

“On the threshold of manhood”: Working-Class Religion and Domesticity in Victorian Britain and Canada

NANCY CHRISTIE*

Recent studies indicate that records of church membership are unreliable as a barometer to measure the religiosity of Victorian working-class people. Specifically working-class forms of religious practice, when combined with working-class views of masculinity, tended to privilege the domestic space rather than church membership as the primary site of Christian experience. The religious diary and family correspondence of Frederick and Fanny Brigden, both working-class Londoners, reveal Brigden's own version of domesticated religiosity and his conception of respectable working-class masculinity. His life-long obsession with temperance, thrift, self-help, and religion was neither imposed by nor borrowed from the values of the dominant classes, but grew directly from his experience of the inequalities and vicissitudes of working-class life. As the Brigdens' example shows, working-class families' conceptions of domesticity did not merely mimic those of bourgeois ruling elites, but flowed from their own interpretations of religion and their own strategies for survival.

De récentes études indiquent que les registres des adhérents à une église ne sont pas une mesure fiable de la religiosité de la classe ouvrière victorienne. Plus particulièrement, les formes de la pratique religieuse ouvrière avaient tendance, lorsque combinées aux visées ouvrières de la masculinité, à privilégier l'espace domestique plutôt que l'appartenance à l'église comme lieu principal de l'expérience chrétienne. Le journal personnel religieux et la correspondance familiale de Frederick et Fanny Brigden, deux Londoniens de la classe ouvrière, témoignent de la version propre à Brigden de la religiosité domestiquée et de sa conception d'une masculinité ouvrière respectable. Son obsession de toujours pour la tempérance, l'épargne, la débrouillardise et la religion n'était ni imposée par les valeurs des classes dominantes ni empruntée à celles-ci. Non, elle émanait directement de son expérience des inégalités et des vicissitudes de la vie de la classe ouvrière. Comme le montre

* Nancy Christie is a researcher and historian in Hamilton, Ontario. She recently edited the collection *Households of Faith: Family, Gender and Community in Canada, 1760–1969* (McGill-Queen's, 2002) and is the author of *Engendering the State: Family, Work, And Welfare in Canada* (University of Toronto, 2000), as well as co-author of *A Full-Orbed Christianity* (McGill-Queen's, 1996).

l'exemple de Brigden, la conception que nourrissait les familles de la classe ouvrière de la domesticité ne faisait pas qu'imiter celle des élites bourgeoises dirigeantes, mais elle découlait de leur propre interprétation de la religion et de leurs propres stratégies de survie.

WRITING WITHIN the paradigm established by Charles Booth, the late-Victorian social investigator of labouring London Gareth Stedman Jones contended that the English working class was “impervious to evangelical” culture. Jones eschewed studying religion as a potential site of working-class consciousness because he identified it too closely with late nineteenth-century constructions of middle-class respectability, and thus something quite marginal to working-class life. Thus Jones concluded of the London working class: “Its dominant cultural institutions were not the school, the evening class, the library, the friendly society, the church or the chapel, but the pub, the sporting paper, the race course and the music hall.”¹ As an exponent of the social control thesis, which conceived of cultural values as circumscribed solely by economic class imperatives, Jones dismissed any evidence of working-class adherence to church, to notion of respectability, or to self-help and improvement as mere emulation and unthinking internalizing of middle-class ideals. This older notion of class imposition, upon which the framework of social control depended, has been reinvigorated by the new historiography of hegemony, especially as it has been deployed within Canada. In this country, its practitioners have more narrowly interpreted E. P. Thompson’s more fluid and open-ended description of hegemonic social relations into a unidirectional process (namely top-down) of cultural imposition. While recognizing the differences in power relations within society, Thompson acknowledged the potential for an upward flow of cultural influence, especially around the notion of customs in common. More recent adaptations of the concept have used it in a more reductionist fashion, which precludes an appreciation of the pluralism of cultural identities and cultural forms that were both resisted and appropriated.²

In Britain since the late 1970s, there has been a considerable historiographical revision of the notion of bourgeois imposition. Geoffrey Crossick and Robert Q. Gray, in pathbreaking revisionist studies of working-class

1 Gareth Stedman Jones, “Working-class Culture and Working-class Politics in London, 1870–1890: Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class”, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 7, no. 4 (Summer 1974), pp. 473, 479. For a similar interpretation, which views religious institutions as anathema to working-class leisure and values, see Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

2 For a discussion of recent uses of the concept of hegemony, see Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, “Modalities of Social Authority: Suggesting an Interface for Religious and Social History”, *Histoire sociale/Social History*, vol. 36, no. 71 (May 2003), pp. 1–30; Peter Bailey, “Leisure, Culture and the Historian: Confessions of a Vulgar Culturalist”, in Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian Britain: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control: 1830–1885* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987; 1978), pp. 10–15.

south London and Edinburgh, rejected the argument promulgated by John Foster, that the values of respectability among the labour aristocracy constituted a form of false consciousness. Both Gray and Crossick questioned the notion that cultural values were merely reflective of economic position and thus posited diversity within the middle and working classes. Further, they argued that the notion of respectability, though espoused by some but not all middle-class elements, was simultaneously constructed among skilled and semi-skilled workers as a means to come to terms with the inequalities and vicissitudes of a still unstable and emergent Victorian industrial capitalism. While they themselves did not expunge the notion of experience from their culturalist reinterpretation of previous Marxist writing, the work of Gray and Crossick paved the way for a more complex and less economically driven framework for class identification. Their approach has led to more recent interpretations that both stress less undifferentiated middle- and working-class cultures and shift the weight away from the primacy of class towards a wider conceptualization embracing such forms of social collectivity as notions of community and religious commonality. At the same time such interpretations give due weight to factors that might diminish notions of class solidarity, such as identities of locality, gender, and ethnic group.³

These new narratives of class and culture have demonstrated the range of divisions within the traditionally conceived ruling groups, but the range of response and reconstruction and interaction between the cultures also meant

3 For example, see, Robert Q. Gray, *The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Geoffrey Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London, 1840–1880* (London: Croom Helm, 1978); Penelope J. Corfield, ed., *Language, History, and Class* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1840–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890–1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); M. L. Bush, ed., *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe Since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification* (Essex: Longman, 1992). On reinterpreting the middle class, the classic Marxist statement is Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle-Classes, 1780–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). When social behaviour and values of a particular group do not fit their model of the middle class, such as that of small shopkeepers, they simply label them working class. For example, Catherine Hall, “The Butcher, the Baker, the Candlestick Maker: The Shop and the Family in the Industrial Revolution”, in Elizabeth Whitelegg *et al.*, eds., *The Changing Experience of Women* (Oxford: Martin Robinson, 1982), pp. 2–16. For revisionist assessments which posit a more fragmented and less impositional middle class, see F. M. L. Thompson, “Social Control in Victorian Britain”, *Economic History Review*, second series, vol. 34, no. 2 (May 1981), pp. 189–208; Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660–1730* (London: Methuen, 1989); R. J. Morris, *Class, Sect, and Party: The Making of the British Middle Class, Leeds 1820–1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Dror Wahrman, “National Society, Communal Culture: An Argument About the Recent Historiography on Eighteenth-Century Britain”, *Social History*, vol. 17, no. 1 (January 1982), pp. 43–72; Jonathan Barry, “The Making of the Middle Class?”, *Past and Present*, vol. 145 (November 1994).

that the creation of social identities and selfhood itself drew upon a wide “field of discourse”.⁴ These constructions of identity, however, were not endlessly multifarious, as Patrick Joyce implies; rather, they still remained connected to a reality of experience,⁵ which meant ultimately that though people might have drawn upon a roughly common culture — such as that of church and chapel — they did so out of a particular class sensibility. In other words, class boundaries were extremely fluid in the mid-Victorian period, especially in England between the skilled working class and lower middle class and between the *haute bourgeoisie* and the gentry, a situation in which individuals from one social group had contacts with and were exposed to the values of other groups. Nevertheless, there were discrete evaluations of class and status, and these appropriations were consciously intended to uphold and reinforce one’s sense of group. Thus, in this broad marketplace of the discursive so characteristic of Victorian society, religion, domesticity, and respectability were not simply attributes of the middle class despite the fact that such characteristics may have been crucial in middle-class formation; rather, the crucial hermeneutic breakthrough advanced by Callum Brown is that evangelicalism (with its imbrications of domesticity and notions of independence, improvement, thrift, temperance, and self-discipline) interacted equally with working- and middle-class cultures.⁶ This new historiographic pathway is of tremendous value to both historians of working-class culture and religious historians, for it neither negates the primacy of an individual consciousness of class nor presumes a too rigid formulation of cultural exclusivity. It thus avoids notions of either the representative or the stereotypical that erode possibilities, intersecting cultures, of ambiguity and choice in creating self-identity.

Frederick Brigden, a London apprentice-engraver, lived his life in the penumbra of these overlapping cultural and economic worlds. The son of a saddle-maker and a small shopkeeper, Brigden emigrated to Toronto in 1868, the year of his marriage, where he worked as an engraver for his friend Henry Beale whom he had met at the London Working Men’s College. In 1887, when

4 For this concept, see Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800–2000* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 31.

5 On preserving the concept of experience, see Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 5; Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920–1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 9–13; Dominick LaCapra, *History and Reading: Tocqueville, Foucault, French Studies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 57, 59–60. For an earlier but very sensible delineation of the intersection of language and experience, see John Toews, “Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience”, *American Historical Review*, vol. 82 (1987), pp. 879–907.

6 Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, p. 43. Although John Seed has argued that Christian organizations were inclusive rather than socially exclusive, he nevertheless still sees working-class behaviour as relegated to the subordinate in relation to a dominant middle class, largely because his starting point is the formation of the latter. See John Seed, “From ‘Middling Sort’ to Middle Class in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century England”, in Bush, ed., *Social Orders and Social Classes*, pp. 131–133.

