AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE:
THE THEOLOGY OF THE FAMILY
IN THE AMERICAN QUIVERFULL MOVEMENT

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AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE: THE THEOLOGY OF THE FAMILY
IN THE AMERICAN QUIVERFULL MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE: THE THEOLOGY OF THE FAMILY IN THE AMERICAN QUIVERFULL MOVEMENT

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Broadly speaking, this dissertation is a work of theological reflection within a specific context, bringing together history, ethnography, and theology to examine one form of evangelical lived religion in contemporary America. The particular situation I am exploring is the so-called “Quiverfull movement.” The Quiverfull movement is a growing subculture of American evangelicalism that has emerged over the past forty years within the networks of the Christian homeschooling movement. Quiverfull families have a very particular lived religion. They have an unlimited number of children (pronatalism), practice homeschooling exclusively, and advocate for “biblical patriarchy,” with very prescribed sex roles for men and women. Ultimately, they view their way of life as the most faithful embodiment of biblical teaching on the family, as well as the primary way that Christians will win the culture war in America over the next few hundred years.

This dissertation advances one primary thesis: Despite the apparent strangeness of their lived religion, the Quiverfull movement in America is both thoroughly evangelical and thoroughly American. Rather than offer a radical, counter-cultural vision for the
Christian family, the Quiverfull movement presents a slightly modified version of something quite commonplace: a privatized, isolated nuclear family struggling (and often failing) to maintain their bonds to the broader community, the church, and other systems of support. As such, the Quiverfull movement serves as an illuminating case study of the weaknesses and blind spots of evangelical and American cultural conceptions of the family. Lacking a broader social vision or any sense of the church as an alternative society, Quiverfull families simply cannot be the radical agents for change that they desire. Instead, they re-inscribe the norms of American individualism and privatization but with a more thoroughly religious sheen. In the end, the problem is not that the Quiverfull movement is too radical but that it is not radical enough.
Dedicated to Ronnie

whose love “always protects, always trusts,
always hopes, always perseveres”

and whose fierce devotion and humble sacrifice

made this possible.
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As with any book, this project would not exist without the influence and assistance of many others. I must begin by offering my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Vincent Miller, for his patient and careful guidance. He convinced me from early on that the Quiverfull movement was a topic ripe for theological reflection and that I was the right one to do it. He made this project more compelling by insisting that I consider Quiverfull in relationship to broader evangelicalism in America. I am a better scholar and writer because of his mentorship. Thank you seems woefully insufficient.

I also want to thank my committee members: Drs. Jana Bennett, Sandra Yocum, Bill Trollinger, and Mary McClintock Fulkerson. I was blessed to have four faculty readers who contributed much by way of advice, constructive criticism, and guidance throughout the research and writing process. Jana Bennett has been an important friend and ally from my first visit to UD’s campus. I first encountered Quiverfull while serving as her graduate assistant and she has played a critical role in my research ever since. Sandra Yocum had a crucial hand in steering me toward deeper, more complex analysis of Quiverfull. I am grateful that she helped persuade me that ethnographic research was the way to go, even if it required significantly more work on my part. Bill Trollinger has supported and cheered on this project from the beginning and offered me assistance in numerous ways. Through his advocacy, I was able to present some of my work at the Conference on Faith and History in 2014. I am especially grateful to him for treating me
like a colleague from early on. Mary McClintock Fulkerson graciously served as an outside reader on this project. I met Dr. Fulkerson at an Ecclesiological Investigations conference in 2012. A brief conversation with her helped to convince me that Quiverfull was a subject in need of exploration. From the start, she has been a generous and kind interlocutor, always pushing me to consider carefully my subject position as a theologian and researcher.

I must also thank a number of people beyond my committee whose wise counsel and professional advice were vital to the dissertation’s completion. Dr. Sue Trollinger oversaw my first summer research fellowship and has been a trusted friend and confidant since that time. Dr. Heather MacLachlan has been an unofficial advisor on the ethnography portion of this project—a selfless act for which this theologian is very grateful. She allowed me to sit in on her classes and pepper her with questions all along the way. Sr. Laura Leming was gracious enough to help me think through the anatomy of social movements in relation to Quiverfull, offering multiple important resources. Dr. James Bielo at Miami University, Oxford, was also kind enough to offer his counsel multiple times through Skype and email. I find his work on American evangelicals compelling and inspiring. I am grateful he took the time to share some of his wisdom with me. And Dr. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth graciously agreed to read some of my work before the final product was put together. Although we only met once, she has been a caring and generous correspondent whose interest and support of my work means a great deal.

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Doctoral study is an often-grueling experience, but my time at UD was made enjoyable through the friendship of my colleagues. I am grateful for all of my co-laborers in the graduate assistant “basement” but a few bear mentioning by name. Thank you to Katherine Schmidt, Scott McDaniel, Herbie Miller, Jason Hentschel, and Adam Sheridan for their friendship and critical conversations about my research. I am better and my work is better for their questions and insights.

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gifts and then apprenticed me in the work of research, writing, and scholarly presentations. I would never have gotten to this point without his determined and warmhearted mentorship. Dr. Ergun Caner is another professor who recognized my gifts and spurred me on in the pursuit of theology. I am also grateful for his willingness to give writing opportunities to a young scholar. Dr. Fred Smith, who I met as an undergraduate, has been a constant source of encouragement throughout my graduate and doctoral studies. I am grateful for his collegiality and prayer. Dr. David Garland was willing to give a precocious 20 year-old a full scholarship to George W. Truett Theological Seminary. I am glad he took a chance on me and I am thankful for his moral support throughout my time in graduate school. The same is true of Dr. Todd Still, for whom I was privileged to work as a graduate assistant. And I want to thank Dr. Roger Olson for believing in my gifts and offering periodic counsel throughout my studies.

There are no adequate words to thank my longsuffering friends, Gabby, Regina, Melissa, and Kristi, who have supported and encouraged me every step of the way. They believed in me even when I didn’t believe in me and faithfully lifted me up in prayer. I am forever grateful for their friendship.

Of course, this project wouldn’t exist without the generous assistance of my informants who gave their time and energy to share their hearts and homes with a veritable stranger. I cannot thank them enough for their transparency with me as a researcher and charity for me as a human being. Whatever differences we have in theology and practice, I find their genuine love for God and their families inspiring. I am blessed to have known them.
Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I thank my family. My grandfather, Hugh Hunter, did not live to see this day, but I owe my love of hard questions and investigation to him. My mom, Wendy Hunter, has been my lifelong champion. She has offered assistance to me in innumerable ways throughout my education and she is the best “Mimi” our kids could ask for. I (we) would not have made it this far without her. Even though they aren’t aware of it, my children, William, Emmelia, and Althea, played a crucial, albeit indirect, role in this project. I am continuously humbled by their love and devotion and grateful for the opportunity to be their mom. Their nightly prayers for “mommy’s dissertation” are gifts I will treasure in my heart forever.

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- Memorial of St. Teresa of Avila, 2015
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INTRODUCTION

When I tell people that I am writing about the Quiverfull movement, most respond with something like, “Oh the Duggars! Like 19 Kids and Counting! Right?” The answer to that question is trickier than it seems. The Duggars do not call themselves “Quiverfull” and yet there is a sense in which they are, for better or worse, the public face of the Quiverfull way of life in America. Millions of Americans have watched their TLC Network reality show over the past six years and 14 seasons. But, it is precisely because of their fame that the Duggars are not really representative of Quiverfull families as whole. I have heard more than one mother call the Duggars “Quiverful royalty.” Their life may be exemplary in the sense that many families admire them and seek to learn from them, but their life is not exemplary in the sense of representing to outsiders what Quiverfull families “are really like.” As a “royal family” with a reality show, the Duggars are as representative of Quiverfull families as The Real Housewives of New Jersey are representative of housewives. There are similarities, of course, but they only go so far.

So, what is Quiverfull exactly? And why am I writing about them? And what could they possibly have to say to students of American religion? This introductory chapter will seek to answer these questions, beginning with the why and then the what. First, I explain how I came to study the Quiverfull movement and how I understand my subject position as a researcher and theologian. Then, I introduce the Quiverfull
movement in a limited way, suggesting it is best understood as a three-part discourse of homeschooling, pronatalism, and gender hierarchy. Also, I offer a short explanation of Quiverfull’s relationship to American evangelicalism as a whole. After that, I introduce ethnography as a research method for the study of lived religion and describe the scope and limits of my own ethnographic research in this project. Next, I explain how ethnography has been used in theological studies in the past and the way I understand these two disciplines interacting in my study. Finally, I will explain this project’s central thesis and describe in brief how each subsequent chapter contributes to that thesis. By the end of this chapter, the reader should understand who I am as a scholar, what Quiverfull is, how I have chosen to study it, and what I intend to say in each of the chapters that follow.

I. All Scholarship is Autobiographical

One of my professors likes to say, “All scholarship is autobiographical,” and this is no less true for me. I came across the Quiverfull movement while doing research for a professor in the early days of my doctoral studies. Their particular instantiation of the family caught my attention for a number of reasons. First, as a person shaped by American evangelical culture, I was struck by the seriousness with which Quiverfull women take their commitment to the stay-at-home mother ideal. This is, of course, a common theme in evangelical culture: Motherhood is a woman’s highest calling and women are enjoined to forgo careers in order to devote everything to it. But it seemed to me that Quiverfull mothers devoted themselves to this ideal with unparalleled zeal. These women not only stay at home with their children full time, but also had a lot of them—and then homeschooled all of them. This is not to mention the men, who sign on to
support a stay-at-home, homeschooling mother and a large number of children on a single income. It seemed to me that the Quiverfull movement was an embodiment of all of the evangelical ideals about the family taken to their most logical and enthusiastic conclusion.

Second, as a scholar interested in studying evangelical lived religion, I was eager to know what Quiverfull families looked like on the ground. It is one thing to write about the joys of homeschooling, receiving every child as a gift, and the eschatological purpose of the family, but it is quite another to live those ideals, day in and day out, within the confines of the private family home. What what it like to live Quiverfull in real life? Moreover, I surmised that there is likely quite a bit of difference between the way spokespersons of the movement describe their work and the way Quiverfull mothers experience their work in real life. For instance, what would average Quiverfull mothers have to say about Doug Phillips’ sermonizing about the “glories of motherhood”? And how would they respond to Nancy Campbell’s insistence that the home is their “battle station” in the culture wars? I knew from my reading in cultural studies that the appearance of widespread cultural agreement is often just that—an appearance. I wondered what Quiverfull culture look like when its families were examined more closely.

Third, I was intrigued by the number of women who, when telling the story of their “conversion” to the Quiverfull way of life, spoke of their own mind changing first and then that of their husbands. That is to say, from what little I had read, it was by and large the women who led the way into Quiverfull—a counter-intuitive trend for such a stridently patriarchal movement. My curiosity way piqued: Is this patriarchal movement
really a mother-led, mother-powered phenomenon? If so, what does that say about their patriarchal ideology? And, going further, why exactly would women sign on to such a grueling embodiment of Christian motherhood and family in the first place? As a scholar, I have enough respect for the intelligence and agency of women, even within patriarchal contexts, to reject simplistic notions that Quiverfull mothers are simply “brainwashed” or “just don’t know any better.” No, these are intelligent, thoughtful women who have knowingly signed on to a vigorous instantiation of motherhood. I wanted to know if women really were leading the way and, if so, why they were doing so.

