland', *Archiv für reformationsgeschichte* 84 (1993) 289-309; Rosalind Mitchison and Leah Leneman, *Sexuality and social control: Scotland 1660-1780* (Oxford, 1989), 237; Gordon des Brisay, 'Twisted by definition: women under godly discipline in seventeenth-century Scottish towns', in Yvonne G. Brown and Rona Ferguson (eds), *Twisted sisters: women, crime and deviance in Scotland since 1400* (East Linton, 2002), 137-155; Alice Glaze, 'Women and kirk discipline: prosecution, negotiation, and the limits of control', *Scottish journal of historical studies* 36.2 (2016) 125-142. Lynn Abrams is one of the few who has extended the debate about how church discipline was gendered into the modern period in 'From demon to victim: the infanticidal mother in Shetland,

to the family. Her nuanced analysis shows how, although fathers were heads of household, reformed thinking placed mothers simultaneously in positions of spiritual authority and of subservience.¹⁸ This examination of the Scottish Gàidhealtachd (Gaelic-speaking area) pushes beyond protestant ideas about the gendered family, into how people actually implemented spiritual practices at home. The results complicate Nugent's conclusions further, showing that family worship undermined as well as reinforced the patriarchal family. The challenge to fathers' authority came not only from the influence of mothers but also from children and non-family members who, through literacy, became better equipped than fathers for spiritual leadership.

Because family worship was a private and common, therefore unremarkable, practice, the sources are fragmentary. Two sets have been particularly useful. One is the annual reports of the missionary organisation, the Edinburgh Society for the Support of Gaelic Schools [ESSGS] which include extracts of correspondence from teachers, ministers and school inspectors. These are supplemented by autobiographies and biographies. The latter are largely drawn from adulatory collections like *The Men of Lewis* or *Ministers and Men of the Far North* which, following a literary tradition as old as Christianity, utilise the lives of revered religious figures as exemplars. Both largely reflect the perspective of converted evangelicals, making them especially helpful for understanding the nature of religious rituals and what they meant to those who practiced them. A careful reading between the lines also offers suggestions as to how these cultural changes were resisted.

1699-1899' in Brown and Ferguson, *Twisted sisters*, 180-203. I have assessed the role of church discipline within the context of informal community discipline in the Highlands in Elizabeth Ritchie, 'The township, the pregnant girl and the church: community dynamics, gender and social control in early nineteenth-century Scotland' *Northern Scotland* 10.1 (2019), 41-67.

¹⁸ Nugent, 'The mistress of the family', 39-62, at 39.

This study examines how evangelicalism ‘completed’ the Scottish reformation and re-shaped Gaelic culture. Stepping in reformed and puritan footprints, evangelicals considered the family the crucial social unit for promoting individual piety and cultural change. The daily ritual of family worship was a visible indicator of how a critical mass of Gaels embraced these interconnected aims. I first date and map the uptake of evangelicalism by tracing the geography of family worship before examining how family dynamics, specifically patriarchal authority, was affected by the practice. I then contextualise this within other, often female-controlled, methods of expressing and transmitting faith within the household. While some parents adopted evangelical forms of domestic religion, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, others resisted the cultural shifts. The effect was not entirely what church leaders desired, with fathers’ patriarchal role being undermined as well as bolstered, and the influence of non-orthodox spiritualities remaining beneath the overt compliance of many families. Examining family life shows how evangelicalism re-shaped Gaelic culture while also exposing how this change was resisted.

Part I: Family Worship and a Cultural Shift

It is possible to use family worship practices to map the geography of the evangelical cultural turn. In evangelical writing, one of the markers of a pre-revival community was the lack of family worship.¹⁹ In 1827 the ESSGS encouraged its supporters by reporting that ‘family worship is now much more common in the Highlands.’²⁰ Family worship was considered a

¹⁹ In Uig, Lewis, this was noted along with superstitious beliefs, indiscriminate taking of communion and baptism, and a lack of doctrinal understanding in Alexander Duff, *Disruption worthies of the Highlands: another memorial of 1843* (Edinburgh, 1877), 223 and reiterated in D. Beaton (ed), *Diary and sermons of the Rev. Alexander MacLeod Rogart (formerly of Uig, Lewis) with brief memoir* (Inverness, 1925), 7. In Moulin, Perthshire, it was noted along with a lack of religious instruction of children or religious conversation and a casual attitude to the Sabbath. Alexander Stewart, *Memoirs of the late Rev Alexander Stewart DD*, (Edinburgh, 1822), 30.

²⁰ Edinburgh society for the support of Gaelic schools, 16th Annual Report (1827), 3. Hereafter referenced with the number of the annual report followed by the page number (16AR3). The date of publication can be

litmus test for conversion and it is fair to conclude that its mass adoption reflected a cultural shift in a community. In 1819, in the wake of the first Skye revival and under the influence of the Gaelic teacher, a school inspector on Soay noted that the ‘Scriptures are now read in every house in that small Island ... family worship which was altogether unknown there is now attempted by some of those poor people’.²¹ Similarly in Port Henderson, Gairloch, ‘the worship of God is now kept daily in their families, and a portion of Scripture is read twice a day, in each family, by one of the Scholars.’²² As revivalism spread across the west coast in the early nineteenth century, people were encouraged to adopt the routine in their homes. As Melissa Hollander noticed for baptism, practicing family worship became an enactment not just of piety but of good parenting, visible to neighbours and religious leaders.²³ However, the mass of evidence produced by early nineteenth-century evangelicals who viewed family worship as a marker of conversion should not mask the existence of the practice in the eighteenth century. This was especially so in the far north, affected by earlier revivals, but it was not unknown in pre-revival west coast culture.

The far north had a long history of enthusiastic protestantism. By the nineteenth century the faith of northern Highlanders was less marked by outbursts of fervency than a strong and settled religious culture, part of which was family worship.²⁴ In the 1810s young Hugh Miller and his cousin Walter were benighted in the Easter Ross hill country. The boys heard ‘psalm singing, in the old Gaelic style’ apparently coming from a copse of trees. This was not, as Walter feared, malevolent fairy folk, but an elderly couple performing worship.²⁵ The minister of Farr on the north coast reported in 1820 that ‘it is general in this Parish to read the

calculated from the first report, issued in 1811. Copies of reports can be found in various repositories in Scotland, including a near full run in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

²¹ 8AR18.

²² 10AR8.

²³ Hollander, ‘The name of the father’, 67.

²⁴ John MacInnes, *The evangelical movement in the Highlands, 1688-1800* (Aberdeen, 1951), 90-110.