Beale received a substantial legacy, Brigden bought control of the business, which he renamed the Toronto Engraving Company, where he employed 300 workers. Despite this dramatic change in both his wealth and class status, Brigden continued to see himself as a “skilful art workman” and to situate his valuation of manliness upon the twin pillars of nobility of feeling, derived from religion, and a notion of progress founded upon the goal of “work and a secure position”. While to some his idealization of work might appear to be a mere matter of embourgeoisement, an outlook defined by his role as an employer who meant to inculcate these values in his work force, it is clear from Brigden’s own words written to his son in 1894 that he conceived of independence and the ability to help others as the obverse of his continued anxieties regarding “actual want and dependence”. This perspective flowed from the fact that he had been a charity boy at the Brighton School for the Deaf and Dumb and from his first-hand experience of the instability of life caused by interruptions in work and earning in industrializing London. When Brigden exclaimed, “I hunger for progress”, he was speaking from a working-class consciousness which maintained that the workingman’s life must be improved beyond simply one of endless toil. As he informed his son Fred, then a budding artist, “I have always felt the daily work of the office and the spirit in which it is done a far more real test of how far religion & God’s work filled my heart than the Sunday and mission work.” Here was a workingman who saw work as a primary site both for his consciousness of class and for his evangelical religious convictions. Nevertheless, Brigden preferred a form of religious practice which involved private prayer, either at home or late at night alone at work, to the public or “open religious profession”, which was the ideal espoused by clerical leaders of organized religion.⁷

What would conventional interpretations of religion, which measure secularization by church-produced statistics of membership, make of such a committed Christian as Frederick Brigden, who preferred the Christianity of “words and life” — what Callum Brown, Mark Smith, and Susan Williams have identified as “diffused Christianity” — to the demands of regular, active church participation? Can we characterize Brigden as a skilled worker who felt alienated from the church or as one of the unfaithful because he would not have appeared in the church statistics (which, as Callum Brown has observed, were themselves constructions of only a particular interpretation of religious adherence)? Or should we conclude, as Alan Gilbert has done, that lack of church membership was not a barometer of level of religiosity, but merely indicated one’s commitment to the Victorian civil ideal of voluntarist

7 Toronto, Central Reference Library, Baldwin Room S138, Frederick Brigden Papers [hereafter Brigden Papers], F. H. Brigden to his son, Fred, August n.d., 1894; August 9, 1896; Fred Brigden, “Notes on Father’s Character”.

8 Alan D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740–1914* (New York: Longman, 1976), p. 24. For a similar argument regarding the association ideal, see S. J. D. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1820–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

association?⁸ Like Brigden, Williams and Brown have argued that outward measures of religious practice such as Sunday attendance cannot be equated with levels of faith within the broader society. Brown in particular has castigated historians who have resorted merely to statistical evidence for uncritically imbibing the very middle-class constructions of religiosity that were defined in terms of the public manifestations of active adherence through participation in religious organizations. By so doing, argues Brown, demographic historians, largely committed to a narrative of religious decline, have jettisoned from their conceptual framework those very forms of religiosity most characteristic of working-class people, namely the reading of the Bible and prayers at home, and have concluded through such flawed methodology that a substantial proportion of working-class individuals were either bereft of faith or antagonistic to church authorities because of their class origins.⁹ As a way out of this historiographical construct, which is itself redolent of class bias, Brown has proposed a rigorous study of the discursive terrain of religious newspapers, tracts, and novels — what he calls the broader culture of Christianity — as well as the way in which the discursive informed the contours of one's self-identity and everyday experience. To that end, this case study examines the religious diary and the family correspondence of Frederick and Fanny Brigden, both working-class Londoners.¹⁰ In this very private realm of family and marriage, Brigden most manifestly constructed his own version of domesticated religiosity, which was dense with cultural meaning

9 Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, pp. 25–31; S. C. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c.1880–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1, 9, 113, 126. From massive oral testimony, Williams demonstrates that, for the most part, working-class Londoners did not share the voluntarist ideal of middle-class church leaders.

10 For the view that London was constructed by the clergy as an especially irreligious urban environment, see Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, pp. 19–28. For a recent assessment which emphasizes greater religiosity among London workers, see Hugh McLeod, *Piety and Poverty: Working-Class Religion in Berlin, London and New York, 1870–1914* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1996), pp. 32–42.

11 There have been studies of working-class autobiography, and those by David Vincent and Mary Jo Maynes are exemplary. They nevertheless used published life narratives which were themselves political documents tending to reinforce the absence of religion and domestic attitudes. See David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Autobiography* (London: Europa, 1981); Mary Jo Maynes, *Taking the Hard Road: Life Course in French and German Workers' Autobiographies in the Era of Industrialization* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). Diaries have been extolled by Patrick Joyce as the ideal conjunction of the representation and the real, of the site for creating both subjective and collective identities. However, despite his animadversions on the subject of class, Joyce places it and politics at the centre and marginalizes the role of religious ideas. See Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). This is especially apparent in his treatment of the working-class leader Edwin Waugh. When analysing John Bright, the middle-class radical, he is much more attentive to religion. Men have now been largely theorized out of autobiographical studies, especially those which relate to religion, as feminist theorists have imbibed the nineteenth-century notion that women were more pious and personal in their religious discourse. See, for example, Linda H. Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The*

for his conception of respectable working-class masculinity.¹¹

Brigden's own life experience exemplified the relationship that social historians such as Geoffrey Crossick and F. M. L. Thompson have uncovered at a macro level between an artisan elite and small shopkeepers, social groups between which there were high levels of intermarriage and which had similar income levels.¹² Brigden was the son of a saddler, who, because of his contact with the ruling elites, became in the words of his son "a prosperous tradesman", but turned to drink and thus suffered a disastrous loss of trade which soon plunged the family into debt. Throughout Brigden's diary and journal, he returned again and again to the interconnection of religious faith, prosperity, and family affection, represented most distinctly by the love of his father, and the causal links between irreligion, lack of self-discipline, economic dearth, family breakdown, and the final, shameful resort to charity. "Oh that cursed vice of drunkenness", wrote Brigden to his sister, lamenting the loss of a once affectionate father, who had attended to chapel and family prayers but had now abandoned "[a]ll sense of honour, self-respect and honesty.... [W]hen under the demon power of drink still I love him." Out of this traumatic life experience Brigden developed a life-long obsession with temperance, joining the reform movement in 1862,¹³ thrift, and, one could argue, religion; this childhood memory induced him to turn to the witness of the church and made him especially receptive to the messages of evangelicalism. In short, the connection which Brigden delineated between respectable behaviour — of seeking economic independence, thrift, self-help, and temperance — was not a belief borrowed through emulating the values of the dominant classes; rather, it was a sensibility that grew directly out of his experience of the inequalities and vicissitudes of working-class life.

The fact that his father had failed as a breadwinner — and presumably had

Politics of Life Writing (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999); Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Cynthia S. Pomerleau, "The Emergence of Women's Autobiography in England", in Estelle C. Jelinek, ed., *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1980). For the best analysis of a workingman's religion through an analysis of his journals, see Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985). For a penetrating insight as to why working-class male domesticity has been ignored by historians and an excellent corrective, see Lynn Abrams, "'There was nobody like my Daddy': Fathers, the Family and the Marginalisation of Men in Modern Scotland", *Scottish Historical Review*, vol. 78, no. 2:206 (October 1999), pp. 219–242.

12 Geoffrey Crossick and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, "Introduction: Shopkeepers, Master Artisans and the Historian: The Petite Bourgeoisie in Comparative Focus", in Crossick and Haupt, eds., *Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), pp. 4, 18, and *The Petite Bourgeoisie in Europe 1780–1914: Enterprise, Family and Independence* (London and New York: Routledge 1995); F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 95.

13 Brigden Papers, Certificate of Marriage, St. Margaret's Parish Church, Westminster, October 13, 1868; Brigden Diary, January 10 and April 10, 1862; letter of Frederick Brigden to Fanny, May 23, 1867.

deserted the family for short periods of time — meant that Brigden's mother had once again to take up sewing, making fancy goods for the small shop she opened. It is clear that Brigden's mother was following in the footsteps of her sister who ran a haberdashery shop, which also specialized in hearses and mourning coaches, but the existence of female shopkeepers was always precarious.¹⁴ Indeed, Brigden's mother had to supplement her earnings by taking in several lodgers and by receiving contributions from Frederick, even though he was himself an apprentice. This undermining of the gender conventions of domesticity within the Brigden family had a profound effect upon Frederick, who thereafter sought to reinforce the links between working-class prosperity and patriarchal control of the family. That his mother was forced into the workplace not only meant that a young servant had to be hired to cook and take care of the younger children in the family, while the older siblings helped with the shop (a decision which represented downward mobility rather than an ascent in social status), but Frederick himself had to take on the role of head of the family, which meant using his wages as an apprentice wood engraver to pay for the education and apprenticeships of his brothers, one with a bookbinder and another with a shopkeeper. Indeed, on his twenty-first birthday Brigden's transition from youth to adulthood was marked by his mother's decision to place all her savings into Brigden's building society account to avoid further depredations from his dissipated father.¹⁵

Brigden thus became both the practical and symbolic head of the family, and this transition in his life-course, "on the threshold of manhood",¹⁶ coincided in turn with the final stages of his religious conversion to evangelicalism, with the completion of his apprenticeship with Harvey Smith, and with his courtship and marriage to Francis (Fanny) Higgins, the orphaned daughter of a bricklayer. Like Brigden's own sister, Fanny was a servant, at the time of her marriage living at a large estate south of London, where she was the lady's maid to the mistress of the house. Although a servant of high status because she attended to the personal needs of her employer, Fanny had the disadvantage of being an orphan, along with the fact that her father was from "the lower class of workmen",¹⁷ which meant that she would be assiduously scrutinized if she hoped to marry into an artisanal/shopkeeping family like the Brigdens. Her social status was further weakened by the fact that several of her brothers were unskilled. Three of her brothers were sailors, another was a porter, another had broken family ties and fled to America, and, most

14 Crossick and Haupt, *The Petite Bourgeoisie in Europe*, p. 74.

15 Brigden Papers, Diary, December 30, 1861; mother to Fred, n.d.; Fred to Fanny, June 2, 1867; Harvey Smith to Brigden, March 16, 1868, announcing the end of his apprenticeship; Eliza Brigden to Fred, June 18, 1870.