The final reason for my interest in Quiverfull is that when I encountered the movement, I was a theologian-in-training who was also undergoing the daily (and nightly) demands of motherhood. My oldest child was born four months before my studies began, my second the following year, and a third immediately after I passed my qualifying exams. Thus, I experienced the rigors of doctoral study simultaneously with the arduous work of pregnancy, birth, nursing, and childcare. My vocation to both theological studies and motherhood gave me a vested interest in Christian constructions of motherhood, theological visions of childhood, and theologies of the family in general. In addition, my background made me sensitive to the way these theological constructions are produced and debated within evangelical Christianity. The Quiverfull movement provided a fascinating location within which to consider these subjects.

So, I began researching the lived experience of Quiverfull mothers in more depth, starting with Kathryn Joyce’s important book, Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement (Beacon Press, 2009). What stood out to me from Joyce’s work was that Quiverfull mothers claimed that the work they performed as wives, mothers, and home
educators was not only their highest calling as women, but also the way by which they fulfill their Christian mission in the world. This reinforced my instinct that these women and their mothering work should be taken seriously as a form of evangelical lived religion in America. Quiverfull women are seeking to be a witness to the truth of the gospel and a transformative force for change in American society. They are just doing it in a way that most scholars do not recognize: by submitting to their husbands, having babies, and homeschooling them.

My early research revealed a scarcity of academic work on the Quiverfull movement as an evangelical phenomenon and nothing yet written on Quiverfull mothers in particular. In addition, the lived religion of the Quiverfull movement seemed like a project well suited for the use of ethnographic methods (more about that below), something in which I had developed an interest since reading Mary McClintock Fulkerson’s book, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford, 2010). And so, with the support of professors and colleagues, my foray into the Quiverfull movement began.

This personal narrative is meant not only to tell the reader how this dissertation began, but also to establish from the start that I do not pretend to approach the topic of the Quiverfull movement from a place of detached objectivity. Indeed, I find that stance impossible. First, I am a mother of three who has plenty of experience with the demands of pregnancy, nursing, and childrearing—all of which were at their most intense while I was completing my doctoral studies. My thoughts on marriage, children, and family were inevitably formed in the crucible of that experience. I will not pretend to have an unbiased point of view on motherhood and childrearing.
Second, I am a Christian theologian with an approach to theology formed within the American evangelical milieu. Although I no longer fit comfortably within the right-leaning evangelicalism of the U.S., for better or worse, evangelicals remain my primary theological interlocutors. Thus, my research has been conducted with certain evangelical sensibilities, including a concern for the use and interpretation of Scripture and an interest in the experiential aspects of women’s lived religion. While some may see my roots in American evangelicalism as a drawback, I found that my evangelical background served me well as I sought to listen closely to Quiverfull families and understand their way of life in a nuanced and sympathetic way.

Third, despite my background in American evangelicalism, I have spent the past few years working out a place for myself within the Anglican tradition of the U.S. My move into a sacramental, liturgical, episcopal, and more tradition oriented ecclesial context has undoubtedly affected the way I evaluate Quiverfull theologically and biblically. Arguably the most important influence on my work has been a new appreciation for the doctrine of the incarnation. Because of the scandal of the incarnation, I am compelled to assert that there is truth and goodness to be found even in ideologically problematic locations. It is precisely in the concrete stuff of daily life, with all of its tensions and difficulties that I expect the transcendent to be manifested. Moreover, my theology of grace leads me to pay attention to the forms of life that Christians find compelling and through which they sincerely seek to follow Christ. I believe there is grace to be found in these locations, despite appearances to the contrary. To affirm that the Quiverfull way of life is graced, however, requires the simultaneous affirmation that it is no doubt imperfectly graced—perhaps acutely so. Thus, I have no obligation to
accept their account of their work at face value, nor will I do so. Still, I contend that Quiverfull families, in all of their imperfect complexity, can provide a site for fruitful theological reflection on the Christian family today.

Fourth, I am an Anglican theologian with deep convictions about the essentially egalitarian nature of the Christian vision for male-female relationships. Due to these convictions, I am troubled by the patriarchy of Quiverfull discourse and its implications for women and their children. Although my critique of Quiverfull is broader than the matter of gender roles, I cannot deny that my egalitarian sensibilities influence my perspective on the movement as a whole. I will make some claims about the surprising way women’s agency works within the lived religion of Quiverfull families, but I want to be clear from the start that I have no desire to “baptize” the Quiverfull family discourse and declare Quiverfull mothers “anonymous feminists.” Indeed, such a move would contradict the multiplicity of women as subjects within their faith traditions. Still, I am convinced by the work of Mary McClintock Fulkerson and R. Marie Griffiths, among others, that women’s agency, even within the most patriarchal contexts, can be exercised in unexpected ways.¹ I will elucidate some of those ways in the following chapters even as I cannot deny my fundamental unease with the gender ideology of the movement as a whole.

Finally, I am writing as a white, middle class woman and U.S. citizen—an identity that comes with significant privileges, as well as blind spots. Although I have

tried to write with a significant degree of self-awareness, I am certain that both will be visible in the following chapters. There is no doubt more to say about the Quiverfull movement, especially those whose subject positions are located outside the presumed Quiverfull norm: white, American, and middle to lower class. I hope that my work might inspire others to take up those critiques.

II. What is Quiverfull?

What is the Quiverfull movement exactly? For the sake of brevity, I will postpone discussion of Quiverfull as social movement until Chapter 2. At this point, let’s start with the label “Quiverfull”—where it comes from and what I mean by it. The term has its origin in the language of Psalm 127:3-5, which says:

Children are a heritage from the Lord,
offspring a reward from him.
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are children born in one’s youth.
Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.
They will not be put to shame
when they contend with their opponents in court.²

Although this psalm was referenced in an early book by Mary Pride, *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality* (1985), authors Rick and Jan Hess are the ones who popularized the term “Quiverfull” with their book, *A Full Quiver: Family Planning and the Lordship of Christ* (1990).³ The Hesses argue strongly for viewing children as an unqualified blessing and childrearing as the primary work of the Christian marriage.

Although *A Full Quiver* has been out of print for some time, their book seems to have been the prime catalyst for the widespread use of the term “Quiverfull.” Those who

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² I will use the New International Version (NIV 2011) of the Bible unless otherwise noted.
adopted their perspective began to use the term to describe themselves (i.e., “We are a Quiverfull family”). This led to the creation of a few websites, a newsletter, networks, and even merchandise. Members of the media picked up the term, as well. By the time Kathryn Joyce published her book, *Quiverfull*, in 2009, the word had been in use for about ten years.

In this project, I will use the term Quiverfull to refer to families whose religious life takes a particular shape. Later, in Chapter 2, I will propose three conceptual lenses through which we can better understand the Quiverfull movement. For the sake of clarity, however, I will introduce one vital concept now. I propose that Quiverfull can be understood as a discourse of practices. While the lived religion of Quiverfull families encompasses many things, three practices are central: homeschooling, pronatalism, and patriarchy. Homeschooling refers to the practice of educating one’s children in one’s home rather than in traditional brick and mortar schools. The mother in the private family home conducts the vast majority of Christian homeschooling. I have placed homeschooling first in the three-fold discourse because of its centrality to everyday life and because Quiverfull families often encounter pronatalist and patriarchal teachings through homeschooling conferences and curricula. Pronatalism is the academic term for the Quiverfull desire to have many children. It doesn’t simply mean someone who loves children or even someone who wants to have a large family, but specifically refers to a family that is seeking to have as many children as possible. Patriarchy, which literally means “father rule,” is a term that is used in many ways in many different contexts and disciplines today. Some scholars even debate its usefulness. In reference to Quiverfull, I

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4 For a helpful discussion of three contemporary accounts of practice that come to bear on the discussion of discourse, see Mary McClintock Fulkerson, “Practice,” *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (ed. A.K.A. Adam; St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 189-198.
am using patriarchy to refer to their practice of male headship and belief in a gender-based hierarchical arrangement in the home, church, and world—one where men, in general, lead and women, in general, support and follow them. Each of these things—homeschooling, pronatalism, and patriarchy—entails certain beliefs, which emerge from particular biblical texts, but more importantly, they are lived out in daily life. Together, they make up the three-fold discourse that composes the Quiverfull movement.

The notion of discourse is employed within a variety of academic fields and defined in various ways depending upon the field. In the humanities, broadly speaking, discourse refers to written and spoken communication or simply a way of thinking that can be expressed through language. But, I am employing discourse in a way first developed by Michel Foucault. Sociologist Iara Lessa summarizes Foucault’s complicated view of discourse in the following way: “systems of thought composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak.” Discourse in this sense means more than simply written and spoken communication or a way of thinking, but also includes bodily activities, rituals, materials, and places where these things come together, all of which contribute toward a particular construction of subjects and the world of which they speak and in which they act. In short, as Fulkerson says, “Discourse encompasses any signifying or meaning-making element,” and must take into consideration both the signs of language and the “statements,” or “situations of utterance.” The Quiverfull discourse constitutes more than simply the content of their published materials and sermons, but

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7 Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, 77.
also includes the institutions, actions, practices, and objects of material culture, which make up their day-to-day life.³⁸

Of course, we must clarify that discourse is not something static and monolithic. Because discourse is more than ideas and beliefs located in the mind, but also daily practices and materials—including “small details” and “subtle arrangements”—Quiverfull discourse must be thought of as constantly emerging through a process of negotiation and conflict.⁹ Although I am seeking to render the Quiverfull discourse intelligible to outsiders, which implies the expectation of some measure of coherence, we must be careful not to assume that there must be some internal logic. Furthermore, for Foucault, discourses are “marked by ruptures, lacunae, and incoherences.”¹⁰ This means that not only can we expect discourses to be contested and internally inconsistent, but also that beliefs and practices often work themselves out in unpredictable ways.¹¹

This means that the Quiverfull discourse should not be assumed to be a coherent whole. Even in the appearance of widespread agreement among practitioners, there will

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³⁸ Thus, Fulkerson is right to say, “The turn to discourse is not idealist in the sense of denying the existence of reality outside of minds; it is, in fact, materialist. The differences that construct signification are widened to include the discourses of a mode of production, the processes of the democratic state and the ‘ideological’ discursive processes of the culture” (Changing the Subject, 93). Fulkerson is speaking of the construction of woman as a subject, but I think her point applies to our project, as well. While I will not be able to be as thorough in my analysis of the women and families of Quiverfull, I hope to be ever mindful of the wider discourses Fulkerson mentions that come to bear in real ways upon the Quiverfull discourse.


¹¹ There is some overlap between discourse and the concept of lived religion. I could just as well say that the term Quiverfull refers to families whose lived religion takes on a very particular shape. The term “lived religion” means what it sounds like: the way a particular people practices their religion in every day life. Like discourse, lived religion entails not just beliefs and texts, but also the rituals, experiences, relationships, and things that make up a people’s religious life. In the words of Robert Orsi, “The study of lived religion situates all religious creativity within culture and approaches all religion as lived experience” (The Madonna of 115th Street [New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2002], xxxvii). Viewing Quiverfull as a lived religion, however, would still prioritize the practices of homeschooling, pronatalism, and patriarchy. For more on the study of American religion in terms of practices, see David D. Hall, ed., Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).
exist shades of conflicting meaning that challenge prevailing ideas and practices. In this way, as theologian Kathryn Tanner has pointed out, unity will be found not in widespread agreement about beliefs and practices, but in common engagement with particular practices as reference points for making sense of their identities and way of life. That is to say, while Quiverfull adherents may use a shared idea to support their practice (i.e., all children are gifts from God), they do not necessarily agree as to the exact meaning and implications of the idea to which they appeal. To miss these shades of difference among Quiverfull families is to misunderstand them and do violence to the complexity of their way of life.