²⁵ Hugh Miller, *My schools and schoolmasters* (Edinburgh, 1889), 121.

word of God as a part of family worship, morning and evening.’²⁶ Daily family worship was common. This did not necessarily mean those who practiced it were committed believers. In the 1790s a farmer in Reay, Caithness, was worried when the catechist’s teenage son came to do the accounts. Concerned about being considered insufficiently religious, he invented ways to impressively extend his usual short worship.²⁷ The practice was so embedded that concluding a social event by conducting family worship was quite normal. Havie (Gustavus) Munro from Spinningdale was put in an awkward position after a wedding party. As a married man and older than the other revellers, the group turned to Havie. They simply assumed he was willing and capable of leading them. However he did not have a deep faith and was unused to prayer so he wriggled out of it, pleading illiteracy.²⁸ Family worship was therefore not universal – it obviously did not occur in Havie’s home – but it was unremarkable. In the far north there was a well-established protestant culture in which family worship was key.

Evangelical historiography, largely based on a face-value reading of the accounts of ministers and evangelists, has tended to paint the west Highlands as darkly heathen until the nineteenth-century revivals. The ‘darkness to light’ narrative tends to describe the miraculous intervention of God through a chosen individual in bringing a population to faith.²⁹ They then adopt all the markers of a converted community: altered attitudes to alcohol, music and dancing; a commitment to church attendance; sabbatarianism; and family worship.³⁰ Even a gentle sifting of the evidence suggests a stronger pre-existing religious culture than claimed

²⁶ 9AR2.

²⁷ John Kennedy, *The apostle of the north: the life and labours of the Rev. Dr. McDonald* (London, 1867), 27.

²⁸ George Macdonald, *Men of Sutherland: sketches of some of them* (Lonemore, 1937, 2014), 68-9.

²⁹ A good example is the biography of Alexander MacLeod in Duff, *Disruption worthies of the Highlands*, 221-232.

³⁰ The distinctions between a culturally evangelical community and the converted evangelical community which existed within it are explored in Elizabeth Ritchie, ‘The faith of the crofters: christianity and identity in the Highlands, 1793-1843’, unpublished PhD thesis (University of Guelph, 2010), 191-203.

for the region in popular evangelical accounts. Uig, in the island of Lewis, experienced a famous revival under Rev. Alexander MacLeod in the 1820s. MacLeod himself stated that when he arrived in the parish the people were attentive churchgoers, although he felt their grasp of basic Christian doctrine and knowledge was poor.³¹ In his autobiography Angus MacLeod, a Hudson Bay Company fur trader and later a teacher and catechist, recalled family worship and other spiritual acts conducted by his father, Neil, a decade before the revival. On the farm at Reiff, on Great Bernera, Uig,

It was my Father's practice on Sabbath morn to bring all the children to the Barn and he would make us all go on our knees around him. He would pray with us there for some time. Again, before he would go to bed on Sabbath night he would do the same, but not on week days. When any person was sick, they would send word to my dear Father to go and pray with the sick person.

In later life Angus was dismissive about the depth or meaning of these, maintaining 'this was all the Godliness that was amongst the people.'³² According to Angus, in and of itself, family worship was an insufficient marker of true evangelicalism. A family serious about their faith would conduct worship twice every day, not just on Sundays. And the tone would be sincere, heartfelt, and imbued with understanding. Evangelicals therefore considered family worship to be a, somewhat unreliable, indicator of conversion. As part of reformed protestantism family worship was habitually practiced. For some families this did not indicate a deep faith. However, the widespread practice of family worship does indicate a locality was culturally evangelical. In the eighteenth century this was more the case in the north than in the west.

Where it was growing it indicates that families were experiencing conversion and were

³¹ 2 June, 1824, Beaton, *Diary and sermons*, 13. A similar situation is described in 1790s Moulin, Perthshire, with the turning point, according to himself, being the conversion experience of their minister, Alexander Stewart. Stewart, *Memoirs*, 42, 50, 100.

³² 'The story of a Lewis catechist', *Stornoway gazette and west coast advertiser*, 25 December, 1971. With kind thanks to Margaret MacIver, Great Bernera, for pointing me to this source.

involved in creating a cultural shift, in their own homes and in their communities. This became especially notable in the west from the 1810s.

Part II: Family Worship: Creating and Challenging the Patriarchal Family

The extent to which reformed theology and practice created cultures of patriarchy or of gender equality is a matter for debate. There is no evidence to suggest that families in the Gàidhealtachd were less patriarchal than elsewhere in Europe and the spread of heart-felt protestantism might be expected to bolster male power. The practice of family worship, properly conducted, reinforced patriarchy on a daily basis through the repeated enactment of fathers taking a position of spiritual authority in the household. However, particularly in regions newly affected by evangelicalism where people were keen to adopt the practice, practical difficulties such as illiteracy and a lack of bibles undermined the patriarchal ideal. Other men, neighbours or teachers, took on the mantle, disregarding the ideal of the family being the unit of spirituality. Children, taught to read by the evangelical Gaelic schools, took on roles intended for the head of household. Women played a low key role in the ritual of family worship, their influence felt in more subtle ways discussed later.

In protestant societies the senior adult male in a family held the position of ‘head of household’.³³ Nugent argues that control over wife and household was an ‘integral aspect of disciplined and reformed masculinity’ and that spiritual leadership was added to Scottish society’s pre-existing expectation of men’s legal, economic, political and moral headship.³⁴

³³ There were female headed households, but in the Highlands and Islands we have little information as to how these families organised their religious life.

³⁴ Janay Nugent, ‘Reformed masculinity: ministers, father and male heads of households, 1560-1660’, in Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth L. Ewan, *Nine centuries of man: manhood and masculinity in Scottish history* (Edinburgh, 2017), 39-52, at 41, 50.

Along with this power came responsibility: that of shepherding wife, children and servants spiritually. In 1557 John Knox instructed the men in his congregation:

you are bishops and kings; your wife, children, servants, and family are your bishopric and charge. Of you it shall be required how carefully and diligently you have instructed them in God's true knowledge ... And therefore I say, you must make them partakers in reading, exhorting, and in making common worship, which I would in every house were used once a day at least.³⁵

Acting within his authority, a good evangelical man was expected to call the household together for family worship. Men might delegate as part of religious training or to honour guests. Indeed a 1989 study of family worship among American Seventh Day Adventist families demonstrated that when young people were actively involved they found worship meaningful and were more likely to adopt the faith as their own.³⁶ Back on the Isle of Lewis, in the manse at Lochs George Campbell encouraged everyone to participate by ‘reading around’. Unfortunately his assistant, Murdo MacIver, was willing, but unable. He ‘spelled out all the bigger words and made brave efforts at pronunciation ... The maids had to stuff their aprons into their mouths to suppress their emotions, but Murdo sailed on’.³⁷ Sometimes a man would hand over to a guest as a mark of respect. This was especially the case if a minister or one of *na daoine*, the ‘men’, visited. *Na daoine* were men recognised locally as being particularly pious. They were highly respected and were often granted positions of community leadership, formally and informally.³⁸ Norman MacFarlane recalled that when one of *na daoine* stayed with them in Stornoway at communion season, his father would invite them to lead in prayer. The MacFarlanes particularly enjoyed Donald Bàn (Donald

³⁵ *Selected writings of John Knox: public epistles, treatises, and expositions to the year 1559* (Dallas, 1995).