16 Brigden Papers, Diary.

17 Brigden Papers, J. Sleight, headmaster Brighton School for the Deaf and Dumb, to Brigden, n.d.

disturbing of all, one was a publican. Despite the fact that one brother worked in a hairdresser's shop and another was a butler to the Duke of Cambridge, while her eldest sister was a servant in an Anglican clergyman's family and her other sister was the respectable wife of a Baptist minister, Fanny's only claim to status was provided by her unimpeachable Christian character. Like Brigden, Fanny's definition of herself as a prospective marriage partner derived from a view of respectable behaviour formed wholly without reference to middle-class mores; rather, her self-identity as a working-class woman of good character depended upon codes of behaviour and a notion of economic self-sufficiency which defined itself against dependency upon charity, a view of independence which paralleled that of Brigden's.¹⁸ Thus, in her first courtship letters to Frederick, Fanny underscored both her ability to save and her practice of dispensing charity to the local villagers, as well as her piety, as discursive modes by which to separate herself from the rough culture of her semi- and unskilled family. At one and the same time she eschewed the high church proclivities of her mistress (and of her sister, from whom she was estranged because of their religious differences) to separate her social identity from the upper bourgeoisie and gentry and railed against the pub culture with which her brother identified, despite the fact that, as a publican, he was the most economically prosperous and upwardly mobile of her family. To both Frederick and Fanny, consciousness of class was dependent less upon economic definitions or upon gradations of wealth — although these were not wholly discounted — and relied more substantially upon cultural values and specific codes of behaviour such as cleanliness, economy, and temperance, all of which flowed from the primary attribute, religiosity. Aunt Henty thus introduced Fanny as a prospective wife of an upwardly mobile artisan in the following terms: she was “a truly *sincere Christian*”, she was “*really pious* and her husband must be the same”, she was good tempered and “*very tidy, careful, and economical*”, and her conduct before men was “*most admirable*”, as she kept her distance from the opposite sex and was not “frivolous”.¹⁹

Although Frederick Brigden situated himself in terms of his occupation, his sense of class was more demonstrably articulated by his values and forms of conduct, which he defined in terms very similar to Fanny's self-description. Fred proposed to Fanny on May 3, 1867, by first explaining that he held “a good place in my occupation and gain an average of 35/ a week”, that he had saved £73, and that he was both a dutiful brother and son to “one of the most affectionate of mothers”. Further he explained that, because of his evangelical faith, he respected women, and he attempted to separate himself culturally from the rough treatment accorded many working-class wives

18 Brigden Papers, Aunt Henty to Brigden, February 29, 1867; Fanny to Fred, June 17, 1867; mother to Fred, n.d.

19 Brigden Papers, Aunt Henty to Brigden, February 28, 1867.

by their husbands by stating that he believed his “conduct as far as I am able should be ruled by the teaching of the Word”.²⁰ While Brigden accepted wider social definitions of class based upon occupational difference, his language of class and thus his self-identity was further nuanced. To him and Fanny, there were sub-categories within both the middle class (by which they meant the lower middle class, as the upper bourgeoisie fell outside their frame of reference because it was associated with gentry values)²¹ and working classes, defined around their notion of respectability, by which they meant a dedication to serious, evangelical religion. Brigden saw economic and occupational boundaries as very fluid, a view best demonstrated in his description of a revival meeting in Exeter Hall in 1865: “an immense assembly of the respectable lower part of the middle classes some labourers, but the most part I should think middle class artisans & small shopkeepers the number of men great, I think preponderating.... Two respectable middle-aged tradesmen before me reminding me of father, very attentive. The speaker appeared honest, unpolished, rather awkward in some of his motions, evidently a workingman....”²²

Here was the community in which Brigden situated himself, in the shadowy social elisions between middle-class shopkeeper, middle-class artisan, workingman, and labourer, and the potential to move up or down this fluid social scale was defined, as he believed, by the degree to which one committed oneself to religion. Indeed, for Brigden, it was not merely occupational status that defined who belonged to his working-class community, but religion that constituted the central benchmark of his sense of collective identity. Thus Brigden, who was a lay preacher at a mission for the deaf in Deptford, south London, described his audience as “a fair sprinkling of rough young men & boys, but a *very* respectable and attentive people in the front rows”. The boundary between who was conceived of as rough or as respectable in Brigden’s construction of the working artisans and middle-class small proprietors depended almost exclusively on their attitude to religion. Both Fanny’s and Fred’s commitment to respectability revealed little gender difference, but was enshrined within an overarching evangelical perspective, an outlook derived from their own lived experience as servant and apprentice artisan in improving London. Brigden’s claim to respectability was neither the result of

20 Brigden Papers, Fred to Fanny, May 3, 1867. For the kind of violent marital relations from which Brigden wished to separate himself, see Nancy Tomes, “A ‘Torrent of Abuse’: Crimes of Violence between Working-Class Men and Women in London, 1840–1875”, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 11 (1978), pp. 328–345; Ellen Ross, “‘Fierce Questions and Taunts’: Married Life in Working-Class London, 1870–1914”, *Feminist Studies*, vol. 8 (1982), pp. 575–602.

21 The notion of self-help united the working and middle classes, for it served as a critique of aristocratic patronage, which Fanny directly experienced daily in her job as servant in a large estate. Brigden and Fanny seemed to espouse a two-class system of upper-middle or gentry and lower-middle or working class. On this point, see Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 52.

22 Brigden Papers, Diary, December 1865.

middle-class imposition nor an unconscious and passive assimilation of external values; his embracing of the values of self-help, individualism, thrift, self-discipline, and temperance were conscious choices made by a workman, but they were not mere “performance” to make working-class culture more palatable for middle-class eyes, as Peter Bailey has posited. Brigden saw respectability and religion as central to his political ideal for making working-class life more stable and more culturally enriched, rather than as a cultural medium emulative of a middle-class status to which he aspired.²³ A commitment to respectable behaviour had distinct associations in Brigden’s mind with economic well-being: because he equated his father’s indebtedness as a matter of choice driven by a lack of religious commitment, he thus advanced a causal link between personal sin and dearth,²⁴ and from this perspective respectabil-

- 23 There is an extensive historiography on the notion of respectability in Victorian England. See Crossick, *An Artisan Elite*, pp. 19–20, 101, 114, 129–130, and “The Petite Bourgeoisie in Nineteenth-Century Britain”, in Pat Thane and Anthony Sutcliffe, eds., *Essays in Social History*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 169–171; Brian Harrison, *The Peaceable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 158–161; John Rule, “Methodism, Popular Beliefs and Village Culture in Cornwall, 1800–1850”, in Robert D. Storch, ed., *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982); K. D. M. Snell, “Deferral Bitterness: The Social Outlook of the Rural Proletariat in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England and Wales”, in Bush, ed., *Social Orders and Social Classes*, pp. 172–173, 176; Keith McLelland, “Some Thoughts on Masculinity and the ‘Representative Artisan’ in Britain, 1850–1880”, *Gender and History*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Summer 1989), p. 164; R. J. Morris, “Samuel Smiles and the Genesis of Self-Help: The Retreat to a Petit Bourgeois Utopia”, *Historical Journal*, vol. 24 (1981); Asa Briggs, *Victorian People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 116–139. For the most part these historians, apart from Briggs, have seen respectability as part of working-class aspirations. For cross-class analysis, see Peter Earle, “The Middling Sort of London”, in Jonathon Barry and Christopher Brooks, eds., *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550–1800* (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 141–158; Dror Wahrman, “Virtual Representation: Parliamentary Reporting and Languages of Class in the 1790s”, *Past and Present*, vol. 136 (August 1992), p. 113. On the notion of respectability as performance, see Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*, pp. 32–35. On the concept of respectability as middle-class imposition, see Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*. Patrick Joyce has posited that, while there may be languages of class, there was no class consciousness. While I agree with Joyce that class had multiple constructions, I nevertheless show, with Brigden at least, that we cannot expunge the concept of consciousness even if this does not fit a political definition. For a critique of Joyce’s tendency to use political rhetoric in place of wider social meanings of class, see Geoffrey Crossick, “From Gentleman to the Residuum: Languages of Social Description in Victorian Britain”, in Corfield, ed., *Language, History and Class*, p. 176; Patrick Joyce, “A People and a Class: Industrial Workers and the Social Order in Nineteenth-Century England”, in Bush, ed., *Social Orders and Social Classes*, pp. 201–203.
- 24 Brigden’s views on political economy were commensurate with those of the *laissez-faire* coterie of evangelicals. On this trajectory within evangelicalism, see Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785–1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). For a more specific analysis of the role of Providence, see Hilton, “The Role of Providence in Evangelical Social Thought”, in Derek Beales and Geoffrey Best, eds., *History, Society and the Churches: Essays in Honour of Owen Chadwick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 223–224. Brigden most likely derived his notions of sin, redemption, and economic stability from his reading of Charles Kingsley.

ity was seen as the best prophylactic against a descent into the outcast London of the labouring poor.²⁵ When respectability is interpreted within Brigden's own terms rather than from the perspective of middle-class observers, it is clear that religion was not an artificial garment of class imposition, but that it functioned as a central pivot of Brigden's class consciousness.