Many anthropologists of Christianity are in harmony with Tanner’s perspective. For their part, William Garriott and Kevin Lewis O’Neill have posited a “dialogic

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12 For example, as we shall see, Quiverfull families subscribe to a belief in male headship (based upon their interpretation of Eph. 5:23) such that men are the “spiritual leaders” of their homes and the ones primarily responsible for the education of their children. For many families in practice, however, the husband’s employment in the American economy of late capitalism requires them to work outside the home for the majority of every weekday (and sometimes on weekends). Due to the husband’s physical absence from the home, much of the domestic administration and decision-making is entrusted to the wife. And, within the practice of homeschooling, the daily education of the children is entrusted to the mother. While rhetorically subscribing to male headship, in practice much of the power in the home is wielded by the wife and mother, who organizes and manages the home and the education of children. In many cases, therefore, the discourse of gender hierarchy (“male headship”) is “ruptured” and works itself out in the home in a way that is unpredictable and incoherent.

To be fair, Quiverfull families would not agree that the abovementioned scenario constitutes an incoherence. Instead, they would most likely assert that the husband delegates to the wife her authority in administrative and educational work. For homeschooling mothers, this often works out in such a way that the wife calls herself the “teacher” while her husband is the “principal” (Monica Smatlak Liao, “Keeping Home: Homeschooling and the Practice of Conservative Protestant Identity,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 2006), 214-220). Deborah Olson calls herself “the captain” of the ship and her husband “the owner” of the ship. This way of accounting for the apparent contradiction between male headship and a female-led home suggests to me that many Quiverfull families are aware of the tensions in their discourse and have come up with conceptual strategies to address them.

13 Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Guides to Theological Inquiry; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 38-58.

14 This draws on Tanner’s notion of theology as “a part of some specific, communally shaped way of life” [*Theories of Culture*, 67], as well as Fulkerson’s discussion of “place” as a “kind of gathering,” where elements “converge to create some kind of unified reality” (*Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], 28).
approach” toward the anthropology of Christianity. This approach turns the focus away from the problems anthropologists encounter in their engagement with Christianity and toward the problems that Christians themselves encounter within Christianity. That is to say, Garriott and O’Neill encourage scholars to pay close attention to the way Christians debate Christian identity: “For as the numerous historical and ethnographic accounts of Christians and Christianity demonstrates, setting the terms for determining what and who counts as a Christian has been an incessant preoccupation of Christians and Christianity…since its inception.” Thus, Christian identity is dialogic: something that is constantly emerging through dialogue and debate—among elites and laypersons alike—over the correctness of particular teachings and practices. The dialogic approach to the anthropology of Christianity is both in harmony with Tanner’s perspective described above and eminently useful for the discussion of Quiverfull practices. Tanner turns our attention to the “cultural items” with which Quiverfull families are practically and collectively engaged, while Garriott and O’Neill advise us to see the debates around these cultural items as revealing the Quiverfull movement’s constantly emerging dialogic identity.


17 Garriott and O’Neill acknowledge that their development of this dialogic approach to Christianity owes much to Talal Asad’s discussion of Muslim identity in The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam (Occasional Paper Series; Washington, DC: Center for Comparative Arabic Studies at Georgetown University, 1986).

18 In Evangelical Christian Women, Julie Ingersoll comes to the same conclusion about the dialogic nature of evangelical identity, but argues the point in a slightly different way. She argues that evangelicalism is a cultural system, “a set of symbols that act as a rubric for ordering life and providing meaning.” The way the symbol system develops is neither purely individual nor purely communal, but
Based on all of the above, I propose that Quiverfull families be seen as players within a discourse composed of three parts: homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and pronatalism. One may hold to gender hierarchy but if one does not participate in Christian homeschooling and pronatalism, then, for the purposes of this study, one is not properly called Quiverfull. If we can conceive of these parts as circles in a Venn diagram, it is at the center where the three circles converge that the Quiverfull discourse is located.

As we proceed, we must keep in mind our explanation of discourse above: it is more than simply written and spoken communication, but also includes practices—the bodily activities and rituals of daily life—as well as material things and the places where the discourse is performed. Although we will not have space at this juncture to highlight all of these aspects, the following explanation always has in mind the multiple ways that discourse is voiced and embodied in any given context.

The first element of the Quiverfull discourse is homeschooling. I will argue in Chapter 1 that the Quiverfull movement as it has come to be recognized today is a subgroup that developed over the past forty years within the broader networks of the Christian homeschooling movement. Although Joyce and other commentators focus worked out in a dialectical process between individuals and their religious subculture (16). The interpretation and control of cultural symbols is not fixed and permanent but the result of ongoing process of construction, which involves lots of negotiation. Thus, the dialectical process of symbolizing meaning in evangelicalism is essentially characterized by conflict (16). Ingersoll develops this view of evangelical culture by drawing on the cultural production theory of Robert Wuthnow and conflict theory from James Davison Hunter (101-104).


See also Quiverfull daughter, Libby Anne, of *Love, Joy, Feminism*, who confirms my interpretation of homeschooling’s centrality to Quiverfull discourse: “Christian Patriarchy/Quiverfull is made up of a loosely connected group of organizations that promote extremely strict gender differences,
almost exclusively on the patriarchal and pronatalist practices of Quiverfull families, it is
important to see that homeschooling is just as central to their lived experience. For
Quiverfull families “on the ground,” the practice of homeschooling is the primary
structure within which the family’s way of life is ordered. Indeed, for Quiverfull families,
the production of a large family is not an end in itself. The couple’s “militant fecundity”\textsuperscript{20}
has a clear goal: the rearing of godly Christian children who will carry on the faith and
transform society in the decades and centuries to come. Christian homeschooling is the
primary means by which this training is carried out. Although curriculum and pedagogy
vary considerably from family to family, the central practice is the same: the education of
children is undertaken as the primary responsibility of parents and conducted within the
Christian home.\textsuperscript{21} Thus, while there are many homeschooling families that are not
Quiverfull, there is no such thing as a Quiverfull family that does not homeschool.
Quiverfull homeschooling is oriented toward one purpose: “multigenerational
faithfulness.” This phrase, coined by Voddie Baucham, expresses the desire that all of
their children continue in the Christian faith for multiple generations. While other

\textsuperscript{20} David Bentley Hart, “Freedom and Decency,” \textit{First Things}, June 2004, accessed May 4, 2015,
http://www.firstthings.com/article/2004/06/freedom-and-decency. One can find merchandise emblazoned
with the words “Militant Fecundity” at the website Café Press. Virtually anything, including baby bibs,
coffee mugs, and underwear, can be imprinted with a slogan showing one’s commitment to prolific
reproduction.

\textsuperscript{21} One adult daughter of a Quiverfull family offered the following observation: “[Y]ou can’t be
Quiverfull and not homeschool. Currently, Quiverfull exists as a segment of the homeschool movement.
The whole point is to let God give you lots of children to train up for his glory, and if that’s the point, why
would you then send them off to the public schools to be indoctrinated into secular humanism? I mean,
that’s how they phrase it, anyway. If you tried to be Quiverfull and not homeschool, you would be shunned,
questioned, or made to feel left out by every other Quiverfull family” (Libby Anne, blogger at \textit{Love, Joy,
Feminism}, email message to author, August 10, 2012).
homeschooling families might point to academic excellence or college readiness as their focus in homeschooling, Quiverfull families have as their primary goal the passing on of their Christian faith to the next generation.

In terms of their daily life, homeschooling is the most important practice of Quiverfull families, but their essentialist gender hierarchy follows closely behind. In Chapter 1, I will say more about the roots of their gender ideology in evangelical Protestant history, but it will suffice for now to point out the close tie between the work of homeschooling and practice of gender hierarchy. Mitchell Stevens, in his groundbreaking work on the American homeschool movement, has observed that gender dualism is both ubiquitous and central to the Christian homeschooling movement. He argues, “Ultimately, it is conservative Protestants’ deep commitment to full-time motherhood that has made them such a ready audience for home education.” One might say that the conservative Protestant commitment to gender hierarchy (and the corresponding ideal of stay-at-home motherhood) is the ideological fuel that powers the Christian homeschooling movement. Quiverfull families call their practice of gender

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22 Stevens distinguishes between two different kinds of homeschoolers: “inclusives” and “believers.” Inclusives are homeschoolers from a variety of faith traditions and cultures who do not separate themselves for religious reasons. Believers are homeschoolers from conservative Christian backgrounds who tend to separate themselves from inclusives and form their own networks, co-ops, newsletters, and other organizations. Although the early homeschooling movement was inclusive in nature, “believers” now make up the majority of American homeschoolers. The story of this shift is told in Stevens, Kingdom of Children, as well as Gaither, Homeschool: An American History.

23 Stevens, Kingdom of Children, 187.

24 Historians have documented that evangelical Protestant culture has evidenced a widespread commitment to hierarchical gender norms from early on. (See, for example, Betty DeBerg, Ungodly Women Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990]; and Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993]). Sociologists such as Judith Stacey and Julie Ingersoll have helped us see that these gender norms have always been contested in some way and are always in some sense emerging as they are debated among elites and laypersons alike. (See, Judith Stacey, Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America [San Francisco: Basic Books, 1990]; and Julie Ingersoll, Evangelical Christian Women). Still, contemporary evangelicals are, by and large, committed to a gender hierarchy that offers prescribed roles for men and women within the family, particularly in regards to parenting and childcare. Sally Gallagher has argued these gender norms constitute
hierarchy many different things, including biblical patriarchy, Christian patriarchy, male headship, and visionary womanhood. For the past few decades, many Quiverfull families have openly embraced the term patriarchy for its anti-feminist valence, but recent years has seen a slow defection from the term because of its association with some public figures who have been denounced as too extreme. Of course, the term patriarchy also has a long history within a variety of academic disciplines as a way of naming the hegemonic structure of masculine domination. But recently, some academics, especially those working in gender theory, have called into question the usefulness of the term, particularly when it implies, in Judith Butler’s words a “categorical or fictive universality of the structure of domination” in order to establish “women’s common subjugated experience.” In this project, I choose not to employ the term patriarchy to characterize the gender dynamics of Quiverfull discourse. Instead, I will use the terms gender hierarchy, gender dualism, and male headship, depending on the subject under discussion. I make this choice in part to avoid the implication of universality or a shared mere “symbolic traditionalism” in many cases, but it remains a form of traditionalism with real consequences when it is “activated” and instantiated in the lives of many evangelical families (Sally Gallagher, Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003]).

25 There was even a Patriarch magazine published by Philip Lancaster from 1993 to 2004. Their website described their mission as follows: “Patriarch’s mission is to bring about a return to patriarchy, leadership by strong, godly men in every sphere of life” (Patriarch Magazine, Web Archive, undated, accessed May 4, 2015: http://web.archive.org/web/20020402041417/http://www.patriarch.com/). Lancaster is a former associate of Douglas Phillips who spoke at many Vision Forum events and homeschooling conferences around the country. He also authored the book Family Man, Family Leader: Biblical Fatherhood as the Key to a Thriving Family (San Antonio, TX: Vision Forum, 2003).