³⁶ J.W. Lee, G.T. Rice and V.B. Gillespie, ‘Family worship patterns and their correlation with adolescent behavior and beliefs’, *Journal for the scientific study of religion* 36.3 (1997) 372-381, at 379.

³⁷ Norman MacFarlane, *The Men of Lewis* (Lonemore, 1924, 2015), 98.

³⁸ John MacInnes, ‘The origin and early development of “The Men”’, *RSCHS* 8 (1944) 16-41; David M.M. Paton, ‘The myth and the reality of the “Men”: leadership and spirituality in the northern Highlands, 1800-1850’, *RSCHS* 31 (2001) 97-144.

MacLean) from Bragar as ‘his worship deeply impressed us’ and he was ‘full of the element of the unexpected’.³⁹ Similarly, when the esteemed minister John MacDonald stayed at Bighouse, Caithness, he was invited to conduct evening worship.⁴⁰ In these ideal scenarios, there was a male head of house who had the ability to lead family and servants in worship. When he handed over tasks he did so out of his authority as patriarch.

However, until at least the mid-nineteenth century, even pious men found it difficult to conduct family worship in the way John Knox had envisaged. Gaelic bibles were not widely distributed until the 1830s. In Gruids, Sutherland, Hugh Miller explained how his uncle dealt with these problems of language and illiteracy. ‘At the close of the day, when the members of the household had assembled in a wide circle round the fire, my uncle “took the Book”’. By this time, in the 1810s, Mr Munro was an elderly man who had been conducting family worship for many decades. He

possessed in those days only the English Bible, while his domestics understood only Gaelic, he had to acquire the art, not uncommon in Sutherland at the time, of translating the English chapter for them, as he read, into their native tongue; and this he learned to do with such ready fluency, that no one could have guessed it to be other than a Gaelic work from which he was reading.⁴¹

Language problems were, however, widespread. In 1811 in Fearn, Easter Ross, only twenty heads of families could read Gaelic. Some others read English and could extemporise a translation, like Mr Munro. Yet more were sufficiently familiar with the Gaelic psalm book to hazard a translation of English versions.⁴² Few of these valiant translators were as capable as

³⁹ MacFarlane, *Men of Lewis*, 98.

⁴⁰ Kennedy, *Apostle of the north*, 199.

⁴¹ Miller, *My schools and schoolmasters*, 98-99.

⁴² 1AR40.

Mr Munro, so results were often rather garbled, as complained of in Eriboll and Rogart.⁴³

How family worship was experienced therefore shifted as Gaelic bibles and literacy became more widespread. In Ross-shire this is dateable to the 1820s.⁴⁴ It was possible for an illiterate person to conduct some elements of family worship, particularly in a strong oral culture where powers of memory were impressive, but the protestant emphasis on scripture meant that low levels of literacy and the rarity of bibles made it difficult for men to conduct family worship until at least the 1820s.

By the mid-nineteenth century evangelicalism was so widespread that family worship had become a cultural expectation across the Gàidhealtachd. When Donald Morrison paid his first visit to Harris to attend a communion he was shocked by his host. He had asked for accommodation and was invited into a home.

At the table they began the meal without a word of Grace. It was too much for Donald, who broke in upon them with an outpouring of thanks to the Great Giver. Bedtime arrived and they were dispersing without worship when Donald pulled out his Bible, read, and led in prayer.⁴⁵

Morrison felt the man of the house was neglecting his duty so decided to usurp his authority. It is unlikely that most guests, however shocked, would have taken such action. However it shows that once evangelical culture became dominant, the pressure to conform, particularly when there were community-sanctioned enforcers like Morrison around, was intense. *Daoine* like Morrison were willing to shame and subvert the authority of a man whom they considered to be neglecting his spiritual duty. The proper performance of family piety in all homes was more important than politeness.

⁴³ 11AR23, 17AR18.

⁴⁴ 13AR17.

⁴⁵ MacFarlane, *Men of Lewis*, 11.

The intention of the Church of Scotland was that family worship should be within and for the family. The nineteenth-century definition of ‘family’ in the Gàidhealtachd was permeable, being closer to an early modern than a contemporary one. It encompassed anyone who lived within the household: servants, apprentices, visitors.⁴⁶ While Nugent found that in the seventeenth-century Lowlands ‘men were to take an active role in reforming their households’, as early nineteenth-century revivalist enthusiasm developed, particularly in the north-west, a man’s ability to spiritual lead the household was undermined by a lack of religious maturity, literacy and bibles.⁴⁷ New converts therefore clustered around those with more religious experience, disregarding any notion of the family. In Habost, Lochs, the thatched house of crofter Alexander MacLeod ‘was often crowded with people who came to hear him conduct family worship.’⁴⁸ This was in direct contravention of the Act of the General Assembly which desired that ‘each family keep by themselves’.⁴⁹ When a particularly popular preacher visited an area, crowds clustered around the house where he was staying to hear him take evening worship. Rev. John MacDonald noted this with approval when he conducted public ‘family’ worship in places as far apart as Lawers, Kilmuir, Rhives, and Lochinver.⁵⁰ More challenging to the notion of a father’s spiritual authority was the trend in Carloway, Lewis, in the 1830s. There it was not men who attended the family worship of their Gaelic teacher, but children.⁵¹ This symbolically weighty role of head of household was being performed by a newcomer. Some children initiated gatherings for worship. One twelve year old in Castlesween, Argyll, brought his brothers to a ‘wood,

⁴⁶ Naomi Tadmor, *Family and friends in eighteenth-century England: household, kinship and patronage* (Cambridge, 2001), 19-20, 31, 35, 38, 63-72, 207.

⁴⁷ Nugent, ‘Reformed masculinity’, 39-52, at 40.

⁴⁸ MacFarlane, *Men of Lewis*, 78.

⁴⁹ *Directory*, 3, 5.

⁵⁰ Kennedy, *Apostle of the north*, 189-190, 208, 216-7, 224, 307. Examples are from Perthshire, Inverness-shire and Sutherland.

⁵¹ 25AR13.

every evening, even in the winter nights, there to perform the evening sacrifice, which should have been done by his father in the house'.⁵² Examples of pious children were not unusual in nineteenth-century religious writing and were utilised to underline the evangelical belief that God could reach children directly, regardless of their parents' religiosity.⁵³ Such piety was probably not the norm, but, as Mary Jo Maynes has reminded us, children as well as adults had agency.⁵⁴ There is no reason to dismiss such accounts and what they indicate is the important influence of missionary teachers effecting cultural change through children. In turn, it was hoped that faith would be passed on by children to their families. Gaelic teachers sometimes used family worship to train up heads of household directly. In Blairmacfaoldich, south of Fort William, a 'considerable number of the heads of families come regularly to [the] Teacher's house, every morning and evening, during the time of family worship.'⁵⁵ In such a context of limited literacy and limited access to books, necessity and revivalist enthusiasm, at least temporarily, created alternatives to the patriarchal protestant model of heads of household actively bringing about the spiritual reformation of society.