Brigden, with his emphasis upon self-help and *laissez-faire* notions of Providence, advanced a two-class model of his society in which the working- and middle-class folk were positioned against the paternalism of ruling elites. Brigden in some respects corresponds to Patrick Joyce's contention that ideas of class were subsumed in broader political categories of "the people", insofar as he supported Liberal initiative such as the eradication of ritualism in the Church of England.²⁶ Brigden, though he evinced a view of class identity that eschewed political class struggle, nevertheless retained the remnants of older artisanal radical traditions in which one's skill was the irreducible distinguishing mark of one's social difference. Moreover, although Brigden also eschewed political reform as a panacea for working-class improvement, even in the wake of the Second Reform Bill, which conferred citizenship on workers like himself, he was influenced somewhat tangentially by Chartism, largely through the social critiques of Charles Kingsley and John Ruskin. Despite the fact that he prayed to ask God to help him "perform my duty in that station [*sic*] of life he has placed me",²⁷ this notion did not represent a reflexive passivity, but only served to reinforce his sense of himself as a "workman"²⁸ — and one who saw himself in conflict with his employer, for he later confessed to damaging his master's property as a form of personal protest against the "dull dragging round of daily work".²⁹

Certainly Brigden emulated the fanfare of technological progress displayed at the Great Exhibition's Crystal Palace, but he also identified with John Ruskin, whose primary theme in his writings was the alienation of workers from their skill, which modern capitalism was increasingly eroding. Like Ruskin, Brigden believed that workmen should have forms of work that stimulated their creativity and that other forms of usefulness — in Brigden's

25 On the need to separate the upper-working classes from the labouring poor, see Stuart Woolf, "Order, Class and the Urban Poor", in Bush, ed., *Social Order and Social Classes*, p. 194.

26 Joyce is in fact describing the liberal equipoise achieved in the mid-Victorian period. On the plebeian radical component of the Gladstonian Liberal Party, see Eugenio Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Paul Hastings, "Radical Movements and Workers' Protests to c.1850", in Frederick Lansberry, ed., *Government and Politics in Kent, 1640–1914* (London: The Boydell Press, 2001), pp. 130, 135–137.

27 Brigden Papers, Diary, January 1, 1861.

28 Brigden Papers, William Sleight to Brigden, October 19, 1863.

29 Brigden Papers, Diary, August 19, 1861; March 4, 1863.

30 Brigden Papers, William Sleight to Brigden, March 22, 1860, on lay preaching as an alternative form of industry and success. On Ruskin's critique of capitalism, see P. D. Anthony, *John Ruskin's Labour: A Study of Ruskin's Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

case becoming a spiritual worker in the form of lay preaching — should be fostered through the creation of more leisure time.³⁰ In a nightmarish vision of modern capitalism, he bemoaned the loss of plebeian spontaneity, which he believed had given workers a public space in which to articulate their peculiar customs. In the demise of the boisterous celebrations of Guy Fawkes Day, Brigden saw in work the ultimate degradation of working-class sensibilities:

The throne of the mighty Guy is tottering to its fall. Farewell to the blazing empire and fallen monarchy civilisation and the policeman trample on the ruins but this advancing pressing all ruling civilisation seems also to be treading us men down harder & harder the ceaseless toil of body & mind, the race for wealth and success leaves us no time for rest and recreation, are we wiser than our forefathers in thus spending all our days in labour whose ceaseless tide is washing out & arbitrarily all traces of those time honoured anniversaries which our forefathers celebrated with festivity and rejoicing. We the young men of this age become grave and staid before our time, the flow of animal spirits of the robust health give way before the confinement of the desk and the toil of the bench.³¹

In many ways, Brigden was a liminal figure, for he adhered to older notions of popular customs and yet also embraced the panoply of new improving associations such as the Mechanics' Institute and the Working Men's College, hallmarks of cross-class initiative which were meant to link middle- and working-class ideals through a mutual commitment to intellectual and cultural improvement.³² From his perspective, these workingmen's associations recovered some of the older intimacy between master and workman which had been lost in the modern workplace; indeed, believing that honourable work should ideally be animated by personal relationships, Brigden embraced the elision between domesticity and work represented by the older culture of apprenticeship because it resolved the problem of the division of labour and the anomie of the urban space. Thus his brother William described his expe-

31 Brigden Papers, Diary, November 5, 1861; David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989).

32 Brigden Papers, J. Sleight to Brigden, n.d., on the fact that it takes "strong ambition or a constraining sense of duty" to take lectures when weary from work. At the Working Men's College Brigden took art classes with Ruskin. On working-class improvement societies, see J. F. C. Harrison, *Living and Learning, 1790–1960: A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961); Tim Barringer, "Equipose and the Object: The South Kensington Museum", in Martin Hewitt, ed., *An Age of Equipose? Reassessing Mid-Victorian Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 69; Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, pp. 116–132; S. J. D. Green, "Religion and the Rise of the Common Man: Mutual Improvement Societies, Religious Associations and Popular Education in Three Industrial Towns in the West Riding of Yorkshire, c.1850–1900", in Derek Fraser, ed., *Cities, Class and Communication: Essays in Honour of Asa Briggs* (New York: Harvester, 1990), p. 26.

rience as a young apprentice clerk, where evenings were spent alongside his master's family — the master peacefully smoking a cigar, his wife reading *Routledge's Annual*, and his daughter sewing, while three apprentices sat writing letters home — an image, Brigden noted, that stood in marked contrast to his own experience alone in lodgings and exposed to the temptations of the streets of London.³³

For Brigden, the Working Men's College and the YMCA served as substitutes for family life and as a counterweight to the alienation of the workplace, where intellectual and spiritual advancement could be enhanced in the fellowship of his contemporaries. Indeed, it was at the Working Men's College library that he discovered the work of the Christian Socialist Charles Kingsley. After reading his novel *Alton Locke*, Brigden, like the major protagonist, an apprentice tailor, turned away from Chartism and political agitations towards the commonality of religious faith, as the primary vehicle for reaffirming the "brotherly union" of workmen. Of *Alton Locke* Brigden commented to his diary, "the principles it sets forth are sound and true the only right means for the elevation of the working classes is the diffusion and acceptance earnestly and truly of the religion of Christ and the clergy are the principle moving power by whom the working man is to be raised." When Brigden underwent his own conversion to evangelicalism, his earlier radicalism centring on improving the material and cultural conditions of working-class families did not disappear, but was sublimated into a religious idiom.³⁴ The Christian Socialist idealism of Kingsley encapsulated the new trajectory of Brigden's social identity, for, as Alton Locke concluded, the claims of universal suffrage were valid "only on the ground of the universal redemption of mankind — the universal priesthood of Christians" by which individual workmen pursued an ideal of collective consciousness through a pursuit of "spiritual liberty" of the patriarch at home.³⁵

Brigden's own spiritual voyage towards a new birth, his conversion to evangelicalism, was a crucial experience in elaborating his sense of working-class masculinity. At one level, the new relationship with God conferred a new sense of social authority upon him and symbolically paralleled the completion of his three years of apprenticeship. Thus his sense of liberty as an adult workman was reinforced and embellished by his sense of spiritual freedom and knowledge symbolized by his confirmation in the church. Further, as historians of religion have argued, the act of conversion implied to members of the working classes a notion of equality and liberty from one's superiors

33 Brigden Papers, William Brigden to Fred, November 10, 1870.

34 Brigden Papers, Diary, February 16, 1861. On the notion that idea of class disappeared when it became subsumed in other social categories, see Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1840–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 167.

35 Charles Kingsley, *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper and Bros., n.d.), pp. 346, 359.

because conversion to evangelicalism validated one's individual authority to interpret the spiritual knowledge in the Bible through the sole criterion of one's personal relationship with God, unmediated by a clergyman.³⁶ For this reason evangelical sects, and especially Methodists, were often perceived by ruling elites to be radical and subversive faiths. As Brigden later told his brother, he had been examining his "conduct & character" since the age of 15, while still a youth, and yet the process of repenting his sin, earnestly seeking Salvation in Christ and willingly giving up "everything inconsistent with a Christian life", was a protracted process which lasted until he had become a fully fledged skilled workman and engaged to be married in 1868. In 1862, when he left home, Brigden began to write a religious diary in which he recorded his self-scrutiny, his backsliding, and his developing relationship with God.³⁷ On August 24, 1862, Brigden used his diary to mark his resolve: "Since the last entry in this diary a great and I hope & humbly pray a permanent change has taken place in my aims, hopes and objects. I humbly pray that now henceforth through all the r[e]st of my life I may make the glory of God and the Salvation of my soul the first and all important objects of my care and diligence everything else being made subordinate to those ends while I live." During this time his workday was interspersed with frequent periods of prayer and meditation until late into the evening, and a typical diary entry noted in detail his sins, which included sloth, losing time, having doubts, neglecting his Bible, being unkind to his mother, having worldly thoughts, and most importantly ignoring his duties to his family.³⁸

In fact, what is significant about Brigden's conversion experience is that he made this important spiritual journey without any reference to organized religion. Indeed, his conversion — what he emblematically called "courting Jesus" — occurred wholly within the context of family and personal relationships, most noteworthy those with his male friends and associates.³⁹ During the most intensive years of self-exploration between 1862 and 1868, he revealed his tempestuous feelings on only two occasions to women. To his

36 On this point, see Nancy Christie, " 'In These Times of Democratic Rage and Delusion': The Protestant Experience, 1760–1812", in G. A. Rawlyk, ed., *The Protestant Experience in Canada, 1760–1986* (Burlington, Ont.: G. Welch, 1991), pp. 9–47; Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, pp. 37–43.

37 On the equation between conversion and adulthood, and as commensurate with Victorian views of progress, see John D. Barbour, *Versions of Deconversion: Autobiography and the Loss of Faith* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), especially his discussion of J. S. Mill, pp. 47, 56; Virginia Lieson Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation: Stories of Women's Conversions, 1800 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 16; Gail Malmgreen, "Domestic Discords: Women and Family in East Cheshire Methodism, 1750–1830", in Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper, and Raphael Samuel, eds., *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), pp. 60–64.