26 The scandals alluded to here will be discussed in more detail below. Whether these denunciations are sincere or simply the result of a desire not to be troubled by association with disgraced persons is a question that remains to be answered. Prominent ex-Quiverfull and ex-homeschooling blogs call into question the denunciations of patriarchy now coming forth from leaders who have, in the past, certainly endorsed it. See, for example, the discussion taking place at the website devoted to homeschooling graduates, Homeschoolers Anonymous: R. L. Stollar, “What Christian Patriarchy is Not,” April 28, 2014, accessed May 4, 2015, http://homeschoolersanonymous.wordpress.com.2014/04/28/what-christian-patriarchy-is-not/.

experience of oppression. Also, I wish to avoid becoming entangled in the internal debates of Quiverfull and homeschooling families regarding the right or wrong application of the term patriarchy. Gender hierarchy, as I am using it, refers to the biblically rooted belief in male headship (the language of which comes from Eph. 5:23), which posits a general principle of male rule in all areas of life, due primarily to the order of creation (Gen. 2), which is understood to teach both gender-based roles and a dualism of gendered spheres.

Quiverfull practitioners describe gender hierarchy (and corresponding gender dualism) in markedly consistent terms: husbands and fathers are the God-ordained, breadwinning leaders of the home, working primarily in the public sphere, while wives and mothers are the God-ordained submissive, supportive “keepers of the home,” working primarily in the private sphere. As we will see in Chapter 1, this way of envisioning the genders and their prescribed roles in the family has a long history in American evangelicalism. Within the Quiverfull discourse, though, included in women’s primary responsibility for the care and nurture of children is the responsibility for their education.

Within Quiverfull homes, the discourse of gender hierarchy is performed in a variety of ways. For some, the husband/father plans and leads daily “family worship,” in which he enacts the role of “spiritual leader” by leading his family in Bible teaching and prayer. For others, male headship is enacted through the husband’s control over the family finances (dispersing money to his wife as she needs it) and the planning of major investments and purchases. For others, male headship is performed as the wife dresses and styles her hair and make-up in the way that her husband prefers. In any case, the
husbands and wives of Quiverfull families perform the discourse of gender hierarchy through a variety of practices in daily life.28

Finally, along with homeschooling and gender hierarchy is the Quiverfull practice of pronatalism. Pronatalism names their rejection of birth control and desire, in their words, to have as many children as God chooses to give them. In practice, pronatalism has active and passive aspects. The choice not to do anything to prevent conception might be called passive pronatalism. Quiverfull wives reject the Pill, condoms, and other forms of birth control in order to, in their terms, leave control of their fertility to God. In this sense, pronatalism is about what a couple is not doing. On the other hand, the choice to have sex during the fertile times in a woman’s cycle might be called active pronatalism. The couple’s choice for sexual intercourse when they know conception is likely is a practice that moves beyond merely not preventing pregnancy to actively pursuing it. The active and passive aspects of Quiverfull pronatalism can vary depending on the couple and fluctuate based upon a variety of circumstances in the family’s life, including sickness and injury, the spacing of children, financial instability, and more. Some Quiverfull families do not prevent conception, but also do not intentionally have sex during the wife’s fertile period. They avoid the active pursuit of conception but remaining technically open to more children. Other Quiverfull families do not prevent conception and intentionally have sex during fertile periods, thereby actively pursuing the conception of more children. No matter how the practice takes shape in the lives of Quiverfull

28 One adult daughter of a Quiverfull family put it this way: “It is possible to be Quiverfull and yet not patriarchal, but from what I’ve seen that’s very rare - very rare. Part of that is probably because Quiverfull sets itself up against feminism, and thus sort of actually invites patriarchy. But if you go through all of the Quiverfull organizations - Above Rubies, Vision Forum, etc, etc, - every single one also endorses patriarchy. Every one. Joyfully, happily. A woman’s place is at home having babies, submitting to her husband who in turn protects her and provides for her. It just all goes together” (Libby Anne, blogger at Love, Joy, Feminism, email correspondence August 8, 2012).
couples, two convictions are constant: 1) the belief that God is in direct control of the conception of children; and, 2) the belief that all children are an unqualified blessing or gift from God.29

For most Quiverfull families, the pronatalist practice emerges alongside of their convictions about homeschooling and gender hierarchy. It becomes a bit of a chicken and egg dilemma to discern which, in fact, comes first. For example, Mary Pride was an early proponent of homeschooling who has published many books to help homeschooling mothers, as well as a number of monthly magazines.30 But, Pride also promotes pronatalism, encouraging her readers to surrender their bodies totally to God’s will for procreation. Thus, women who consult Pride for homeschooling assistance also receive instruction in pronatalism—if they are not committed to it already. This is how Renee Tanner, a mother we will meet in Chapter 3, and Deborah Olson, who we will meet in Chapter 2, first encountered the pronatalist discourse. Renee found in Pride’s book, The Way Home, a vision of homemaking that included pronatalism and homeschooling. And, Deborah, through a search for homeschooling materials, came across Family Driven Faith by Voddie Baucham, a book that presented openness to many children and

29 Some, though not all, families have as the goal of their pronatalism the production of “arrows for the war” over American culture. Among many Quiverfull couples, the activist impulse inherent to evangelical Christianity works itself out in a transformative goal for their pronatalist practice. For these couples, it’s not simply about having many children for their own sake, but also for the sake of spurring a massive demographic shift over the next few hundred years. The reasoning is, if the average American family has two children while Quiverfull families have six, and this discrepancy continues for another couple of centuries, then a substantial demographic shift will take place, thereby “Christianizing” American culture in the long term. See, for example, Kathryn Joyce, “The Quiverfull Conviction: Christian Mothers Breed Arrows for the War,” The Nation, November 27, 2006, 11-18. The phrase “arrows for the war” originates with Nancy Campbell in her book, Be Fruitful and Multiply: What the Bible Says about Having Children (San Antonio, TX: Vision Forum Ministries, 2003), 79-90.

30 See, for example, the following books by Mary Pride: The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality (Fenton, MO: Home Life Books, 1985), All the Way Home: Power for Your Family to Be Its Best (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1989); and The Big Book of Home Learning Series, Vols. 1-4 (Fourth Edition; Alpha and Omega, 1999). Her magazine, Practical Homeschooling (formerly HELP for Growing Families), is in its twenty-second year of publication.
homeschooling as incumbent upon Christian wives. If children are blessings, the reasoning goes, and a couple’s primary means of influencing the world for Christianity, then the more children they have, the better.

In answer to the question, “What is Quiverfull?” I have proposed in a preliminary way that Quiverfull families be understood as participants within a three-part discourse. Homeschooling forms the operative framework for their daily life and has a significant influence on the way the pronatalism and gender hierarchy of Quiverfull families are performed. It is important to recognize that not all families who homeschool are pronatalist or patriarchal. And, not all families who are patriarchal are also pronatalist or choose to homeschool. And so on and so forth. Many Christian families practice one or two of these things without being Quiverfull. The way I’m using the word is to refer to where all three practices occur at the same time. Again, if we conceive of these three parts as circles in a Venn diagram, it is at the center where the three circles converge that the Quiverfull discourse is located.

At this point, however, it is important to recall the contributions of Tanner, Garriott, and O’Neill referenced above. They help us to see that not all Quiverfull families conceive of and participate in these practices in the same way. The movement is not monolithic, but evidences widespread differences in the way they perform the Quiverfull discourse. So, in the case of homeschooling, some Quiverfull families will be very concerned about college preparedness and emphasize high academic achievement to that end. Other Quiverfull families do not consider college a foregone conclusion for their children and will emphasize the formation of godly character and education in practical skills for daily life as an adult. In both of these cases, homeschooling is a primary
reference point for their cultural action, but families embody that commitment in different ways.

In the case of pronatalism, some Quiverfull families have never and will never seek to limit or space their children. They attain the Quiverfull “ideal” in practice, regardless of how they feel about their choice to do so. Other Quiverfull families, while believing that all children are gifts from God, will struggle to adhere to the strict no-limit ideal. They will utilize family planning methods at various times, but often feel guilt and shame because they are falling short of the ideal. Again, the pronatalist discourse is key to their way of life, but the families will interact with and exercise that discourse in different ways. Thus, while defining Quiverfull as a three-part discourse of homeschooling, pronatalism, and gender hierarchy, Quiverfull remains dialogic: something that is always emerging and a matter of constant debate.31

III. Quiverfull, Homeschooling, and Evangelicalism

In addition to a foundational understanding of what “Quiverfull” entails, it’s important to recognize from the outset that the Quiverfull movement is very much embedded in the evangelical subculture in America. (In Chapter 2, I will talk more about the category of subculture in relation to the Quiverfull movement.) Indeed, there would be no Quiverfull without American evangelicalism.32 As I will explain in more detail in

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31 As we will discuss in Chapter 2, many Quiverfull families have other discernible traits. They tend to read the Bible literally and propositionally. They tend to trade in nostalgia, particularly for the colonial and Victorian periods of American history. They often participate in homesteading practices designed to promote the family’s independence, like making their own bread, sewing their own clothing, or canning their own goods. And, some look to their “full quiver” as the way to “take back” American culture for Christianity over the next few hundred years. But, these characteristics are variable and may not be present in all cases. So, for my purposes, the three basic requirements for qualifying as “Quiverfull” are homeschooling, pronatalism, and patriarchy.

32 Many outsiders characterize Quiverfull families as “fundamentalist,” while others use the more neutral term “evangelical.” I will employ evangelicalism and evangelical throughout. But, I am going to
Chapter 1, the Quiverfull movement emerged over the past forty years from the networks and organizations of the Christian homeschooling movement. Although not all homeschoolers are Christians, Christians are arguably the most vocal and activist homeschoolers in the country. Homeschooling grew into a nationwide phenomenon in large part due to the activism of Christian families (mostly mothers) who created a plethora of local, state, and national organizations and networks for its promotion. Then, starting with teachers like Bill Gothard and Mary Pride and the families that adopted their approach, the three-fold discourse of patriarchy, pronatalism, and homeschooling eventually emerged in the 1980s as a discernible subculture within the Christian homeschooling movement. Today, enough time has passed that Quiverfull families can speak of first- and second-generation practitioners.

Currently, conservative estimates are that the number of American Quiverfull adherents is in the low tens of thousands, but the sociological research necessary to accurately quantify the number of Quiverfull followers has yet to be done.\textsuperscript{33} Low tens of thousands of adherents makes Quiverfull a definite minority among Protestant evangelicals. But, through the work of Kathryn Joyce and others, this minority has received significant attention in recent years from journalists and other interested observers. The popularity of the Duggars’ reality show, \textit{20 Kids and Counting}, has also contributed to the recognition of the Quiverfull movement. Indeed, it’s possible that the distinction of the Quiverfull lived religion in America is disproportionate to their small numbers. Despite their cultural renown, however, Quiverfull families remain cultural outliers in the U.S. They are simply not families that we see every day. Also, while there

\footnotesize{save my reasoning for this choice and the discussion of the relation between evangelicalism and fundamentalism for Chapter 1.}

\textsuperscript{33} This estimate comes from Joyce, “The Quiverfull Conviction,” \textit{The Nation}, 11.
is much affinity between the convictions of some evangelical leaders and Quiverfull practice, Quiverfull families stand out within broader evangelicalism, too. Most Quiverfull families operate on the margins of their church and community (unless the father happens to be a community or church leader).