In the early nineteenth century the activity of the ESSGS and the translation and distribution of affordable Gaelic bibles meant it was more likely that a child than a man could read. While not ideal, devout Evangelicals recognised that until literacy was universal, the act of family worship was more important than who conducted it. John Shaw, minister of Bracadale in Skye, reported that 'much good was likely to accrue from the parents employing the children in reading the Scriptures at home.'⁵⁶ Families did this in different ways. Some men paid a literate young person. Donald MacRitchie in Uig, Lewis, gave a neighbour's son a lamb in

⁵² 19AR18.

⁵³ Mullan, *Narratives of the religious self*, 169.

⁵⁴ Mary Jo Maynes, 'Age as a category of historical analysis: history, agency and narratives of childhood', *The journal of the history of childhood and youth* 1.1 (2008) 114-124.

⁵⁵ 18AR30. The teacher was Finlay MacKay.

⁵⁶ 26AR29.

return for him coming to the house twice a day to read the chapter.⁵⁷ A couple in Port Henderson employed a fifteen year old boy who taught them to read the Bible.⁵⁸ However in many families it was the children of the household who, as a result of their new literacy skills, were propelled into roles intended for adult males. In 1815 when the first Gaelic school opened in Torosay, Mull, ‘there were only two men and seven boys in the hamlets of Calluch and Arrin, which contain 22 families, that could read any English or Gaelic’. However a year later when the teacher paid evening visits: ‘I found the Parents listening, while their children read the Scriptures’.⁵⁹ We cannot, of course, be absolutely certain that this was not put on for the benefit of the teacher, but examples published to encourage donors to the ESSGS provide mounting evidence of a shift in family practices. In Quidnish, Harris, in the 1840s there was a ‘boy eight or nine years of age reading the Bible, who at his own home conducts family worship’ and a fourteen year old lad ‘who has been impressed with the truth since the school was examined last year; he keeps family worship in his father’s house’.⁶⁰ When the Gairloch minister reported that every family at Sand of Udrigle had a child who could read, he recognised how this skill had inverted the ideal of spiritual authority. The child ‘acts the part of a priest in his father’s family by reading to them the word of God. Thus the Lord ... ordains strength out of the mouths of babes and sucklings’.⁶¹

There is little evidence of Highland women or girls conducting family worship. Despite spiritual leadership expanding beyond the head of household family worship was, as in Reformation-era Scotland, a demonstration of masculine piety.⁶² Most reports of children conducting worship are generic or refer to boys, as in Uig, Port Henderson, Quidnish or

⁵⁷ 18AR33.

⁵⁸ 10AR8.

⁵⁹ 5AR19.

⁶⁰ 38AR13; 39AR12.

⁶¹ 13A31.

⁶² Nugent, ‘Reformed masculinity’, 39-52, at 42.

Torosay. Although Highlanders generally preferred to educate their sons, they sent as many girls as boys to Gaelic schools.⁶³ When Gaelic bibles became common it was therefore just as likely that a daughter could have performed family worship. However in this male-dominated society it is probable that if there were a choice, boys were preferred to lead. Alternatively it is possible that the sources record boys more because the authors, usually teachers and ministers, were looking for future religious leaders. A rare reference to a daughter leading was in the MacRitchie household in Uig. The ten year old learned sufficiently from the boy her father paid with a lamb that she could take over reading the chapter. She and her father, Donald, shared responsibility for leading the singing: he would raise the tune and she precented. Donald prayed.⁶⁴ Although Mrs MacRitchie had also learned to read a little there is no indication that she took on any role. While the position of husbands and fathers in the reformed ideal is not in doubt, the position of adult married women was complex. Mothers shared responsibility for the character of their family and for the spiritual education of younger children. They were therefore entrusted with much power, alongside fathers, but remained subservient to their husbands.⁶⁵ In Neil Gunn's fictionalised representation of his boyhood in Dunbeath, Caithness, his father is the spiritual authority. His mother is portrayed as disconnected from formal religion, and passive during family worship until it was time to sing.

His mother is sitting in her hard chair by one side of the fire: his father, at the opposite side, has induced a mood of silence and preparation.

⁶³ The reasons for these gendered choices around education are explored in Elizabeth Ritchie, 'The people, the priests and the protestants: catholic responses to evangelical missionaries in the early nineteenth-century Scottish Highlands', *Church history* 85.2 (2016) 275-301, at 291-2; Charles Withers, *Gaelic in Scotland, 1698–1981: the geographical history of a language* (Edinburgh, 1984), 152; Victor Durkacz, *The decline of the Celtic languages* (Edinburgh, 1983), 124–125.

⁶⁴ 18AR33.

⁶⁵ Nugent, "The mistress of the family", 39-62, at 39-40, 45, 50, 55-56.

“Let us take the Books,” he says, in a voice withdrawn from them. He turns over the pages of the big Bible. “Let us read the eleventh chapter of the Gospel according to St John.”

When they have all got the place in the small print Bibles, he looks at Kenn the youngest, who starts and hurriedly mutters through the first verse ... He stumbled so badly over his next verse that his father looked at him. He grew red and terribly confused. ... Kenn’s mother sat quiet and aloof. She did not even look at her young son. Correction here lay with the man of the house ...

The reading of the chapter over, his father meditated a little while, then turned to the twenty-third psalm. The Lord’s my shepherd, I’ll not want ...

While he read the psalm, the fingers of his free hand crushed audibly against the rough skin of the palm. His voice was charged with fervour, and his head moved as if he were telling the lines to himself in a lonely place.

He finished and there was silence.

The mother was sitting upright in her hard chair, the Bible closed on her lap, her face towards the fire. Without a movement of her body she began singing the psalm.

... His father prayed for a long time, and he prayed well and fluently and without a pause or stutter.⁶⁶

Todd has argued that the rights and dignity of women had some protection as they were allowed a role in leading household religion in the absence of a father.⁶⁷ There must have been many households headed by widows or by men who were in the army, at the fishing, or working in the Lowlands. In the absence of men, women doubtless conducted worship within the home. Merry Wiesner found female heads in various European reformed traditions

⁶⁶ Neil Gunn, *Highland river* (Edinburgh, 1937, 1991), 94-6.

⁶⁷ Todd, *Culture of protestantism*, 314.