38 Brigden Papers, Diary, August 24 and November 27, 1862; January 9 and 11, 1863.

39 Contrast this with the conversion of a seventeenth-century worker who took his lead from learned men and their sermons. See Server, *Wallington's World*, pp. 16, 25.

mother in 1864, he described in spectacular detail the great wall of blank despair which had first impelled him towards the total evisceration of self — “he can do nothing God does all” — which marked the transition towards his new sense of “true manliness” defined by gentleness, modesty, humility, and an endless sense of duty to others that defined the ideal family patriarch.⁴⁰ Once he wrote a brief notation regarding this fundamental transition to Fanny, his fiancée.⁴¹ All the encouragement and advice on the actual mechanics of how to proceed with his journey of personal salvation was elicited from relationships with male friends. In 1863 Brigden purposely joined the YMCA, despite his deafness and the cost of subscription at 5/ per annum, to “find among the young men here some companion who may accompany me to the Lord’s supper”. It appears that this conscious pursuit of exclusively male “Christian friendship” was intended to harden his resolve for sexual purity, for Brigden explicitly mentions that this brotherly communion allowed him to avoid the “temptations of the streets” to which he had been so prone.⁴² Tremendous emotional bonds were created as Brigden undertook a lengthy correspondence with several friends who shared intimate details of their own conversion experiences. Arthur Hollick, for example, a friend who had latterly become an Irvingite, explained to the emotionally fragile Brigden how he himself had suffered for three years but had sought “the spiritual life” through a system of fasting and reading religious works, but warned that “Jesus arose but slowly in my heart”.⁴³ Another friend, a Mr. Pearl, advised Brigden not to be too concerned about attending the sacrament on Sunday, but enjoined him to focus rather on his personal relationship with God and to contemplate through vigils of prayer at home alone this highly individualistic experience of repenting one’s sins. In a similar vein, his friend John Anderson admonished Brigden to set aside the “speculative theory’s [sic] about the Coming of Christ” with which his clergyman was filling him and to concentrate rather upon the progress of his “inner soul of the holy spirit convincing you of Sin ... what you want is to come by *simple Faith* to him who *loved you*.”⁴⁴ For his mentor, promoter of working-class improvement William Sleight, the Bible and not the sermons of learned clergymen formed the centrepiece of one’s religious experience, for the Bible, and it alone, could bring about that conversion which would make Brigden “more than conquer through the strength and power of Him who loved us”.⁴⁵

40 Brigden Papers, Brigden to mother, October 26, 1864; Brigden to brother, March 15, 1867.

41 Brigden Papers, Fanny to Fred, July 9, 1867.

42 Brigden Papers, Diary, June 24 and 30, 1863.

43 Brigden Papers, Arthur Hollick to Brigden, October 19, 1863.

44 Brigden Papers, August 15, 1862. In this respect, Brigden and his male friends participated in an older plebeian religious strand of largely disregarding abstract clerical thinking about the millennium in favour of a more practical type of piety appropriate for everyday living. For an American manifestation of this, see Erik R. Seeman, *Pious Persuasions: Laity and Clergy in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 32–43.

45 Brigden Papers, October 2, 1862.

This religious transition to adulthood which conversion entailed was for Brigden a profoundly homosocial process, and it served several important social functions: it not only preserved youthful sexual purity, thereby setting evangelical young working men apart from the more licentious elements of working-class London; it also contributed to emotional maturity, which not only helped ease the tensions of the complexities of youth but was a crucial constituent of companionate marriage and Christian fatherhood. This spiritual system of bonding among other workers helped reinforce the view that class consciousness could be solidified outside the realm of the political through a shared spiritual experience. Most importantly of all, male bonding underscored the fact that conversion symbolized a transition to manhood, which implied achieving a higher social status in the work world through the achievement of skill, the acquiring of spiritual maturity, which together combined to confer on working-class males the status of family patriarch. There was no better illustration of the crucial role that religion played in defining a working-class model of “domesticated masculinity”⁴⁶ than Frederick Brigden’s overt appropriation of his father’s patriarchal role as the symbolic head of the family following his conversion. It is clear that, in Brigden’s mind, there was a direct relationship between the authority of the Heavenly father and those on earth, for he wrote to his mother that “practically & continually God answers prayers as truly as a tender father answers the requests of His children for things he needs”.⁴⁷ His own new relationship to God the Father gave Brigden the confidence to instruct his own mother paternalistically on how to manage her delinquent husband and save the family from further disaster by placing Fred as the economic and spiritual head of the family.

In a similar vein, Brigden used his father’s lack of religion and his own newly acquired status as a reborn evangelical as a means to undermine further the power and status of his father within the household. In a pointed letter written in 1863, Brigden boldly stated, “I need not ask you if you believe in religion but can’t see how he can believe that there is a just and Holy God a future judgment in which every man will be judged ... and [those who] live as you do ... can hope for nothing but eternal misery.” It was not that Brigden feared for his father’s own immortal soul, but it was Brigden senior’s lack of faith that made him a bad father — for it had led to the corruption of his other brothers, who appeared to evince “an enmity against God”. Even more significantly, from Frederick Brigden’s perspective, religion formed the centrepiece of working-class masculinity because it established concepts of duty both to a higher power and to one’s dependents upon which the breadwinner ideal was itself founded. This equation between sin and providence and between morality and economy lay at the basis of Brigden’s personal view of

46 I have borrowed this phrase from Lynn Abrams, “ ‘There was nobody like my Daddy’ ”, p. 226.

47 Brigden Papers, Fred to mother, October 1863.

48 Brigden Papers, Fred to mother, October 26, 1864; Fred to father, February 1863; Fred to mother, October 1863.

political economy, which was implied when he accused his father of “dispensing and rejecting degrading your manhood, ruining your soul”.⁴⁸ Indeed, not only had Brigden’s father ruined his soul, but he had also brought financial ruin upon the entire household and thereby destabilized the very concept of patriarchal manhood to which his son subscribed. In the final analysis, Brigden’s religious conversion marked a transition away from a consciousness of class defined by political action to a reinvention of work and his identity as a working-class male as an essentially private function connected to the reified space of home. Hence, Brigden could write on his twenty-first birthday that “I have now fully entered on the stage in the character of man to fight the battle of life with a determination to gain the victory under the will of Providence to gain for myself a comfortable independence, skill in my art, a well educated mind, and a character unimpeachable for truth, honesty and industry” because he was “essentially a family man and my *greatest* pleasures are found in the family circle”.⁴⁹

Some working-class Londoners embraced the ideal of household religion and made it the privileged site of religious expression because in the home one was in full control and authority, and to them this was the essence of religious and secular liberty. It is not surprising, therefore, that Brigden’s fondest memories were of spending his Sundays crowded in a “comfortable, capacious family one [chair]” listening fondly to his mother reading Bible stories,⁵⁰ or that Fanny, who was herself converted by a former master,⁵¹ drew constant analogies between the comforts of home and the contemplation of God. As she said, “[I]t is so comforting to feel we can look up to him as to a Father.”⁵² Indeed, Fanny and Fred considered a shared religious ethos as the foundation of a well-constituted marriage, and their conception of the marriage contract was explicitly founded upon rules of conduct guided by Christian ethics.⁵³ Their mutual evangelicalism above all formed the basis of their attraction⁵⁴ and became the central idiom by which they articulated their growing emotional intimacy. Their ideal of companionate marriage was directly linked to their religious faith, for it was this model of personal love for Christ and for God, brought about through their conversion to a Christian

49 Brigden Papers, Diary, April 22, 1862. Interestingly, this is the very year he assiduously sought to convert.

50 Brigden Papers, Fred to Fanny, July 9, 1868.

51 Brigden Papers, Fanny to Fred, June 25, 1867.

52 Brigden Papers, Fanny to Fred, June 4, 1867. On November 7, 1867, Fred then sent Fanny the treatise *A Father’s Hands*, which implies that they shared a similar patriarchal view of religious teaching, despite the fact that they also both refer frequently to the example of their mothers.

53 Brigden Papers, Francis to Mr. Brigden, May 6, 1867. Only after becoming betrothed did Fanny and Fred address one another by their Christian names.

54 Brigden Papers, Fred to Fanny, April 30, 1867 (Fred noted that Fanny’s role in converting his Aunt Fielder was what had stimulated his interest in her); Fanny to Mr. Brigden, May 3, 1867 (Fanny wrote that “to meet with one whose sympathies on religious subjects correspond with my own is a great pleasure to me”).

way of life, that underpinned their vision of conjugal relations. Fred believed, for example, that in marriage they would “be drawn together in their efforts to become like the master and in their service to God”, while Fanny in turn expressed the hope that in their marriage “we may be [a] help to each other in the ways of Holiness”.⁵⁵

Thus, as Fred and Fanny negotiated the terms of their marital contract through a lengthy courtship of weekly correspondence, they used their faith as a framework for an ideal of marriage based upon mutual respect, emotional support, and freedom from abuse. Each, however, appropriated their faith for different ends, for they espoused subtly different conceptions of domesticity. Fanny, well aware that Victorian marriage could place women in perilous situations, pictured Sunday as their best day together, when, at the end of a week, conflict could be resolved “when we can join together in the service of God”.⁵⁶ Even though both spouses embraced the view that their love of God would function to create the basis of “a closer tie” in their marital union, there were explicit gender differences. For Fanny, religion provided a sense of authority which she believed underpinned her right to independent expression within the marriage and to certain expectations regarding her husband’s conduct towards her. While Fanny might appear to have interpreted marital unity in similar terms, seeing in the act of mutual prayer and the search for spiritual perfection a means to reach marital peace, she was not unaware of the potential for disagreement and dispute, especially knowing the history of Fred’s father’s failure to support his family and his pattern of abuse. To remind Fred of his promise to model his conduct as a husband upon the ethics of religion, Fanny sent him *Home Life in the Light of Its Divine Idea* on his birthday, in which “the relations of home life husband, wife, father, child &c are patterns of heaven, that they were created in the very beginning as representation of the relations which God holds with angels & with men”.⁵⁷ Religion from Fanny’s perspective was a way to redefine the contours of working-class marriage; while continuing to recognize the right of husbands to admonish their wives, it firmly reprobrated discipline through physical violence.⁵⁸

