Tapes and Tables
Mixed Methods Research on Family Religion

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Summary
The authors show how qualitative and quantitative methods can be combined in a ‘mixed methods’ research model to provide a multifaceted view of family religion and rituals. Results from a Swiss research project on bedtime rituals are reported and methodological issues connected with this approach are discussed. In this project case studies, qualitative content analysis and a family survey (N=1344) were combined to explore the ‘patterned creativity’ of today’s families in their ritual and religious practices. Qualitative methods elucidate the families’ unique capacity to shape their ritual and religious microcosms. Families vary in the selection, combination and staging of the ritual elements they incorporate in their evening rituals with children. Quantitative methods help to identify motives and types of evening rituals and to position these types in a societal context. Together the complementary approaches also broaden the scope of the study of family prayers.

Keywords
methodology, ritual, family, religion, prayer

1 Introduction
Rituals are meaningful elements of families’ life worlds. They regulate relationships in and beyond the family, stimulate identity formation, create meaning in the midst of daily routines, and promote healthy functioning of parents and children, as empirical research has amply demonstrated (cf. Fiese, Tomcho & Douglas 2002). They are also important for the practice of religion in families and for the transmission of religion from one generation to the next (Visscher & Stern 1990, Domsgen 2004). But we know less about the specific religious relevance of family rituals. What, in particular, are the forms and functions of
family rituals in societies characterised by increasing pluralism and individualisation of religious beliefs and practices? Do families creatively develop their own, individualised patchwork of religion (Ebertz 1988) or are socially patterned forms of religion, influenced by established religious institutions, still prevalent?

Family rituals were explored in a Swiss research project that combined qualitative and quantitative approaches. Bedtime rituals in families with small children were considered especially intriguing from the angle of our research questions. Among the three paradigmatic rituals explored in the project, bedtime rituals appeared to be the area in which families are most free to create their own religious and ritual patterns. But do they in fact devise idiosyncratic ritual and religious practices? In presenting some results of this research, we discuss a methodological problem as well: what are the pros and cons of a mixed model approach in empirical theology? Could a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches be especially helpful for the analysis of contemporary family rituals and religion?

2 From methodological wars to new frontiers

First we look at the methodological problems. In the 1960s and 1970s the ‘qualitative turn’ was proclaimed as a “far-reaching change of social sciences” (Mayring 2002, 9). Qualitative, constructivist and phenomenological methods were advocated as alternatives to the established paradigm of quantitative research, which was discredited as positivist and empiricist. Qualitative research in its turn came under fire. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998, 3f.) even speak of wars between the ‘QUANs’ and the ‘QUALs’, which became increasingly unproductive in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

These heated debates have subsided by now. The development of qualitative methods stimulated methodological discussion in the human sciences and had lasting effects on research methodology (Mayring 2001). Today standard textbooks on research methodology include sections on qualitative methods (e.g. German, Bortz & Döring 1995, 271-325). Proponents of qualitative research, on the other hand, are open to quantitative research strategies and methods.