‘prayed and recited catechism with children and servants, attended sermons, read the Bible or other devotional material ... and provided religious instruction for their children.’⁶⁸ Some Highland women were capable and committed to this. Margaret MacKay was returning home to Sheigra, Sutherland, from a communion. A friend’s daughter gave her a lift in a cart between Lairg and Altnaharra. ‘When nearing their destination Mrs MacKay asked the girl to take the horse aside to a quiet spot and let it graze for a time. She then took her Bible and conducted worship in the usual way – by prayer, reading a portion, and singing – the young girl sitting by her side.’⁶⁹ When away from her husband Margaret took responsibility for the spiritual nourishment of herself and her younger companion. However she might not have done this had her companion been male. If a man were a visitor, even young and a stranger, a woman might ask him to lead rather than do so herself. In the mid-1790s Mrs Holm found a student pacing up and down the shoreline at Invergordon, stranded on his way to college by high winds which meant the ferry could not sail. There was no inn so she invited him in for a meal and a bed. Her husband, Hector, was not due back until late so she handed over responsibility for conducting family worship to the unknown youth.⁷⁰

The ideal of family worship presupposed and upheld the notion of the patriarchal family. However, local realities meant the masculine spiritual leadership ideal was impossible for most to realise. As religious enthusiasm grew, missionaries and new converts found various solutions. Some, such as families looking to local or visiting religious leaders rather than the head of household, or children taking on key roles in family worship, potentially challenged the primacy of the patriarchal household. However, this shift was temporary and the patriarchal ideal was never deliberately undermined: children were invited to lead by the head

⁶⁸ Merry Wiesner, *Women and gender in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1993), 189.

⁶⁹ Macdonald, *Men of Sutherland*, 149.

⁷⁰ Kennedy, *Apostle of the north*, 30

of household and women deferred spiritual leadership to men, even unknown visitors, thus extending male authority in general. For many Gaels the purpose of the family and its daily rituals were strongly impacted by the evangelical cultural turn. Evangelicalism bolstered male authority by adding the role of spiritual leadership, although this was not fully realised until literacy, vernacular bibles and spiritual experience became widespread between the 1820s and 1850s.

Part III: Evangelical Parenting

Daily worship was the visible indicator of the ideal evangelical home, but it was only part of a greater and more pervasive whole. It was intended to be an expression of a faith embedded in a family life where parents provided deliberate spiritual guidance to their children and modelled spirituality through their own habits. The Murrays from Rogart, Sutherland, were commended for the ‘loving and faithful instruction and godly example’ which were ‘instrumental in leading [Angus and Alexander] to the Saviour in early life.’⁷¹ The importance of childhood for spiritual development had long been recognised across Europe and the Anglophone world.⁷² As evangelicalism became the primary influence, a critical mass of Gaels adopted the notion of the family as a seminary, and adjusted parenting priorities and the gender role of parents accordingly. In 1843 residents of Stenscholl, Skye, probably in collaboration with the minister, petitioned the ESSGS for a teacher. They may have had many reasons for this, but what they emphasised was that they were

deeply sensible of the responsibility under which they lie as parents, to train

their children in the fear of the Lord, and in the knowledge of his word, beg to

⁷¹ Macdonald, *Men of Sutherland*, 110. The Murray family moved from Clashmore, near Dornoch, to Oldtown, Rogart, probably in the 1810s.

⁷² Mullan, *Narratives of the religious self*, 158; Mullan, ‘Parents and children’, 73-84, at 73; Ozment, *When fathers ruled*, 146.

lay before your Society the utterly destitute state of their children, in regard to the means of obtaining any education.⁷³

By the 1840s the prevailing culture in the Highlands expected parents, rather than church or clergy, to be responsible for religious guidance. Indeed the minister of Creich, Sutherland, in accordance with the 1647 Act of the General Assembly, refused to allow parents who did not include religious teaching as part of their family life to participate in communion.⁷⁴ This sort of top-down enforcement of parents' spiritual duty was common in the early modern Scottish Lowlands and emerged clearly in the Highlands when evangelicalism spread.⁷⁵ However, when examining evangelical influences on parenting it is important to pay attention to other strands of spirituality taught at home. In all of these, mothers could have as much influence as fathers.

Parents were expected to teach children theological and bible knowledge. The process began at baptism when they promised to 'nurture and instruct them in the true knowledge and fear of God'.⁷⁶ The parents' ongoing role was implemented through family worship, enforcing church or Sabbath School attendance and ensuring children learned the catechism. In Achnacarnin, Assynt, Alex MacKenzie and his wife did an effective job in persuading their children of the doctrine of original sin and the need for salvation. One day Alex found his young son, born in 1802,

upon his knees weeping in a corner of the house called in Gaelic the *cul-mhoine* – the place where the peats were kept. "What is the matter with you, James?" said

⁷³ 33AR25.

⁷⁴ *Directory*, 1; Macdonald, *Men of Sutherland*, 38.

⁷⁵ In the early modern Lowlands lairds might not lease farms to those who neglected family worship. Todd, *Culture of protestantism*, 313.

⁷⁶ G.W. Sprott and Thomas Leisham (eds), *Book of common order and the directory of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1868), 139.

his father. “I am weeping for my sins”, said James, sobbing. “Poor boy!” said his father, “they are not so many as yet.”

As a result of this domestic training James was ordained an elder at the unusually young age of eighteen.⁷⁷ Years later, when appointed catechist of Assynt, he remembered the influence of family life on his young faith and he emphasised to parents the importance of regularly instructing children in the *Shorter Catechism*.⁷⁸

Parents were also expected to inculcate a way of living, including habits of personal devotion and Sabbath-keeping, as well as avoiding vices such as swearing or drunkenness. This might partly be done through family worship, but was also carried out through discussion, discipline and personal example.⁷⁹ When both parents were devout they could create the all-encompassing religious atmosphere often mentioned in biographies and autobiographies.⁸⁰ The ‘godly’ MacDonalds of Brora, Sutherland, ‘religiously trained’ young John, born in 1800, ‘from his infancy’ with the result that ‘he was known to cultivate the habit of secret prayer from his childhood’.⁸¹ In Reay, Caithness, another young John MacDonald was cared for by a widowed neighbour.

Each night, before putting him to bed, she knelt beside him, and in an audible voice prayed for the child. These prayers left such an impression on his memory that even in his last years he could recollect some of her petitions.⁸²

One Sunday in Bayble, Lewis, Rory Dubh

returned from church [and] found his young son playing with other small boys and desecrating the Holy Day ... he led him to the back room where he took him

⁷⁷ Macdonald, *Men of Sutherland*, 88.

⁷⁸ Macdonald, *Men of Sutherland*, 90.

⁷⁹ *Directory*, 2; Boyd, *Scottish church attitudes*, 72.

⁸⁰ Mullan, *Narratives of the religious self*, 160.

⁸¹ Macdonald, *Men of Sutherland*, 23.