For his part, Fred subscribed like Fanny to the idea that their love for God always superseded their own mortal love, and his discourse regarding the connection of his affections to those of a higher power served to suppress the sexual passions. As Fanny exhorted her intended following her visit to London, he must not let their affection “get in the way of higher affections & duties to God”. Prayer and piety were means to manage the problem of pre-marital sex, and thereby they sublimated Fred’s thoughts of “the slow fire of

55 Brigden Papers, Fanny to Fred, March 15, 1868; Fred to Fanny, April 8, 1868.

56 Brigden Papers, Fanny to Fred, May 11, 1868.

57 Brigden Papers, Fred to Fanny, April 21 and 28, 1868; Fanny to Fred, May 21, 1867.

58 See Ross, “Fierce Questions and Taunts”, p. 223.

59 Brigden Papers, Fred to Fanny, November 29, 1867; Fanny to Fred, December 3, 1867.

restless feelings which sometimes visits me and is not easy to put out”⁵⁹ into a purer form of spiritual love. On a broader level, it is apparent from their correspondence that Fred had a very different view of the distribution of power within the family. Where Fanny saw an evangelical system of beliefs as underpinning a measure of equality for herself, Fred saw in religiosity a recipe for female passivity, in which the stimulus to sympathy made a wife support and console her husband. Certainly, Brigden saw no intellectual companionship between himself and Fanny, despite her very sophisticated appreciation of modern theological debates. To curb her growing confidence in their relationship, Brigden outlined her role as he saw it within the marriage: “I know that you will be to me all that I wish and look for in the way of society. I should not look to you for those encounters of mind & thought which have made the interest of my friendship with Beale. I look for sympathy & kindness which coming from affection makes home pleasant & that I know I have in you.”⁶⁰

It was therefore with considerable consternation that, just prior to their marriage, Brigden discovered that Fanny “does not think strong self will is wrong” and confessed to his diary that “such a thing might render our future union unhappy”, but that with God’s help his assertiveness as family patriarch could be reaffirmed.⁶¹ His fear that alliances among his female kin might thwart his right to decision-making within the family compelled him to change his mind about the troubling issue of having his aunt live with them. Earlier, Brigden had adamantly argued for her presence, for she could not only contribute rent but she could tutor Fanny in the skills of domestic economy. Unsurprisingly, Fanny objected to his notions of having extended family living under their roof. Fred eventually conformed to Fanny’s view because in this instance the concept of privacy dovetailed with his own desires to dominate his wife.⁶² With this end in view, Brigden, just prior to their marriage, inundated Fanny with various prescriptive tracts on the correct ordering of gender relations in the household, in part as a counterweight to the tracts on the gentrified conceptions of domesticity that Fanny had received from her mistress. To restrain the opinions from two classes, he bombarded her with such weighty tomes as Horace Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture, Home Education*, with its opening quotation from John Locke; *Domestic Portraiture*, interestingly on the family life of an eminent clergyman; and the bestseller, then in its seventh printing, by John Angel James, *Female Piety or the Young Woman’s Friend and Guide through Life and Immortality*.⁶³ Where he alone could not persuade, the expert advice of various male evangelical luminaries

60 Brigden Papers, Fred to Fanny, May 21, 1868. Beale later emigrated to Canada and induced Brigden to follow him to Toronto to work for him.

61 Brigden Papers, Diary, July 26, 1868.

62 For the debate on this provocative issue, see Fanny to Fred, June 10, 1867; Fanny to Fred, April 1868; Fred to Fanny, September 1, 1868.

63 Brigden Papers, Fred to Fanny, August 4, 1868.

would prevail. While Brigden himself often disregarded the preachings of clergyman, the broad terrain of the discursive could be effectively deployed to scotch gender disorder at home. The same notion of religious liberty bequeathed by evangelicalism, which implied equality of authority before God, was an idea that assumed gender parity in affirming the right to practise their religion without reference to middle-class criteria. However, when this egalitarian notion was applied by working-class men like Brigden to the family, it became a source of gender division and a lever for elevating patriarchal authority and upholding hierarchies of dominance and subordination. Thus religious discourse within the working class itself could serve both to uphold convention and to articulate a set of opposing values.

In the now classic work *Family Fortunes*, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have shown how religion, and more particularly evangelicalism, was used, at the level of rhetoric and prescriptive literature, to justify an ethic of domesticity and to rationalize a system of gender relations flowing fundamentally from capitalist relations, which tended increasingly to separate the spheres of workplace and home.⁶⁴ Because so much of their work hinges upon prescriptive literature from such a wide range of sources, they can only trace in a general and vague manner the interpenetration between evangelicalism and domestic rhetoric. Simply because the language both of evangelicalism and of domesticity was in abundance in the period they describe does little to connect it concretely to particular class affinities. As Dror Wahrman has rightly pointed out, evangelical values were also espoused by the gentry (and, indeed, Davidoff and Hall study almost exclusively upper bourgeois and gentry social networks) and, as we have seen, emerged as strongly out of particularly working-class sensibilities.⁶⁵ Moreover, they do little to delve beyond simple descriptions of idealizations of Christian domesticity to elucidate the particular ways in which religion informed questions of marital love, notions of sexuality, or how the tenets of evangelicalism defined the marriage contract itself. As I have suggested above, it is not sufficient to argue merely that evangelicalism elided with notions of domesticity, or that the family was useful for fostering the growth of evangelicalism. Rather, the evangelical ethos underpinned specific modes of behaviour within both the domestic and broader social spheres, and, far from functioning as an undifferentiated template of one particular class, it

64 Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 108–112.

65 Dror Wahrman, “National Society, Communal Culture: An Argument about the Recent Historiography of Eighteenth-Century Britain”, *Social History*, vol. 17, no. 1 (January 1992), pp. 67–71. For a similar argument, see James Vernon, “Who’s Afraid of the Linguistic Turn? The Politics of Social History and its Discontents”, *Social History*, vol. 19, no. 1 (January 1994), p. 90. Although Hall has elucidated working-class domestic values, she attributes this to the trickle-down effect. See Catherine Hall, “The Tale of Samuel and Jemima: Gender and Working-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century England”, in H. J. Kaye and K. McClelland, eds., *E. P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), pp. 78–102.

was appropriated and refashioned differently by gender and by class. Hence, specifically working-class forms of religious practice, when combined with working-class views of masculinity, tended to privilege the domestic space as the primary site of Christian experience (and arguably the family and the home played a greater role in the lives of working-class men and women than for their middle-class contemporaries). More telling still, when examined from the perspective of actual lived experience of working-class families, conceptions of domesticity did not merely mimic those of bourgeois ruling elites, but flowed both from their own interpretations of religion and from their own strategies for survival. Culture and economic factors reinforced one another; cultural values did not merely emanate from capitalism.

Although Fred might idealize the conventional image of the home as a realm in which specifically feminine qualities were embellished and advanced, a vision encapsulated in one of his favourite homilies from Martin Luther (“The priest no more devout can be, The Christian housemaid with her broom, Her work pursuing faithfully”⁶⁶), his imagined concept of the gender division of labour between workplace and home implied by this ditty bore no relation to the practical aspects of their marriage. While Fred and Fanny might have aspired to such an ideal (although there is no concrete evidence that they wished to move into the middle class, given his pride in his skill as an engraver), it might have meant nothing more than to signal their commitment to a notion of improvement. Simply because Fred was, by luck and happenstance, able to achieve a modicum of wealth and a middle-class social standing later in life does not mean that we should impute to them middle-class valuations of domesticity. What can be shown is that, on the eve of their marriage, the Brigdens adamantly rejected upper bourgeois notions of domesticity, despite the efforts of Fanny’s mistress to educate her in the proper tenets of bourgeois social relations by constantly sending her presents of books such as *Concerning Domestic Life*, a portrait of the lives of noble women. Upon being informed by his fiancée of the contents of this volume, Brigden excoriated its premise of gender difference defined by male work and female leisure. Far from wishing to assimilate middle-class notions of domestic life, Brigden replied: “It is certainly a record of Noble lives, but if domestic life was of the general character of such uncommon lives, the prevailing ideas we connect with the words must be turned topsey turvey.”⁶⁷ On this score, Brigden privileged experience over language. While Brigden might aspire to marry “as free as we can” and with £100 in savings, which would enable him either to

66 Brigden Papers, Diary, September 18, 1868.

67 Brigden Papers, Fanny to Fred, January 14, 1868; Fanny to Fred, August 27, 1867; Fred to Fanny, February 28, 1868. For a fine analysis on the way in which the upper bourgeois used relations between mistresses and their servants to police class relations, see Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody’s Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995).

rent or to buy his own house, as would many skilled workmen, he likewise recognized that “even the best tradesman have [*sic*] slack days”, which would render such goals unworkable.⁶⁸ Hence Brigden recommended to Fanny several schemes by which they could improve the economic viability of their shared household, none of which involved Fanny giving up work after marriage. In fact, all of them depended upon a great deal of labour from Fanny. At first he recommended that they start a small business like his mother’s, in which Fanny’s needlework skills could be applied to making fancy goods for sale while he oversaw the stationary goods; on top of this, they could rent rooms. On another occasion he explained that his landlady, who was married to a piano-forte maker, supplemented his income with needlework and that a former landlady, the wife of a harnessmaker, began her own underclothing business on the side. Even if Brigden was lucky enough to continue in his original line of work, he believed that Fanny would always rent rooms and also considered her unpaid labour to be a crucial component of his concept of domestic economy. He even went so far as to offer to buy her a sewing machine so that she could make their children’s clothing, as his own mother had done.⁶⁹

While it is true that evangelicalism underpinned the Brigden family’s adherence to a concept of a private, domestic realm, this was not informed by a concept of separate spheres.⁷⁰ Rather, the gender inequalities which undergirded Frederick Brigden’s belief in patriarchal dominance flowed directly from his allegiance to a specific understanding of respectable working-class masculinity, and, while not wholly untethered from a concept of a provident breadwinner, his peculiar gendered concept of social status relied most heavily upon the overarching cultural firmament of his religiosity. According to Brigden’s world view, patriarchy was concomitant with godliness, and his earthly status was derived from a larger spiritual power.