Despite their marginal status, this dissertation is going to claim that the Quiverfull movement is very much a part of both evangelical and American culture. Indeed, Quiverfull families are “one of us” in many ways. Not only are they very much a part of the evangelical story in America (something I will explore in Chapter 1), but, as an ideologically inflected subgroup of American evangelicalism, they are also inheritors of the American and evangelical tendency toward individualism and privatization. Certainly, the Quiverfull lived religion is distinct on the American religious landscape today, but not they are not so distinct as to constitute a unique phenomenon. While most investigations of Quiverfull thus far have emphasized their distinctiveness from American culture, this project will emphasize their resemblance (without losing sight of the specific things that make them different). As it turns out, through a careful look at the practice of Quiverfull families we can learn a lot about ourselves. I will say more about this in the chapters that follow.

IV. Ethnography in the Study of Quiverfull

In the past few decades, there has been a proliferation of academic research on American evangelicalism across multiple academic disciplines. To my knowledge, my work is the first to address Quiverfull as a lived religion and the first to prioritize the voices of Quiverfull women. Key to both of these aims is the use of ethnography, a qualitative research method. This section will explain ethnography as a qualitative
research method and then explain why I think ethnography is particularly suited for a study of the Quiverfull movement.

Qualitative research methods seek to gather in-depth information about human beings and human behavior, particularly the why and how of such behavior. For this reason, smaller samples are used in qualitative research and, typically, the findings produced by the scholar’s data collection are not generalized beyond the particular cases studied. Some qualitative research methods of data collection include questionnaires, focus groups, participant observation, structured interviews, unstructured interviews, and the analysis of archives and other written materials. The use of such methods is vital to a broad spectrum of academic inquiries, including the anthropological investigation of cultures and communities, psychological research on mental illness, and political research on social movements.

Ethnography is one such qualitative research method. The word “ethnography” derives from Greek and literally means “writing culture,” that is, the description of a people and its way of life. To be more precise, ethnography can be understood as “a process of attentive study of, and learning from, people—their words, practices, traditions, experiences, memories, insights—in particular times and places in order to understand how they make meaning.” Ethnography is distinguishable from other qualitative methods due to the fact that it is almost always conducted in “natural” settings.

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34 For more information, suitable for use by theologians, see John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006).
35 Even this point is debated, however. See, for example, Bent Flyvbjerg, “Five Misunderstandings About Case Study Research,” *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 12, no. 2 (April 2006): 219-245. Flyvbjerg argues that qualitative research findings may be used, in some cases, both for hypothesis-testing and for generalizing principles beyond the specific cases studied.
(often referred to as “the field”), in which the every day language and behavior of people is followed as it occurs. Thus, the analysis that ethnographers produce is necessarily inductive because explanatory theories will emerge from the experience as it is observed in real life.

Although the tradition of producing descriptive accounts of people and places goes back to antiquity, ethnography, as we know it today, emerged from the discipline of cultural anthropology. Arguably the greatest insight of cultural anthropology was the concept of culture itself: “the idea that people’s behaviors, beliefs, interactions, and material productions were not random, but rather formed a ‘complex whole’ that was meaningful, logical, more or less consistent, and worthy of respect on its own terms.”38

Of course, this concept of culture required scholarly tools for the careful collection and analysis of the many details composing the cultures of the world. Ethnography is one such tool. Today, the investigation of culture is carried out through ethnographic methods in a variety of disciplines. Most important for my purposes, however, is its increasingly central role in the study of religion and religious communities, especially evangelical Christianity.

In addition to the increasing use of ethnography for the study of evangelicalism, the past few decades has also seen a swell of academic research in the experiences and agency of evangelical Protestant women. Scholars as diverse as Judith Stacey, Marie Griffith, Brenda Brasher, Christel Manning, and Julie Ingersoll have explored evangelical Protestant women’s belief in and conformity to patriarchal gender ideology, as well as the

38 Angrosino, Doing Cultural Anthropology, 2.
ways in which evangelical gender ideology is continuously contested territory. Utilizing a variety of theoretical approaches, combined with careful ethnographic research within evangelical and fundamentalist groups, the abovementioned scholars have revealed that the experience of women within patriarchal movements is by no means uniform and very often defies tidy explanation. Some feminist researchers have even claimed that the women in their studies find avenues of agency and liberation within explicitly patriarchal environments.

Feminist theologians have also complicated the ways in which we discuss women’s subjectivity and agency within conservative religious movements. Leading the way in this regard is Mary McClintock Fulkerson whose book *Changing the Subject: Women’s Discourses and Feminist Theology* (1994) uses poststructuralist analysis to offer a way to discuss women’s agency in non-essentializing ways and conceive of the subject, “woman,” as possessing multiple identities. To do so, Fulkerson analyzed the discourses of mainline Presbyterian and Appalachian Pentecostal women. Fulkerson shows that even women who do not identify as feminists have faith practices that have their own “registers” of resistance to patriarchy. Her work has challenged theologians

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40 Those who draw these conclusions include: Judith Stacey, *Brave New Families*: R. Marie Griffith, *God’s Daughters*; and Brenda Brasher, *Godly Women: Fundamentalism and Female Power*. More recent scholars like Julie Ingersoll, want to challenge this thesis somewhat, but they do not deny the larger point: the experience of women within patriarchal movements is much more complicated than it at first appears.

(particularly feminist and liberation theologians) to reconsider their representations of women’s experience.

All of the abovementioned research leads me to two conclusions. First, an academic study of the Quiverfull movement calls for a particular focus on the women within the movement. Even within a patriarchal discourse, there is no doubt that women are the primary actors in the Quiverfull subculture. In fact, as we shall see, Quiverfull discourse centers the bodies and work of women in a way that complicates their patriarchal claims. The women of the movement are the mothers, homemakers, and homeschoolers focused upon birthing and nurturing “arrows” for the Christian war over the American culture.\(^\text{42}\) The consistent testimony of Quiverfull teachers is that their women are the most important agents of change, contributing to the formation of hearts and minds that will lead to Christian dominion in the years to come. Thus, it seems that sustained focus on the women of Quiverfull is a particularly useful avenue into an interpretation of the movement as a whole.

The second point suggested by the abovementioned research is that academic study of the Quiverfull movement requires the use of ethnographic methods. Ethnographic methods allow for disciplined attention to the lived experience of Quiverfull families and the women at the center. There are several reasons that ethnography presents the best research tool for the present project. First, as described above, I take as a starting point the axiom of postmodern anthropology that despite appearances to the contrary, a movement like Quiverfull is not a monolithic, thoroughly consistent whole, but an internally fractured entity with permeable boundaries. This truth

\(^{42}\) This warfare language is especially prolific in the writing of Nancy Campbell, noted Quiverfull advocate and teacher, in her volume *Be Fruitful and Multiply*, as well as Rachel Giove Scott, *Birthing God’s Mighty Warriors* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2004).
has been observed in the sociological research mentioned above, which indicates that the experience of women within patriarchal evangelical Protestantism is neither uniform nor predictable. Thus, we rightly anticipate that while Quiverfull adherents may hold to certain shared ideas and practices, they do not necessarily agree as to the exact meaning of the ideas to which they appeal, nor do their practices look the same in day-to-day life.

The only way to shed light on the shades of difference within the Quiverfull movement is to employ ethnographic methods, which allow for a comparison between Quiverfull literature and the experiences and practices of Quiverfull families.

The second reason for study using ethnographic methods is that those engaged in the Quiverfull way of life function in a decentralized manner. There is no officially recognized leader of the Quiverfull movement and no governing ecclesial body claiming their lifestyle as an authorized practice. So, their theology and practices are disseminated mostly by word of mouth, through books passed from person to person, blogs recommended through email correspondence, social networking, and a variety of homeschooling publications and conferences. Furthermore, the daily life of the Quiverfull family necessarily operates in a way that is, for the most part, closed off from public access. While many Quiverfull families sustain their identity through online support groups and blogs, very often these media sources are unavailable without going through a selective subscription process. It is insufficient, therefore, for a researcher of the movement to study only the more notable teachers and authors of the movement. Although the texts produced by these thinkers are important—central as they are to the shaping of Quiverfull discourse regarding motherhood, children, and family—they
cannot address the pertinent questions of the movement’s practical coherence and consistency in the lives of women and families on the ground.

The third and perhaps most important reason that ethnographic methods are needed is that the primary actors in the Quiverfull movement—the women—are those who are the least visible. Quiverfull gender hierarchy affirms a mostly public role for men and a mostly private role for women. Women are believed to be divinely ordained to be submissive wives and mothers, while men are called to be the leaders in the home, church, and society. As a result, men are the primary Quiverfull teachers and publications for Quiverfull families tend to be authored by men. Certainly, women operate the majority of Quiverfull blogs and there are multiple publications authored by women and directed to a female audience. But, many of these works are explicitly or implicitly stated to be under the “headship” of the women’s husbands, which calls into question the extent to which the material is truly representative of the experience of Quiverfull women.

Moreover, there is no doubt that works intended to promote and reinforce Quiverfull teaching are unlikely to include the challenges to prevailing ideas and practices that cultural anthropologists assure us are there. In short, if researchers want to hear from Quiverfull mothers about their work within the movement, a method of study is needed that will take their stories into account.

Before moving on to a more detailed explanation of the ethnographic methods used in this project, I think a caveat is required. In an important article in 1991, Susan Harding calls attention to the fact that fundamentalists both create their own identity and
Fundamentalists create themselves through their own cultural practices, but not exactly as they please. They are also constituted by modern discursive practices, an apparatus of thought that presents itself in the form of popular “stereotypes,” media “images,” and academic “knowledge.” Singly and together, modern voices represent fundamentalists and their beliefs as an historical object, a cultural “other,” apart from, even antithetical to, “modernity”… Academic inquiry into fundamentalism is framed by modern presuppositions which presume “fundamentalists” to be a socially meaningful category of persons who are significantly homogenous in regard to religious belief, interpretive practices, moral compass, and socioeconomic conditions, a category of person whose behavior defies reasonable expectations and therefore needs to be—and can be—explained. […] Fundamentalists, in short, do not simply exist “out there” but are also produced by modern discursive practices. 

Despite her broader focus, I think Harding’s point is important as we begin an inquiry into the Quiverfull subculture. Quiverfull families have already been represented and explained by “popular ‘stereotypes,’ media ‘images,’ and academic ‘knowledge.’”

By and large, journalists and cultural commentators have been the ones to construct Quiverfull identity thus far. Like their fundamentalist kin, Quiverfull families “create themselves through their own cultural practices, but not exactly as they please.” Even as they are reacting against certain contemporary practices of marriage and family, they are simultaneously being influenced and formed by them as well. Moreover, as this study proceeds, I am mindful of the fact that I too am participating in the representation of Quiverfull families. My use of anthropological and sociological categories inevitably influences the way the Quiverfull subculture is portrayed. My hope is that the present

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work can be appropriately reflective and self-critical even as it contributes to the discursive representation of Quiverfull families in a way that is beyond their control.

V. The Scope of My Ethnographic Research

As is prone to happen in projects of this type, the shape and scope of my research developed over time. I started with the assumption that I would seek to interview as many mothers as I could find—the more, the better. I planned to find as many Quiverfull mothers as I could and conduct one, 90 minute interview with each. But, I knew that, given my occupation as a doctoral student at a Catholic university, finding informants was going to be something of a challenge. I began by seeking to pull together as many contacts as possible, first by contacting those in my social circles who have connections to Quiverfull families, and then by scouring Quiverfull blogs for contact information. These avenues were less productive than I had hoped, resulting in a very short list of names. Of the initial list, only one mother expressed a willingness to participate.