⁸² Kennedy, *Apostle of the North*, 22.

up in his tender arms ... as he spoke to the boy of God's infinite kindnesses to him, and of the disloyalty of trampling His commandments under foot.⁸³

Rory Dubh's approach to reprimanding his son was one of explanation, example and gentleness. Some, such as Gerald Moran and Maris Vinovskis, have argued that, unlike their puritan predecessors, evangelical parenting was authoritarian and stressed fear rather than appealing to a child's affections and reason. However, that Rory Dubh's sympathetic attitude was preserved in a collection of didactic stories suggests otherwise.⁸⁴ On the other hand there was Mrs Murray, Rogart, known as Bean Mhòr Achnagaraidhean. She 'was a remarkable woman, a mother in Israel, whose concern for the souls of her children was a paramount consideration.' The biography of her son Alex notes that the 'example and instructions' of his parents 'contributed very largely through the Divine blessing to the formation of his character'. By the time her seven sons were men, probably in the 1820s, she was sure six of them were converted. However she worried about the one. No longer relying on example and instruction she became forceful, even coercive. Mrs Murray

brought him to a private room one day and commanded him to kneel down and pray. The young man obeyed, and so manifest were the tokens of Divine assistance vouchsafed to him while engaged in the solemn duty that his mother's anxiety regarding him was entirely removed.⁸⁵

In their spiritual training, some devout parents were proactive, like Mrs Murray, some reactive, like Rory Dubh, and others led by example, like the Reay widow. Doubtless many were far less deliberate.

⁸³ MacFarlane, *Men of Lewis*, 114.

⁸⁴ Moran and Vinovskis, 'The great care of godly parents', 24-37, at 29.

⁸⁵ Macdonald, *Men of Sutherland*, 102-3.

Although the language of the *Directory*, and later Church of Scotland and Free Church pastorals, referred to the ‘parent’, in a patriarchal society the default authority was the father. A woman only had ultimate authority in the family if her husband were absent and any sons were too young. Mainstream reformed thinking also gave men the dominant role within the home. However, women too were expected to teach and influence children. By the mid-nineteenth century the discourse of male spiritual leadership was contested by the discourse of ‘True Womanhood’. As ‘True Womanhood’, or the ‘Cult of Domesticity’, developed within the Anglophone world, the notion that the religious and moral life of the household depended on the inherent goodness of women strengthened, potentially undercutting the patriarchal family.⁸⁶ By about 1860, a Free Church pastoral shows this rhetoric had been fully adopted and was therefore probably infiltrating Gaelic culture through church literature. It encouraged mothers to interweave the instruction of their children ‘gradually with all that is most sweet, sacred, endearing, enduring, in the association of home.’⁸⁷ There is little explicit evidence of this emphasis on mothers among Highlanders in the earlier period. The spiritual authority or influence of women tends to be more hidden. Strong, highly religious women like Bean Mhòr Achnagaraidhean taught their children directly and forcefully, however much emphasis was also placed on example: a life of faith, not just religious ritual.

Even in a home where the patriarch opposed evangelicalism, a woman could influence children through her habits. Folklorists of the nineteenth century, particularly Alexander Carmichael, collected a wide variety of blessings and prayers which were integrated into work and domestic life. These were often connected with particular moments or tasks:

⁸⁶ Barbara Welter, ‘The cult of true womanhood: 1820-1860’, *American quarterly* 18.2 Part 1 (1966) 151-174; Moran and Vinovskis, ‘The great care of godly parents’, 24-37, at 36; E. Anthony Rotundo, *American manhood* (New York, 1993), 50; Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, *Public lives: women, family and society in Victorian Britain*, (New Haven and London, 2003), 4.

⁸⁷ Boyd, *Scottish church attitudes*, 79. They used Deuteronomy 11: 18-21 to support their case.

kindling or smothering the fire, grinding grain, milking or churning.⁸⁸ This was a pattern quite different from that promoted by the disciplined spirituality of nineteenth-century evangelical culture.⁸⁹ Most exuded an intense awareness of God, saints and angels. Many gave thanks for provision, or asked blessing on home, family or livestock.

I am smooing the fire
 As the Son of Mary would smoor;
 Blest be the house, blest be the fire,
 Blest be the people all.⁹⁰

Some were devotional. These emphasised personal faith and character and practiced the presence of God.

I will kindle my fire this morning
 In presence of the holy angels of heaven
 ...God kindle Thou in my heart within
 A flame of love to my neighbour.⁹¹

These prayers show how, for many people, christianity was already integrated into daily life. These beliefs, theology and practices formed the spirituality of youngsters who were continually exposed to them. While most sources deal with the explicit religious teaching within the family, which in protestant regions was largely evangelical, paying attention to cultural habits which also carried christian faith suggests there was more than one set of influences at play, even in the heat of evangelical revival. Most blessings were clearly catholic, regardless of where they were collected.⁹² Out of the twenty two which concern

⁸⁸ Carmichael collected some blessings for female tasks from men however, rather than challenging our understanding of the sexual division of labour, this indicates they were so frequently recited that males also picked them up.

⁸⁹ Taylor, *A secular age*.

⁹⁰ Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina gadelica*, (Edinburgh, 1928), vol. I, 238-9.

⁹¹ Carmichael, *Carmina* I, 230-1.

⁹² Carmichael collected relatively little in strongly protestant areas. Times of evangelical revival, such as in Carbost, Skye, in 1861, had a particularly deadening effect on people's willingness to be cultural informants.

food processing and fire-tending in *Carmina Gadelica* (collected between the 1860s and 1880s from elderly informants, therefore reflecting cultural transmission early in the century), only five are non-religious. Most refer to celtic saints such as Bride/Bridget, Patrick, Colmcille, Brendan and Ternan in addition to Michael, Peter, Paul, Mary and the Trinity. Four blessings were contributed from protestant islands.⁹³ Assuming these contributors were protestant, whether converted or nominal, this small sample indicates a latent catholicism was sustained through work blessings. For dangerous and important life events such as birth, women, in particular, continued to use protective charms which usually involved a mix of catholic and Gaelic otherworld objects, words and rituals. This was done out of sight of men and entirely separately from evangelically-approved patriarchal rituals of church baptism.⁹⁴ The retention of catholic blessings in protestant areas after the evangelical revivals suggests that, at least for women, personal devotion continued to be theologically broader than was officially encouraged. Doctrinal niceties were less important to ordinary women than to male religious leaders. It is also important to note that the published version of *Carmina Gadelica* is highly selective. Donald Meek points out that much of the unedited material is ‘pagan’ in nature.⁹⁵ Whether invocations were simply ritualised words, evidence of ongoing veneration or indicate that popular catholicism existed in tension with culturally dominant evangelicalism, it seems clear that this type of faith was embedded in the daily activities of women and was part of the family culture of the household.⁹⁶ The faith passed on in the family, especially what was passed on implicitly rather than explicitly, was more complex than conformity, even willing conformity, to evangelical religious culture would suggest.