That Brigden’s self-identity as a Victorian working-class man focused so exclusively upon the domestic realm had, in turn, distinct implications for the way in which he and his family practised religion. That very spiritual journey in which Brigden came to define Christ as “a real personal friend” led him to abjure those who saw religion “as a rule of morals” to be confirmed through ritual practices of church-going rather than as a mode of living, “of an inti-

68 Brigden Papers, Fred to Fanny, May 1867; Fred to Fanny, January 27 and September 1, 1868.

69 Brigden Papers, Fanny to Fred, September 1867; December 2, 1867; February 6, 1868; Fred to Fanny, January 27, February 6, and July 17, 1868. On women’s contribution to the household, see Elizabeth Roberts, “Working-Class Standards in Barrow and Lancaster”, in T. C. Smout, M. W. Flinn, Pat Thorne, and Anthony Sutcliffe, eds., *Essays on Social History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974); Wally Secombe, “Patriarchy Stabilized: The Construction of the Male Breadwinner Norm in Nineteenth-Century Britain”, *Social History*, vol. 11, no. 1 (January 1986), pp. 53–76.

70 For a critique of Davidoff and Hall’s propensity to conflate domesticity with the concept of separate spheres, see Nancy Christie, “Introduction: Family, Community and the Rise of Liberal Society”, in Nancy Christie, ed., *Households of Faith: Family, Gender, and Community in Canada, 1760–1969* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), pp. 4–5.

71 Brigden Papers, Fred to mother, October 1863; October 26, 1864.

mate connection with a person".⁷¹ Of course, personal relationships were of crucial importance to Brigden, who lived amongst strangers in the sprawling metropolis of London, but his religion served more than narrowly functional ends such as these. The very private form of Brigden's sense of his class identity, together with his commitment to evangelicalism, which extolled individual interpretations of godliness, were mutually reinforcing tendencies which led him to pursue connections with a wider "culture of Christianity"⁷² not exclusively bound up with active participation in organized religion. In this regard, Brigden was a representative working-class Protestant, for, as Susan Williams's analysis of oral history testimony in Southwark demonstrates, religion remained just as crucial a factor in the formation of self-identity among working-class men and women as it was among the middle classes, but the forms of working-class religious practice diverged signally from those ideals of church membership so forcefully espoused by clergymen obsessed with church finances and with the associational ideal that underpinned them. Where church statistics may sketch out only the broadest and roughest social and geographical patterns of church-going, they are less adequate in explaining either levels of religious belief or the complex ways in which people internalized religious tenets and used religious culture to construct other social identities.

What kind of relationship did the extended Brigden family have with religious culture? It is clear from the correspondence from Brigden's relatives that attending church was considered a "duty" to be performed on Sunday⁷³ and that, in many respects, this outward display of religious observance was an important element of their sense of respectability. Aunt Henty, for example, took a very dim view of their neighbours, who failed to attend chapel twice on Sunday, and she believed, interestingly, that the fact that the husband, a clerk, chose to smoke in the evening rather than attend service explained why his wife was "a poor manager".⁷⁴ Going to church was thus a "performance" of respectability, to use Peter Bailey's phrase, a demonstration of proper, moral comportment that served a specific function in affirming one's class and social status within the neighbourhood.⁷⁵ Despite such social factors, it appears that Brigden's family did not attend Sunday service consistently and preferred to attend other services such as weekday prayer meetings, special men's meetings, and Sunday School, perhaps because these entailed less formality or because they entailed less expense. Needless

72 This concept forms the foundation of Brown's reinterpretation of how historians must approach the issue of secularization. See Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, p. 198.

73 Brigden Papers, Fanny to Fred, May 21, 1867.

74 Brigden Papers, Aunt Henty to Brigden, March 31, 1868.

75 Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*, pp. 32–35.

76 Brigden Papers, Thomas to Fred, September 6, 1871, in which he refers to the overwhelming numbers of children attending Sunday School. On the tendency of historians of religion to ignore the role of Sunday Schools, see K. D. M. Snell, *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

to say, the preference of the Brigden family for weekday meetings and Sunday Schools⁷⁶ means that they would have not appeared in any formal church surveys, which placed an overweening emphasis upon Sunday attendance and thus would have necessarily left out great numbers of working-class parishioners. Moreover, like the people Susan Williams studied, Mrs. Brigden and her children placed greater emphasis upon special services such as those held at New Year's or on Whitsunday. Thus Brigden's mother described the family's pattern of formal religious practice: "I am now going to a prayer meeting with Aunt and [for] the boys there are special meetings all the week we all went to the watch service it was a very good one."⁷⁷

It is unclear whether the Brigdens became full church members, although it is doubtful that they did, given the poor state of their finances. We do know that Frederick Brigden was not, for he attended several different churches in London; on any given Sunday he attended either the Anglican Temple church or the chapel at St. John in the morning and the Wesleyan chapel in the evening.⁷⁸ To do so meant travelling a great distance, a factor which may explain his lack of regular attendance.⁷⁹ During the rest of the week Brigden was a lay preacher in Deptford at the mission for the deaf and dumb, which attracted both the rough and respectable working class, in part because the tradition of proper dress codes did not pertain to these services and such missions specifically appealed to men. That Brigden saw such missions as the primary site for the religious observance of a broad spectrum of the working class⁸⁰ provides an important corrective to Geoffrey Crossick's observation that South London had the lowest church attendance among the metropolitan working class. Of course, if Crossick had taken the extraordinary expansion of church missions in Deptford, rather than the growth of regular churches, as his measure of working-class religiosity (a fact that Booth had recognized when he called this working-class suburb a "Tom Tiddler's ground for missions"⁸¹), he would have reached very different conclusions. Most significantly, however, despite the Brigden family's dedication to evangelicalism — they often attended the annual meeting of the missionary society⁸² — it was not considered normative for working-class families to become members of

77 Brigden Papers, mother to Fred, n.d.; Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, pp. 87–88.

78 Brigden Papers, Diary, February 21 and April 21, 1861; Fred to Fanny, February 28, 1868. On the tendency to move fluidly between Anglicanism and Methodism, see Frances Knight, *The Nineteenth-Century Church and English Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

79 On such non-class determinants for church attendance, see Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, p. 155. Ken Inglis has pointed out that there were insufficient churches to serve London's growing population between 1861 and 1885, which would have greatly affected levels of regular church attendance. See Ken Inglis, *The Working Classes in Victorian England* (London: Routledge, 1963), p. 98. He also stresses that the need for Sunday dress would have meant that a large proportion of the working classes would not have attended services on Sunday.

80 Brigden Papers, Fred to Fanny, February 28, 1868.

81 Quoted in Jones, "Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Priorities in London", p. 171.

82 Brigden Papers, Fred to Fanny, June 13, 1867.

their church. Indeed, so unconventional were monetary offerings thought to be among working-class families, who emulated values such as thrift and providence, that, in the letter proposing marriage to Fanny, Fred was at pains to explain the fact that “it has also been my custom to devote a small proportion of my earnings towards the cause of God in the world”, stating that he considered it both “a duty and a privilege”. That it was not deemed customary to give a year’s subscription to one’s church or chapel is even more remarkable given the fact that Brigden paid his annual membership dues to institutions such as the Mechanics’ Institutes and the YMCA which fostered intellectual improvement and working-class sociability. In short, church membership for the vast majority of the working classes, especially those who were less prosperous than the Brigdens, would have been seen as a frivolous expense, and the reluctance to squander one’s hard-earned savings on associational life⁸³ may go a long way to explaining the irregular and peripatetic pattern of working-class church attendance and the preference expressed by such families for conducting religious services within the private domestic sphere.⁸⁴ Indeed, so weak was the role played by organized religion in working-class definitions of religious faith that, upon their marriage, Fanny, a dedicated Christian, expressed the view that she did not care in what church they were married.⁸⁵

In many ways, it was the shortcomings of clergymen that induced Frederick and Fanny to prefer their own vigils of prayer over the public recitations and rituals of the church. Their anti-clericalism, if it could be so described, was not grounded in a system of unbelief or even in a sense of class alienation; rather, it flowed from their own very decided views on religion and their mutual sense of religious perfectionism. Brigden’s disenchantment with various clergymen emanated from his conviction that they needed to seek greater holiness and become like Christ. As he confided to Fanny just prior to their marriage:

I have felt somewhat overcast with a sad feeling when I have met ministers who [are] amiable, respectable good men yet come short of what we desire to see and one cannot but feel that the church can never rise to its right position of respect & influence & power till the tone of the character of its ministers is raised.... I like to see a noble looking minister & have had a feeling of regret that even in appearance & mind many of the ministry seem to be mere leavings

83 On the weakness of the associational ideal for shopkeepers, see Chris Hosgood, “A ‘Brave and Darling Folk’? Shopkeepers and Trade Associational Life in Victorian and Edwardian England”, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 26, no. 2 (Winter 1992), pp. 285–308.