Next, I turned to the data available through the National Center for Family Integrated Churches (NCFIC). Many Quiverfull families believe strongly in “family integrated churches” and those who attend a church tend to do so in these kinds of congregations. So, I reasoned that it would be relatively easy to find Quiverfull families if I worked through NCFIC member churches. Based upon the list of churches I found within driving distance of Dayton, I sent emails to the pastoral leadership or secretaries of those with email addresses listed on their websites. The emails described the nature of my project and requested help locating mothers who would be willing to be interviewed. Unfortunately, these emails didn’t produce a single informant—indeed, not even a return message.
Still, my research among the NCFIC member churches did lead me to an advertisement for a Family Driven Faith conference led by Pastor Voddie Baucham in nearby Cincinnati. Given the paltry number of informants I had acquired to that point, I decided to attend with my whole family and try to find more. Much to my chagrin, my family and I were essentially ignored the entire weekend. Not a single contact came from our attempts to introduce ourselves and make conversation. Honestly, I was shocked and disappointed by the lack of hospitality. I had assumed that an activist, evangelistically oriented movement like Quiverfull would produce families eager to welcome and include others in the fold. But, in the Cincinnati church that hosted the conference, that impulse appeared non-existent. Of course, I cannot say for certain why we were greeted with such coldness. Despite our attempts to “fit in,” it’s possible that we violated some unspoken rules of decorum. I don’t really know and I doubt that we will ever know. When we were walking out to our car to head home, I was certain the whole weekend had been a bust. But then a very friendly mother approached us in the parking lot. Our conversation led to email correspondence and an agreement to participate in my research. Deborah (not her real name) helped connect me to another Quiverfull mother in the region.

In the mean time, I had begun to prepare a long list of interview questions. Then, in the fall of 2012, I conducted my first interview by phone with Renee Tanner. To do so, I equipped my cell phone with earphones and took notes in a Word document on my computer. I tried as much as possible to transcribe Renee’s answers word for word, including pauses, stall mechanisms, and stray thoughts seemingly unrelated to the question. When our planned 90-minute interview was complete, I was shocked to discover we only made it through ten of the planned thirty questions. Even so, Renee had
proven to be a very interesting and forthright informant. She provided me with so much valuable information that I went ahead and scheduled another interview. It was then that I realized then that my intention to interview each subject only once was not going to work. Not only was I finding it difficult to find a large number of mothers who wanted to participate in my project, I was also convinced that if I wanted each informant to receive the right amount of attention, I would need to narrow the focus of my research. My first instinct—the more, the better—was simply wrong.

In consultation with two advisors (both practicing ethnographers), I concluded that I needed to conduct multiple, monthly in-depth interviews with a small group of informants over the course of a year or more. At that point, I had three women who were enthusiastic about helping with my project and willing to make themselves available for periodic interviews: one first generation, middle to upper class Quiverfull mother in her 50s living in the Southwest; one second generation, lower class Quiverfull mother in her 30s living in the Midwest; and one second generation, middle class Quiverfull mother in her 30s living in the Midwest. I agreed with my advisors that a long-term investigation into the lives and lived religion of these three mothers would ultimately prove more useful than a surface level knowledge of many. So, I readjusted the focus of my ethnography on digging deeply into the lives of these three women on a variety of topics pertinent to my research. My original list of 30 interview questions turned into several theme-oriented groups of questions, addressing marriage and gender roles, sex and reproduction, motherhood and mothering, children and childrearing, the nuclear family, church and family religion, and American culture and politics.
Thus, the ethnographic research that forms the basis for this project was gathered mostly through in depth interviews with three Quiverfull mothers over the course of two years. I met in person with Deborah Olson twice: Once at a coffee shop and once in her home, where I spent the afternoon with her and her children. At the coffee shop, I took notes by hand. But in the home visit, I recorded our entire visit on a digital recorder, which I later transcribed. The rest of our interviews were conducted by phone with occasional email correspondence to clarify things discussed on the phone. I met in person with Carley Miller once at a coffee shop, recording our conversation on a digital recorder, which I later transcribed. The rest of our interviews were conducted by phone with occasional email correspondence. Because of her location in the Southwest, all of my interviews with Renee Tanner were conducted by phone. Although I closely followed the questions I prepared for each interview, I did improvise questions depending on the subject raised by my informants. In this sense, then, the interviews were somewhat open-ended.

I also interviewed a number of others in the course of my ethnographic research: Two pastors of “family integrated churches,” one adult daughter of a Quiverfull family, and one mother of a large homeschooling family who does not consider herself Quiverfull. Although these conversations were helpful and enlightening in their own ways, I ended up not giving sustained attention on these informants. Indeed, in many ways they helped me to establish the boundaries and limitations of my study. For instance, I find the “family integrated churches” phenomenon very interesting and spent quite a bit of time talking to two pastors about what family integrated means, the reasoning behind that emphasis, and how it works in their congregations. Ultimately,
however, that subject is beyond the bounds of my dissertation. My interviews with Quiverfull mothers were offering much more fruitful material for a study of Quiverfull as a movement. So, after a few conversations on the subject, I decided that avenue was no longer worth pursuing for the present project.

In addition to interviews, my ethnographic research also included a broad survey of Quiverfull print materials and numerous Quiverfull blogs and websites. The books I read in the course of my research can be found in the bibliography and will be referenced throughout. The websites of a few organizations were also important resources, including Vision Forum, Inc. and Vision Forum Ministries, the Western Conservatory of Arts and Sciences, the National Center for Family Integrated Churches (NCFIC), Above Rubies, and the Quiverfull Digest. Another key resource that I have consulted throughout my research is the blog, A Quiver Full of Information, which offers up-to-date articles, websites, blogs, and more on Quiverfull related topics. In addition, I have consulted numerous blogs over the past two years. In 2013, I established an email address strictly for the purpose of research and then subscribed by email to some of what I deemed to be the most well trafficked and relevant blogs. This selection was by no means scientific, but dependent upon my judgment. A few are significant because they are managed by notable Quiverfull teachers (i.e., Ladies Against Feminism, Beautiful Womanhood, and Your

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Sacred Calling). A few were of interest because of how many people subscribe to the blog and participate in online discussion (i.e., Raising Homemakers and Keeper of the Home). And some were simply standouts for their ideological emphases (i.e., King’s Blooming Rose, which focuses on stay-at-home daughters). Through the subscription process, I received a notification about each new post on each of these blogs for over a year. This allowed me the opportunity to look over the subject matter addressed and consider the content of their message more closely if it pertained to my research. I had hoped to do more with the data I acquired through these blogs, but time constraints prevented anything more than cursory consultation and occasional reference in the pages that follow.

All of the above resources—books, websites, and blogs—I consulted in correlation with the data culled through interviews. In some cases, I drew topics from the print and Internet resources for use in interviews or used the printed rhetoric to question the on-the-ground discourse of my informants. In other cases, I drew topics from my interviews to bring to the print and Internet resources or used the points raised in my interviews to question what was offered in print. For example, when the Doug Phillips scandal broke on the Internet, I asked my informants for their reaction and to what extent

49 King’s Blooming Rose: http://kingsbloomingrose.com. I also subscribed to one very important anti-Quiverfull blog, Love Joy Feminism, which is run by Libby Anne, an adult daughter of a Quiverfull family. Libby Anne and I also interacted some by email. In the end, I chose not to focus on much of the content of Love Joy Feminism because I wanted the bulk of my ethnography to come from current practitioners of the Quiverfull way of life.
50 I think one fruitful avenue of future research would be on the ideological sifting and sorting that takes place on these blogs and websites. In particular, the fall-out on the Internet from the public downfall of Bill Gothard and Douglas Phillips would be a fascinating study. Nowhere is the constantly contested nature of subcultural identity more clear than in the online communities that Quiverfull practitioners create and sustain.
they supported Phillips’ teaching. Significantly, I discovered that none of them found Phillips compelling as a teacher and all of them were suspicious of his strident sense of patriarchy. Despite the fact that Phillips has garnered a lot of public attention and is often seen as representative of Quiverfull, the mothers in my research did not identify with him, even prior to his public fall from grace. This is important because, more often than not, popular level writing about Quiverfull draws exclusively on print and Internet resources. The result of my inquiries about Phillips show that print and Internet resources may not be representative of the thinking of Quiverfull families on the ground. I think the use of books, websites, and interviews complicates our picture of Quiverfull as a movement, giving researchers a much more accurate sense of this still emerging evangelical phenomenon.

At this point, I need to explain in more detail the limitations of my research. First, I have focused almost exclusively on the experience and perspective of Quiverfull mothers. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the mothers are most certainly at the center of the Quiverfull movement. Their bodies and prolific work in the home literally and figuratively give life to the movement. Without the mothers that bear, birth, nurse, rear, and educate the “full quiver” of children, there would be no Quiverfull movement.

Not only that, but, by their own testimony, mothers are often the ones who lead their husbands into the Quiverfull discourse. Many Quiverfull testimonies are built around the careful, prayerful persuasion of husbands, who often must be convinced by
their wives in a way that is appropriately submissive and deferential.\(^51\) Certainly not every situation is the same, so I hesitate to speak in generalities. Yet, it is my observation that most families are acclimated to Quiverfull ideas slowly through their participation in the Christian homeschooling movement. That is to say, they hear speakers at homeschooling conferences and conventions, read recommended books and articles, and talk with Quiverfull-minded friends, and over time they slowly become participants in Quiverfull discourse.\(^52\)

Moreover, by virtue of their myriad responsibilities, Quiverfull mothers often don’t have the time or ability to talk about their lived religion in a public way. Although there are many Quiverfull blogs online, the vast majority of mothers on the ground don’t have the time or resources for that kind of expression. Put simply, I wanted to hear the voices of women who do not maintain a public persona. Thus, due to their practical centrality in the family, the leadership they often take in bringing their husbands into the Quiverfull discourse, and the limits often put on their ability to speak up, I focused intentionally on understanding and rendering intelligible the experiences and perspectives of mothers.

A final, more practical reason for the focus on Quiverfull mothers is that two of the three fathers were reluctant to speak to me. In response to my requests for an

\(^{51}\) The woman-led nature of Quiverfull is especially evident in the testimonies found in Natalie Klejwa, *Three Decades of Fertility: Ten Ordinary Women Surrender to the Creator and Embrace Life* (Visionary Womanhood, 2013).

\(^{52}\) In regard to the women-led nature of Quiverfull “conversions,” it is also important to recognize that most women of Quiverfull families were, as a result of their own background, predisposed to value and aspire to the kind of life that Quiverfull proponents present as ideal. What I mean by this is that most Quiverfull mothers were raised in Christian homes, envisioned marriage in a patriarchal fashion, prioritized motherhood as a key life aspiration, desired a large family, and had considered homeschooling as a viable option from the time their children were quite young. To borrow from Peter Berger, most Quiverfull mothers built on their pre-established “plausibility structures” drawn from the sensibilities and characteristics of American evangelicalism. In this way, it seems that for most mothers, the Quiverfull discourse is simply an intensification and more tightly woven alliance of their previously held commitments.
interview, one expressed a lack of time and one suggested that speaking to his wife was enough. I got the impression from both that they believed their wives could speak well for their families. Perhaps, as a researcher, I should have been more forceful, but I was loath to offend the families in question or cause conflict between the spouses. Once I determined that I would not be able to interview both parents (or that it would require more pushing that I was comfortable with), I focused exclusively on the mothers.