⁹³ Harris, Mull, and North Uist twice, though one woman was originally from Skye. Donald E. Meek, ‘Alexander Carmichael and “celtic christianity”’, in Dòmhnall U. Stiùbhart (ed), *The life & legacy of Alexander Carmichael* (Callicvol, 2008) 82-95, at 89-90.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Ritchie, “‘A palmful of water for your years’: babies, religion and gender identity among crofting families, 1800-1850”, in Jodi A. Campbell, Elizabeth Ewan and Heather Parker (eds) *The shaping of Scottish identities: family, nation and the worlds beyond* (Guelph, 2011), 59-75, at 64-7.

⁹⁵ Meek, ‘Alexander Carmichael and “celtic christianity”’, 82.

⁹⁶ Mary MacLeod Rivett points out that this sub-surface practice was also embedded in the landscape, with continued use of healing wells and abandoned pre-Reformation churches. Private correspondence August 2017.

The widespread adoption of evangelicalism across the Highlands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries affected family life in deeper ways than simply the addition of a daily ritual of bible reading, prayer and singing. Good evangelical parenting required explicit religious training in how a child should conduct herself externally and how she should nurture a personal faith. This was ideally taught within an environment where parents modelled these things. Mothers could have as much influence as their husbands on this aspect of family religion. This type of upbringing was natural to parents with deep faith such as the MacDonalds, MacKenzies, Murrays, and the Reay widow but, as evangelicalism stimulated a broad cultural shift across the Gàidhealtachd, all parents were expected to conform, and social pressure was increasingly exerted. However, the co-existence of catholic worship and ‘pagan’ practices around work tasks and female life events shows evangelicalism was not the only belief system expressed and taught within protestant families. It is possible this spirituality was particularly carried by women, perhaps largely unnoticed by evangelical leaders who were focused on the religious roles of men within the family and on explicit religious practices such as family worship.

Part IV: Resisting the Evangelical Turn in Family Life

Most sources present a positive view of evangelicalism. However, it is certainly possible to discern resistance. Why, for example, were the brothers in Castlesween having to sneak off into the woods? Presumably their father refused to conduct family worship. As evangelicals used family life to drive cultural change, it was in family life that resistance was manifested. The evidence suggests Gaels resisted in three ways. The most passive type was for the household head to conform to the rituals expected of converted evangelicals but maintain his own beliefs privately. Other heads of household resisted more overtly and refused to

participate in religious practices. Thirdly, those who lived under patriarchal authority had less freedom to resist. However for some, particularly catholics, practices such as obligatory family worship was experienced as oppression too much to bear and they refused to cooperate.

Revivalism resulted in many genuine converts and profoundly affected Gaelic culture. Evangelical leaders recognised, however, that people might conform superficially without heartfelt conversion. The *Directory* reminded readers that ‘exercises ought to be performed in great sincerity’.⁹⁷ So, while cultural change in a locale was welcomed, and external behaviour was deemed important, leaders worried that it was not always genuine.⁹⁸ The Gaelic teacher reported that on Eigg, during the early 1840s, there was ‘a change to the better on the outward conduct of almost all the Protestants in this island’ but he made no claims for internal change.⁹⁹ In the early 1850s Renigidale, North Harris, experienced a cultural shift instigated by the Gaelic teacher, Duncan Morrison. Previously ‘open sins, deserving civil and ecclesiastical punishment, were not infrequent among them. But now the place is greatly changed; now there is not a family without keeping family worship, with only one exception, in the whole district.’ Only one family outwardly resisted, however the minister worried that ‘the apparent was more than the real’. He felt a replacement teacher should be sent until the internal faith of the people was securely established.¹⁰⁰ So family worship was an indicator of conversion and of a godly community, but there was always the danger, particularly as the Highlands became culturally evangelical, that it did not indicate the true state of spiritual affairs.

⁹⁷ *Directory*, 4.

⁹⁸ Boyd, *Scottish church attitudes*, 70.

⁹⁹ 32AR31.

¹⁰⁰ 46AR11.

Performing any family-based religious practice depended on the opinion of the, usually male, head of household. If only some of the family members had experienced conversion this could cause tension. In 1831 there was a school at Braes in Skye. It was used by a community whose next generation became famous for battling the police to reclaim their grazing rights on the slopes of nearby Ben Lee. One of the ESSGS annual reports shaped an incident at the school into the type of sentimental morality tale which was increasingly popular in the nineteenth century.¹⁰¹ However the story's subtext shows evangelicalism was not always welcome. The inspector spotted a boy who had been unable to walk since he was a toddler and who was carried to the school on someone's back. The inspector offered him a bible on the condition that

he would make conscience, in the sight of God, of reading a chapter regularly every morning and evening in his parents' house - he would attend school regularly, - that he would not be found cursing or swearing, or breaking the blessed Sabbath day ... it was with great reluctance he at all promised ... After he got the Bible, he went home and began to perform his promise ... but he was not many days at his pleasing work when [his parents], being people of the world, would listen to him or it no longer ... he at last fell upon an alternative, which was, to go and build a small hut, where he could read it with pleasure alone, and without disturbance or molestation. He accordingly began to collect stones for this purpose, though only able to crawl on the ground on all fours. When some of the children in the town saw his diligence, they began to aid him ... he went two or three times a-day to read the Book of God ... He had not been long thus engaged, when the life-giving Spirit of God began to pour a flood of light upon

¹⁰¹ Calum G. Brown, *The death of christian Britain* (Oxon, 2001), 121; Diana Pasulka, 'A somber pedagogy: a history of the child death bed scene in early American children's religious literature, 1674-1840', *The journal of the history of childhood and youth* 2.2 (2009) 171-197, at 184.

the word of His grace; so that ... he would now remain for two or three hours upon a stretch.

By 1836 he had sickened and was on his deathbed. He was wracked with guilt at not fulfilling his whole promise and it took much reassurance that God would not judge him for his parents' refusal to listen.¹⁰² By the 1830s the child deathbed scene was a set piece in evangelical literature and was regularly incorporated into the ESSGS reports. There is no way of checking to what extent the life and death of this boy was rearranged to fit the model. This story, however, shows the introduction of religious practice within the family could be unwelcome, perhaps especially if it involved children taking the lead.

The head of the household controlled religious observance or non-observance within the family. When Rev. John MacDonald, he who had been influenced by the widow in Reay, visited the Lochaber mansion of Cameron of Locheil he expected the usual evening devotions with the large party of guests. However

between nine and ten o'clock, card-playing having been proposed, Mr. Macdonald ... asked him whether he was to hold family worship. ... "Not to-night," his host replied; "it would give offence to my visitors."¹⁰³

A contest of power between the minister and Locheil ensued, resulting in MacDonald abandoning the house in the dead of night and walking several miles before finding shelter. Locheil probably usually practiced family worship, but his visitors did not and he was happy to accommodate their preference. Someone, on the other hand, who was under patriarchal authority, a wife, a child or a servant, lacked that autonomy. An unconverted dependent of a convert had to conform. Most children, for example, were less enthusiastic about religious

¹⁰² 26AR38.