84 Brigden Papers, Fred to Fanny, May 3, 1867. On the importance of private prayer in working-class British families, see Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, p. 126.

85 Brigden Papers, Fanny to Fred, April 27, 1868.

86 Brigden Papers, Fred to Fanny, March 11, 1868.

of the universities & colleges instead of their best, noblest, as though the work of God was left largely to a class of men who could not succeed in any other profession & took it up as a last resort.⁸⁶

What Brigden craved, and often did not find amongst the more learned clergy, was a sense of personal connection and, like his mentor William Sleight, a minister who could interact with him “in a kind of fatherly way”. Thus, although Brigden frequently attended church, the Sunday sermons did not form the source of his religious tenets, nor did he passively imbibe the dictates of another class. Though he considered church services valuable insofar as they were “calming and strengthening”, imbued with a strong evangelical belief in the authority of the individual experience of God, Brigden believed that he himself was the progenitor of his own religious beliefs, which were then merely echoed in the clergyman’s sermons, the best being those that expressed his own convictions aloud.⁸⁷ Far from being the source of religious sustenance, the church service served only to present an atmosphere of comfort and an environment in which “to quiet the mind” and create a predisposition to inner self-reflection, which would be carried forth into the realm of private devotion, the true site of religious progress. Thus, on Christmas morning Fanny attended service but spent the rest of the day reading her Bible aloud to the local shepherd and his wife, which was in turn followed in the evening by her own private devotions. As she expressed it to her fiancé, “what a great blessing the bible is, the more one studies it, the more precious its contents become.” In fact, to an even greater degree than Brigden himself, Fanny was troubled by organized religion, for it represented to her a source of sectarian division and disputation; further, because she was compelled as a servant to follow the religion of her master’s household, which was high Anglican, it symbolized cultural oppression and the lack of religious freedom. In Fanny’s case, private prayers performed the function of a revolt against gentry values and customs, which she looked upon with abhorrence. Indeed, she saw the household in which she worked as unchristian and perceived the sharing of customs among gentry and plebeians as frivolous, their lack of serious comportment as corrosive of the evangelical ethos.⁸⁸ Just as contemporary urban clergymen constructed a trope of working-class alienation from church and chapel, the young Fanny had evolved her own version of religious and moral decline among the rural gentry.⁸⁹ Indeed, so anathema to Fanny was high church emphasis upon church doctrine that she preferred

87 Brigden Papers, William Sleight to Fred, April 1867; Fred to Fanny, August 26, 1868.

88 Brigden Papers, Fanny to Fred, July 1, 1867. On the way servants used evangelicalism as a form of social critique, see Deborah Valenze, “Pilgrims and Progress in Nineteenth-Century England”, in Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones, eds., *Culture and Ideology and Politics: Essays for Eric Hobsbawm* (London: Routledge, 1982), 115–116.

89 Brigden Papers, Fanny to Fred, July 1 and September 23, 1867; January and August 1868.

90 Brigden Papers, Fanny to Fred, June 17, 1867.

to break off intimate relations with a favoured sister who, a servant like herself, preferred to assimilate passively the high church attitudes of her master, a form of class collaboration which Fanny clearly detested.⁹⁰

Above all, Frederick and Fanny championed a view of religious liberty that privileged the idea of choice, and their decided views upon religion, rather than their indifference to the importance of faith to their society, determined the relative unimportance of organized religion in their lives. His need to fulfil his deepest religious desires prompted Brigden to visit several different churches; in short, Frederick, and more especially Fanny, felt their religious yearnings suppressed and confined by the often meagre choice of church venues, and they sought rather to canvass the evangelical marketplace through the constant purchasing and familial circulation of all manner of religious publications. Thus throughout their courtship Frederick and Fanny collected many printed sermons, tracts, and treatises on a wide range of issues, from conversion, to church government, to domesticity, about which they corresponded at length. In July 1867 Fanny told Fred how she had been spending the day reading *Sunday at Home*; in the following year they exchanged copies of Rev. Brock's sermons; and just prior to their marriage Brigden sent Fanny a copy of *Dickestruth's Family Prayers*, which he believed would form a model for their own private devotions.⁹¹ As Brigden himself maintained, with the recent availability of cheap print, which made the cornucopia of religious publications affordable for the working classes, what need had one of an educated clergy, when one could privately access the pluralistic religious culture thus offered?

There is no better method by which to elucidate the specific class affinities of Fred and Fanny Brigden's private form of religious practice than to contrast it with that of their children in Canada. Because their father had in 1887 become the owner of a large concern of skilled artisans, the younger Brigdens belonged to a very comfortable Toronto upper middle class, and their religious views mirrored this distinct change in their social status. The transition from working-class to middle-class religious expressions can be minutely charted because we have at our disposal a fulsome correspondence between their children, Bertha and Fred. Despite the fact that her own mother had been a servant, Bertha, with her new-found middle-class status, had assimilated the panoply of normative behaviour and sought through her relationship with Dorothy, her own servant, to establish clear cultural boundaries. Indeed, Bertha evinced the very type of class paternalism that her mother had sought to evade by seeking personal control of her faith through her practice of domestic piety. On the one hand, Bertha very much objectified Dorothy as the "other", as "one of the working classes", who at the

91 There is a plethora of family correspondence about religious reading material. See, for example, Brigden Papers, Diary, April 17, 1863; Fanny to Fred, July and September 16, 1867; Fred to Fanny, June 23, 1868; Fred to Aunt Henty, March 31, 1868.

92 Brigden Papers, Bertha to Fred, August 26, 1917; January 27, 1919.

same time must be tutored in attitudes of obedience and passivity. To this end, Bertha prescribed settling Dorothy into a routine of “regular church-going”,⁹² a pattern which was intended to replicate middle-class norms. Bertha explicitly regarded the church as the primary institution by which to suppress working-class aspirations and in particular to quell radicalism. On the eve of the Winnipeg General Strike, she praised both the sermon delivered by Rev. Southam at the Industrial Bureau for its ability “to quiet or harmonize public feeling” and the creation of a Christian Men’s Federation, for as she observed: “To keep well alive, it does seem as if the church must be constantly giving out to the masses in new ways though with the same fundamental truths.”⁹³ Where her parents would have perceived the primary social fault-line as that between the godly and the ungodly, their daughter conceived of the institutional church in terms of the middle-class clergy and lay leadership, whose pronouncements she unquestioningly accepted, and she believed that the clergy should educate the lower classes. In this respect, Bertha shared the view of Christian education exemplified by her cousin Beatrice Brigden, who, though more sympathetic to working-class ideals and the goals of the General Strike, nonetheless was committed to educating women about middle-class notions of marriage and sexual conduct in her social purity lectures.⁹⁴ Throughout her correspondence with her brother Fred, Bertha constantly commented about her connections with the church elites, exclaiming about the fact that she sat in the Southam pew at Trinity Church, Winnipeg, and recounting her attendance at a theosophy meeting where she encountered “attractive ideas” concerning the afterlife with the notable comment that it was attended mostly by “a distinctly superior class of people”.⁹⁵ In a manner that would have been anathema to both her parents, she directly imbibed the thoughts and reasoning of clergymen whom she clearly saw as authoritative experts, constantly directly quoting from their sermons in her letters. At St. Clement’s Anglican Church in Toronto, Bertha totally absorbed the conventional views of social Christianity, stating “that the cry of democracy was in vain unless it be a redeemed democracy” and that social reform must be an outgrowth “of *individual* reformation in the everyday *virtues*”.⁹⁶

In direct contrast to her father, Bertha firmly adhered to the primacy of

93 Brigden Papers, Bertha to Fred, May 13, 1919; undated letter.

94 On Beatrice Brigden’s social purity lectures, see Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, “A Full-Orbed Christianity”: *The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900–1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), chap. 2.

95 Brigden Papers, Bertha to Fred, October 14, 1917; February 4, 1919. Bertha had attended spiritual and psychic meetings which she deemed “all very natural” but which some people may have deemed a species of irreligion. On the attractions of spiritualism in World War I, see J. M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). On this view of spiritualism, see Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

96 Brigden Papers, Bertha to Fred, September 24 and 30, 1917; October 14, 1917.

external measures of religiosity, namely through the causative connection between regular church-going and the development of moral character, despite her own allegiance to evangelicalism. There was no greater measure of the cultural distance between her father's evangelical faith, founded upon a mystical reading of Scripture, than Bertha's declamations regarding biblical criticism: "Of course, no one now believes in the literal translation of the Bible ... we can't understand Revelations."⁹⁷ While it might be argued that her views of theology may merely have reflected a more modern outlook and had no particular class bias, this is undermined by her castigation of the tawdriness of the revivalist campaigns of Billy Sunday, whose apparent ability to convert she denigrated as merely a psychological technique of the power of persuasion.⁹⁸ So much had the second generation of Brigdens imbibed the middle-class convention that the communal performance of church-going was the yardstick of religious faith that Bertha commented with disdain, after reading George Gissing's *The Private Prayers of Henry Ryecroft*, that his "strongly individualistic" piety exhibited "a lack of a strong religious faith". One can only imagine her shock and outrage when, one week later, Bertha perused her father's diary and discovered "how *individualistic* it all is";⁹⁹ according to her commitment to an associational ideal of religion, her father was not a practising Christian. In one generation, the Brigden family had internalized the prevailing middle-class notion of working-class irreligi-

97 Brigden Papers, Bertha to Fred, January 27, 1919.

98 Brigden Papers, Bertha to Fred, March 31, 1919.

99 Brigden Papers, Bertha to Fred, September 2 and 10, 1917.

gion as it related to the constructed crisis of declining church attendance. This very perspective eviscerated domestic religion from the cultural terrain of Christianity, and this orthodoxy, itself the creation of a specific class perspective, has continued to inform historical demography.