In addition to the limited focus on Quiverfull mothers, this project is limited in the number of critical themes I examine. For example, I spend some time exploring gender roles in the home and the construction of children within the nuclear family. But, the important matters of race and class do not play a major role. There are a couple reasons for this. First, neither race nor class came up in an overt way in my interviews or the print and Internet materials that I surveyed. The matter of race is important in some quarters of the movement, especially those who spend a lot of time talking about demographics. Because the Quiverfull discourse is a generally white and middle to lower class phenomenon, there is ample room for a study that brings the subjects of race and class to the forefront, my primary interests lay elsewhere. Even so, it is important to recognize that whiteness and white experience is the assumed norm among Quiverfull families and most would be categorized as middle to lower class.

In addition to the subjects of race and class, the following project does not give much attention to homeschooling. Admittedly, this is despite my contention that homeschooling is central to Quiverfull discourse. Among other things, I think the curriculum used by mothers, the way homeschooling mothers cooperate with one another, the way children with special needs are educated, and the long-term
consequences for homeschooled children (in terms of career choice, income level, and future marriage and family practices) are all matters that deserve serious consideration. In a general way, sustained inquiry into how Quiverfull children in particular are educated would add to the growing body of research on Christian home education in America. But, no project can do it all. In light of my focus on gender and the family, these research questions remain beyond the bounds of this project.

Finally, I want to be clear that the ethnographic data I have gathered cannot be argued to be representative of all Quiverfull families. This is particularly true of the three mothers that occupy the majority of my focus in the chapters that follow. This sample size, if it can even be called a sample size, is too small. Also, simply by virtue of their willingness to talk to me, it is possible that these Quiverfull mothers are qualitatively different from other Quiverfull mothers. For example, it is quite possible that they have more outgoing personalities and are less world-averse than their Quiverfull peers. Also, these women come from a limited portion of the United States, which certainly influences their theology and practice. And, they themselves do not claim to speak for all mothers who share their way of life. Despite all of these qualifications, I do think the research I’ve conducted is representative enough for a project of this kind. I am not offering an ethnography of the Quiverfull movement per se, but I have attempted to bring historical, ethnographic, and theological methods into conversation on the subject of the Quiverfull instantiation of the family. I am certainly not claiming to pen the final word on the

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Quiverfull movement. This is, rather, very much the first word—at least from an academic point of view. So, I present these findings with both acknowledgement of my limitations and confidence that what I am offering remains valuable for our understanding of Quiverfull as a movement, as well as American evangelicalism as a whole.

VI. Ethnography and Theological Studies

Now that I’ve introduced ethnography and explained how my ethnography of Quiverfull was carried out, I need to say something about how I understand the ethnography and theology to function in this project. I will start with a brief outline of how ethnography has come to be used in theological studies in recent years. Broadly speaking, following on the heels of the so-called “cultural turn” among an array of scholarly disciplines in the 1980s, a number of Christian theologians and ethicists began looking to the social sciences for ways that their research could critically attend to the complexities of human experience. These theologians came from a variety of locations and followed a number of trajectories. Among them were Latin American liberationists, feminist, Black, womanist, and Latina/Mujerista theologians; practical theologians in the sub-discipline of “congregational studies;” and theological ethicists in the virtue

54 See Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, for a very helpful description of this methodological shift, the impact of which continues to be felt across multiple disciplines.

55 Of course, such theologians have long contended that all theology is context-driven. In the 1990s, however, some began to make concerted efforts to integrate sustained study of these specific contexts into their theology. For example, Roberto Goizueta, a U.S. Hispanic Catholic theologian wrote *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment*, which is a challenging exposition of contemporary Catholic theology birthed out of the popular religious practices of Hispanic Catholics in the U.S. His is a theology that reflects deeply on the meaning and implications of the “preferential option for the poor by working with the lived religion of real poor people (Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995]).

56 Although not all doing or saying the same thing, all practical theologians argue for the practical nature of theological reflection. In the case of congregational studies, mainline Protestant theologian Don S.
theory school of thought. Although all were engaged with lived experience and practices, most of these theologians were not trained in the particulars of qualitative research methods. Moreover, they tended to utilize the cultural studies practice of the “thick description” primarily for the purpose of exploring and describing the expression of faith occurring in a given time and place. Later theologians, however, would take the additional theoretical step toward affirming, “the situation or context of study has embedded and embodied within its life substantive contributions to theology and ethics.” That is to say, earlier theologians described and reflected on the expression of faith in a given time and place (theological reflection on ethnography). But, more current theologians argue that the contextualized faith of a particular people actually has something constructive to say for the work of Christian theology today (theology from ethnography). Theologians who are presently using ethnography in this latter sense include Nicholas M. Healy, Mary McClintock Fulkerson, Christian Scharen, and Aana Browning is a good example of someone who led the way in the turn to ethnography. In his *Fundamental Practical Theology*, Browning seeks to introduce what he calls a “descriptive theological” moment within the larger task of theology. He argues that description (in the qualitative research sense of the term) is necessary in order to bring to the fore the implicit normative claims that are always operating within particular congregational contexts. In this way, Browning is calling theologians’ attention to living communities of faith for the purpose of deepening and broadening theological understanding (Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996]). Congregational studies has developed significantly since Browning’s early contribution to the field. See also, Carl S. Dudley and Nancy T. Ammerman, *Congregations in Transition: A Guide for Analyzing, Assessing, and Adapting in Changing Communities* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2002).

In general, virtue ethicists are building on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, who led the way in a shift to highlight the significance of practices and bodily habituations. (In this same school of thought, it is worth noting the influence of theorists like Pierre Bourdieu and Michael de Certeau.) The MacIntyrian focus on bodily habituation seems to lead naturally into an interest in the description of practices in the lived religion of Christian communities. It is puzzling, therefore, that even as Stanley Hauerwas and some of his students are committed to the significance of narrative and practices, they simultaneously lack the commitment to study practices as they are embodied in real life.

William Cavanaugh is a notable exception. His work, *Torture and Eucharist* (Malden, MA/Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), is generally recognized as a highly skilled work of social scientific research and theology.

Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, xxii.

Healy’s book *Church, World, and the Christian Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) explicitly advocates using ethnographic research in congregational studies for the formation of
Marie Vigen. Although coming from a variety of traditions, all of the groups and figures mentioned above are a part of the general and still emerging “ethnographic conversation” among Christian theologians.

Although there are times when I will draw theological insights from my ethnographic data, the present project is more accurately described as theological reflection on ethnography. Indeed, in the chapters that follow, I use ethnographic research to more fully understand the theology at work in particular locations (Quiverfull families). Then, I engage that theology in a critical way. Thus, while I affirm that there are places in my project where the contextualized faith of Quiverfull families has something constructive to say for the work of Christian theology today, I do not attempt to flesh out those constructive elements in a sustained way. Perhaps future research will

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61 Fulkerson, a Presbyterian theologian, is an example of one who received training in ethnographic fieldwork in order to pursue a theological project. Her book, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), focuses on the practices of an interracial church in Durham, NC that intentionally includes differently abled persons in their life and worship. Her project seeks to discover what this particular church, Good Samaritan United Methodist Church, has to teach about creating places for people who are constructed as “different” and “other” to be seen and known. In the process, Fulkerson makes use of ethnographic research, postmodern place theory, theories of practice, and theology in order to move from studying “the Church,” in the abstract, to studying “churches”—one church, in particular. In so doing, she produces a theology that intentionally emerges from a particular location, with all of the tensions and ambiguities that entails. In the words of Nicholas Healy, she moved from “idealized” to “concrete” ecclesiology—“theology for and from a truly ‘worldly church’” (Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life*, 150).

62 Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen co-edited *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (London/New York: Continuum, 2011), a collection of essays that puts forward a forceful case for the legitimacy of employing ethnographic research methods in theology and ethics. In the first half of the book they explain in detail what ethnographic research entails, why theologians should understand ethnography to be a legitimate source for theology, and offer cogent responses to their critics. In the second half of the book, they present seven exemplar essays that provide vivid illustrations of what theology from ethnography can look like.

allow my to take those additional steps, but the present project mostly refrains from doing so.

With that in mind, it’s important to ask how and on what basis my theological critique is going to proceed. Certainly, I am not an insider to the Quiverfull movement, so I will not be offering criticism based on coherency and continuity with perceived authorities or authoritative practices. I will certainly not be condemning or promoting Quiverfull as an instantiation of lived religion. As I stated above, I begin my evaluation of the Quiverfull discourse from within a particular subject position. As a theologian formed in the evangelical tradition, I have significant experience with the assets and deficits of evangelical theology and I see both at work in the Quiverfull movement. Also, as a scholar of American Christianity, I recognize within Quiverfull a continuation of themes and tendencies that have been present in American evangelicalism from early on. In both of these ways, my subject position means that I will contextualize Quiverfull within evangelicalism and offer observation on its continuity and discontinuity with what I understand to be American evangelical norms.

In addition to my own scholarly concerns for evangelical theology and history, there are two central objectives within Quiverfull discourse that can serve an evaluative purpose as well. I will explain these two objectives below, but they can be short-handed as 1) witness and 2) transformation. First, Quiverfull practitioners want to witness to the watching world regarding the truth and goodness of the Gospel. In their way of life, Quiverfull families seek to show their neighbors the fullness of life that Christ offers to his followers. Being a witness in this way depends only on faithfulness. The family’s job is to be faithful to their calling regardless of the results. They may not convince anyone in
their lifetime to adopt their way of life, but their calling is to be faithful nonetheless. Mothers in the movement often give voice to this particular objective. They are the ones working tirelessly within the home, day in and day out, to train and educate their many children. Lacking any obvious sign that their work is accomplishing a higher purpose, Quiverfull mothers often attest that they are seeking only to be a good witness—to be faithful in their own context to God’s word, regardless of the perceived results. So, one way to evaluate Quiverfull practice is to consider to what extent their way of life offers a compelling Christian witness to the world.\textsuperscript{64}

Second, Quiverfull practitioners also express a desire to transform American society and culture through their way of life. Through their practice, Quiverfull families seek to have a significant long term impact on American society, both through the number of children they produce and through the quality of children they produce. By having more children than their non-Christian numbers, Quiverfull families anticipate Christians outnumbering non-Christians within a few hundred years. By having better quality children—better educated and more strongly committed to their religious tradition—they will also have a slow Christianizing effect on American culture over the same time period. This transformative objective is often heard among Quiverfull elites (the key teachers and writers of the movement), who cast the vision for Quiverfull laity. The objective of transformation is somewhat counter-intuitive given the abovementioned concern for faithful witness. Being a Christian witness is entirely unrelated to efficacy—that is, what the witness accomplishes. Being a witness requires faithfulness only, regardless of the consequences. But, the objective of cultural and social transformation is

\textsuperscript{64} Of course, one’s evaluation of the Quiverfull witness will vary depending upon one’s location and tradition.
very much dependent upon the matter of efficacy. Therefore, another criterion for evaluating Quiverfull discourse will be whether or not Quiverfull lived religion is capable of accomplishing what they want it to accomplish.  

To sum up, then, the following project will make use of ethnography in a way that is best described as theological reflection on ethnography. I will use ethnographic research to help render the Quiverfull lived religion more intelligible, especially in light of evangelical history and the general tendencies of evangelical theology. Moreover, my theological evaluation of the Quiverfull movement will be based first on my concerns as a scholar formed within evangelicalism. In addition, I will be considering how Quiverfull practitioners fulfill (or struggle to fulfill) their stated objectives to be a witness to the world and a catalyst for transformation of the world. In that respect, the criticism will be focused on those areas where Quiverfull theology and practice works against their stated goals.