¹⁰³ Kennedy, *Apostle of the north*, 194-5.

matters than the Castlesween and Braes boys. Neil Gunn evoked a scene where brothers entertained themselves during family worship with private competitions.

In a clear voice, Joe reads the second verse; and is followed, sunwise, by his father, his mother, and Angus.

Now this is the chapter that contains the shortest verse in the Bible, namely, *Jesus wept*. It is verse thirty-five. It has always been a game amongst the boys that it is hard luck to get a long verse or one with difficult names and embarrassing to get one dealing with certain bodily organs or acts. But to get the shortest verse in the Bible is to score.

There was a certain shyness and fear about this public reading. When Kenn had got over his first verse, he immediately began ‘counting out’ to find the lucky one. Angus who had been quicker on the count, was waiting for him, and, closing his left eye, shoved out his tongue. ...

When the singing ended, they all got down on their knees on the stone floor, put their elbows on their chairs, and bowed their heads. ...

Kenn became aware of the stealthy movement of Angus’s body. But even in the very moment of making up his mind that he would not look at him, he turned his head and at his brother’s mockery stuck out his tongue to the root. Then, feeling better, he bowed his head again.¹⁰⁴

The resistance of most children was probably expressed subtly, in this sort of a way, and was mainly borne out of boredom or frustration. Servants in a household were placed in a position equivalent to children. While devout servants may have welcomed family worship, enforced attendance was a problem, particularly in mixed-faith communities like Eigg.¹⁰⁵ At Hulin farm catholic servants were coerced into participating. They felt so strongly that they

¹⁰⁴ Gunn, *Highland river*, 94-6.

¹⁰⁵ Boyd, *Scottish church attitudes*, 88.

resigned and complained to the priest.¹⁰⁶ Scottish catholics had a long history of resisting employers' efforts to enforce protestantism of whatever brand so this particular issue was a running sore.¹⁰⁷ In a context of expansionist protestantism catholics, and indeed children, usually employed the 'everyday resistance' conceptualised by James C. Scott in his studies of the disempowered of south-east Asia.¹⁰⁸ It was when they had the support of their Church that catholics tended to engage in overt resistance, withdrawing children from school, emigrating or, in the case on Eigg, resigning their jobs.¹⁰⁹

As evangelicalism and the family rituals which marked it became culturally dominant, a strain of resistance developed. Some heads of household wholeheartedly adopted daily worship as part of a coherent set of personal, family and corporate religious practices. However as evangelicalism became the cultural norm, some parents conformed to the ritual without internalising the faith. Some refused to conform at all. This was more feasible for adult males. Believers in a household whose patriarch resisted evangelicalism could only practice their faith privately or outwith the home, while non-believers in a household headed by a convert were expected to participate. So resistance to family worship, symbolic of evangelicalism, certainly existed, but the ability to resist or the pressure to conform depended on a person's level of social authority. When it came to adopting or rejecting Gaelic evangelical culture, heads of household had much autonomy, but women, younger members and servants had little.

¹⁰⁶ Catholic reactions to evangelicalism are fully discussed in Ritchie, 'The people, the priests and the protestants', 13-14.

¹⁰⁷ Christine Johnson, *Developments in the Scottish catholic church, 1789-1829* (Edinburgh, 1983), 171.

¹⁰⁸ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance* (New Haven, 1985); James Symonds, 'Toiling in the vale of tears: everyday life and resistance in South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 1760-1860', *International journal of historical archaeology* 3.2 (1999) 101-122, at 112, 114-6.

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, *Developments in the Scottish catholic church*, 171.

Conclusions

In the midst of social and economic upheaval a critical mass of the people of the Gàidhealtachd were drawn to evangelicalism as a way to restructure their culture. It was through the family that this evangelical culture was rooted and consolidated. As a result, the purpose and patterns of family life were reshaped. This was most visible through family worship which, in its ideal form, embedded scripture reading, psalm singing and prayer within each household's daily ritual, connecting the private devotional life of individuals with the family's participation in public corporate worship. Evangelicals in the Highlands and western islands endeavoured to follow the pattern of Lowland Scottish reformers, working for cultural transformation through men taking responsibility for the spiritual reformation and nurture of their own households. Patriarchy was bolstered as spiritual leadership was added to the male householder's legal, economic and moral authority. However the inability of many individual men, however willing, to perform family worship, predicated as it was on literacy, access to vernacular bibles and a degree of religious experience, simultaneously undermined their authority. While the reformers' concept of male-led household religion may have worked well in literate and settled agricultural communities, in a largely oral culture while communities were experiencing socio-economic upheaval and considerable mobility, it was less well-suited. The gendered structures of reformed family devotion were intended to bolster the authority of the senior male over a defined household, but the cultural adaptations made by Gaels instead elevated literacy, spiritual ability and pragmatism. Although never challenging patriarchal assumptions, Gaels looked beyond the head of household to feed spiritual enthusiasm: local men, Gaelic teachers, visiting preachers or even literate children stepped in to conduct some form of family worship, the visible symbol of evangelical conversion. Regardless of this initial fluidity, the male head of house retained overall control over how or whether his household participated. Resistance was clearest when men refused to

restructure family life around evangelical rituals, whereas that of women, servants, youths and children was more hidden.

Family worship was a prominent marker of evangelical commitment, but the emphasis on it could hide less obvious spiritual practices. The ritual was far from the only way of practicing and teaching Christian faith within the family, and other methods were less gendered. To create a pious home environment required both parents to teach the catechism, enforce church attendance, instruct children in ways of living and lead by personal example. That many households in the Highlands and Islands were female-headed for at least part of the year also suggests that women had fairly direct spiritual influence when their husbands were away. Christianity was also embedded in family life in ways which strong evangelicals rarely recognised. Prayers used to promote the health and well-being of loved ones and precious resources or to bless daily processes, like milking, and important events, like childbirth, were often dismissed as catholicism or superstition. But these too shaped the practice of faith within the household and formed children's spirituality. Even within the midst of an undeniable cultural reorientation towards evangelicalism, it is possible to see strands of continuity from earlier generations and it is possible to see resistance. On the surface, therefore, it seems that the evangelical cultural turn in the Gàidhealtachd signalled the final success of the Scottish reformation and the reinforcement of patriarchal control. An examination of the actual practice of religion within families suggests, however, a more complex cultural accommodation.

Key words: parenting, children, family worship, Evangelical revival, Protestant culture, Highlands and Islands