VII. The Thesis and Structure of this Project

Although the dissertation that follows will cover a lot of terrain, it advances one primary thesis: Despite the apparent strangeness of their lived religion, the Quiverfull movement in America is both thoroughly evangelical and American. What they offer in their family-focused vision for Christian life is far from counter-cultural, but part and parcel of the American culture they seek to stand against. That is to say, “they” are very much a part of “us.” As such, the Quiverfull movement serves as an illuminating case

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On this matter of transformation, I have been influenced by James Davison Hunter’s critique of evangelicalism in *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
study of the weaknesses and blind spots of evangelical and American cultural conceptions of the family.

To advance the above thesis, the following project is arranged into seven chapters. In Chapter 1, I tell the story of American evangelicals as it pertains to gender, the family, and education, from the Victorian period to the present day. This narrative shows that the Quiverfull movement did not emerge “out of nowhere,” but is an organic part of the story of evangelicalism in America. Thus, the Quiverfull movement is a contemporary intensification of longstanding evangelical tendencies going all the way back to the 19th Century.

In Chapter 2, I offer a close examination of the Quiverfull movement as a contemporary religious and cultural phenomenon. I suggest that Quiverfull can be helpfully understood as 1) a discourse of practices, 2) a subculture of evangelicalism, and, borrowing from Robert Wuthnow, 3) a transdenominational special purpose group. As a subculture, Quiverfull has elite and lay levels, both of which are important to giving the Quiverfull movement its theological and practical cohesion. Also, the Quiverfull movement, like evangelicalism in general, is characterized by constant conflict and debate. Following the introduction of these interpretive lenses, I provide an overview of the major Quiverfull cultural producers at the elite and lay levels.

In Chapter 3, I present the findings of two years of ethnographic research with Quiverfull mothers. The mothers I chose vary in age, class, and experience, so their stories offer outsiders a better sense of the variety within the Quiverfull subculture. Quiverfull mothers are not the monolithic automatons that some journalistic accounts have mistakenly suggested. The insight these mothers provide into the way Quiverfull
discourse works on the ground offer vital material for the theological reflection in the chapters that follow. Perhaps more than anything else, the stories of Renee, Carley, and Deborah reveal the contextual give-and-take that occurs even within the often very prescribed notions of Christian faithfulness in Quiverfull discourse.

Drawing on the historical narrative of Chapter 1, the cultural analysis of Chapter 2, and the ethnographic data summarized in Chapter 3, Chapters 4-6 address the key themes of mothers/motherhood, children/childhood, and the family. Each chapter will do two things simultaneously: explore the ethnographic data more deeply and reflect theologically on those findings. The discussions found in Chapters 4-6 will reveal in their own ways the extent to which Quiverfull practitioners are distinct from and similar to their American neighbors. Chapter 4 considers in some depth the imagination and practice of motherhood within the Quiverfull movement. While their practice of motherhood is ideologically antifeminist, it displays a complicated and conflicting relationship with patriarchy. Moreover, the experience of vulnerability that is a normal part of human motherhood is exacerbated in Quiverfull families, where the mother is almost perpetually pregnant, nursing, and caring for others.

Chapter 5 considers the Quiverfull view of children and childhood. Quiverfull families stand out due to their emphasis on children as a blessing. Like many in Christian history, they see children as both sinners and innocents. But, of particular concern is the fact that they are prone to seeing children as adults-in-the-making, rather than full human beings in their own right, and the private responsibility of parents in the nuclear family. Both of these perspectives are widespread assumptions of American society and work against their desire to create an alternative way of life that is a witness to and effective
transformer of American culture. Moreover, their view of children can have the effect of disconnecting of child rearing practices from broader communities and systems of support and thereby increasing the vulnerability of children within Quiverfull homes.

In Chapter 6, I explore closely the Quiverfull discourse of the nuclear family. As in previous chapters, we discover that the Quiverfull vision of the family intensifies the general American privatization of the family. This often results in familial isolation. Also, because the Quiverfull movement reifies the nuclear family, they often construct it as a sinless space, which can serve to occlude abuse and neglect in the home. This has sometimes-treacherous consequences for Quiverfull women and their children. Also, their family-focused Christianity often leads to the theological and practical eclipse of the church. Lacking an ecclesial context for understanding the family’s purpose and work, the Quiverfull family can become an inward-looking, self-interested institution that replicates the privatized pattern of life all around them.

Finally, in Chapter 7, the project’s conclusion, I bring all of these strands of thought together in support of the thesis already outlined in broad strokes above. I conclude by arguing that Quiverfull families are responding to the challenges facing the family in the contemporary American context with a solution (the Quiverfull discourse) that is both distinctly evangelical and American. Quiverfull families, like many other cultural commentators today, look to the re-ordering of the private sphere to resolve what are fundamentally systemic and cultural problems. In so doing, they evidence some of the persistent tensions of American evangelical religion, especially the persistent problem of modern American individualism. That is to say, Quiverfull subculture represents an extreme instantiation of broader, mainstream American tendencies. Therefore, Quiverfull
women and their families should be seen as a manifestation of the impasse always faced by American Christians in discussions of the family: an eclipse of the communal and public by a focus on the individual and private. Ultimately, Quiverfull women and their families make it clear that evangelicals ultimately lack the theological tools to fashion a constructive answer to the “crisis of the family” and will need to reach beyond the bounds of evangelical theology and the private home to do so.

VIII. A Final Word

As I write this introduction one of my key informants is giving birth to her seventh child. Although my primary posture in this project is that of a researcher, I can’t help but be preoccupied with concern for her wellbeing. This pregnancy, like the past few, has been difficult and her health somewhat fragile. I am worried about her: I hope she and the baby will be all right. My distractedness is an important reminder, however, that this kind of research can never be conducted in a thoroughly detached way. Even though I have sought to maintain a degree of objectivity, I cannot deny that this project engages my heart in a way that other research does not. I suspect that this has much to do with our shared faith as Christians and our shared experience as mothers. Our lives are very different, but we also have much in common. All this is to say, I have come to care about the women whose lives are explored in the chapters that follow. I hope that the women I have been privileged to know will be able to recognize themselves in these pages. And I hope they know that I am forever grateful for their transparency and friendship.
CHAPTER 1

THE QUIVERFULL MOVEMENT IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

I. Introduction

About midway through the writing of this project, I presented some of my findings at a national historical conference. Although I received mostly positive feedback from those in attendance, one evangelical scholar was visibly perturbed by my presentation. As he explained his grievances to me and everyone else in the room, it became clear that this scholar did not have a problem with what I said, but what I didn’t say. He did not think that had been careful enough to distinguish the members of the Quiverfull movement from other evangelicals. In fact, he viewed Quiverfull proponents as completely beyond the pale of evangelicalism. Although he did not say so explicitly, the crux of the my colleague’s consternation was that I had made “them” look too much like “us.”

At the time, I did not have the chance to respond adequately to my colleague’s concerns. But, with the benefit of hindsight, I feel compelled to acknowledge that his criticism is not without foundation. I did not make an effort to carefully distinguish between Quiverfull practitioners and evangelicals as a whole. The truth is, I am not convinced that there is a significant difference between them. In terms of daily practice, there is no doubt that a Quiverfull family looks and behaves differently than most of their
evangelical neighbors. For many, this distinction is intentional. But, there is no getting around the fact that Quiverfull families are evangelicals, theologically, politically, and culturally. Indeed, when you view the Quiverfull movement into the context of American evangelical history, the similarities overshadow and outweigh the differences. My evangelical colleague looks at Quiverfull and sees a bizarre aberration within evangelical Christianity in America. I look at Quiverfull and see a movement that is both thoroughly American and evangelical.

The following chapter takes up the task of explaining the emergence of the Quiverfull movement within American evangelicalism. To that end, I will provide a narrative of evangelical history in the United States through the lens of three themes: gender relations (principally in the institution of marriage), the family, and education. To lay the groundwork, I begin with a consideration of Kathryn Joyce’s journalistic investigation, *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement*, which is the first representation of the Quiverfull movement published thus far. Then, I review the much-contested subject of how to define “evangelical” and “evangelicalism,” as well as the best frameworks through which to construct their history in America. Then, with these preliminary matters settled, I offer an account of the evangelical story in America that focuses principally on the themes of gender, the family, and education. We will begin in the Victorian period and end in the early 1990s. We shall see that the Quiverfull movement, while by no means an inevitable development, is very much a contemporary inheritor of the evangelical story in America.

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66 Of course, an exhaustive history remains beyond the purview of this project, but I will draw on a number of important historians to provide the background for the appearance of Quiverfull.
II. Kathryn Joyce’s Quiverfull

Kathryn Joyce, a feminist journalist, was the first to offer a consideration of “Quiverfull” families as a defined movement within American evangelicalism. She published, Quiverfull, her investigation into the “Christian patriarchy movement” with Beacon Press in 2009. Joyce’s consideration of the Quiverfull movement was the first of its kind, targeting the gender and family ideology of Quiverfull leaders and tracing their connections to mainstream evangelicalism, multiple organizations and ministries, as well as public policy groups and political activists. Although panned by conservative evangelicals and Quiverfull proponents alike, Joyce’s work was well received and positively reviewed outside of evangelicalism. It was also the source of a number of Internet and print articles on the same topic.

Joyce’s book is important because it is the first to pinpoint Quiverfull families within evangelicalism as a distinct group worthy of careful consideration. Although she

70 Other authors have included discussions of Quiverfull in their works, particularly demographers interested in the proliferation of fundamentalist pronatalist movements. But, none of these authors offer new information on the Quiverfull movement, but draw on Joyce’s work to make their arguments. See, for example, Monica Duffy Toft, “Wombfare: The Religious and Political Dimensions of Fertility and Demographic Change,” in Political Demography (eds. Jack A. Goldstone, Eric P. Kaufmann, Monica Duffy Toft; Boulder/London: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 213-225; Eric Kaufmann, “A Full Quiver:
discusses Quiverfull proponents within the context of evangelical gender ideology, she rightly identifies them as something relatively new and distinct from the evangelical mainstream. Due to the groundbreaking nature of Joyce’s work, it is appropriate to begin our historical survey with the first book-length treatment of the subject. In what follows, I will summarize the content of Joyce’s book chapter by chapter. Then, I will explain what I consider to be the most valuable elements from her work, as well as the trajectories that her study presents for further investigation.

Joyce’s book is narrative in style and organized into three parts. Each of the parts focuses on the women within the “Christian patriarchy movement” as wives, mothers, and daughters, respectively. The chapters within these three parts are loosely organized around a common theme, organization, person(s), or concern (i.e., the teaching of controversial couple Michael and Debi Pearl or the Quiverfull interest in demography). Joyce draws her material from a variety of sources, including interviews, participant observation at retreats and conferences, magazines, books, pamphlets, and a variety of Internet sources like blogs and online forums. Although Joyce has her own perspective on the coherence and plausibility of the Quiverfull way of life, she does not share much about her personal point of view. Instead, in journalistic style, her prose is mostly


71 Upon its publication, Nathan Finn criticized Kathryn Joyce’s book, Quiverfull, for not sufficiently differentiating between Quiverfull families and complementarian evangelical families. He says, “Joyce simplistically lumps almost all complementarians into one camp, thus missing the nuance among those who claim to hold to traditional Christian views of marriage and family” (Finn, “Complementarian Caricature,” 48-49). Despite this critique, Joyce explicitly acknowledges that not all (or even most) supporters of Christian patriarchy are practitioners of the Quiverfull lifestyle. Some evangelicals may affirm a form of male headship, support wifely submission, choose to homeschool their children, and may even have large families, yet they would not qualify as Quiverfull because they do not eschew family planning. Still, Joyce never establishes how one differentiates between evangelicals that affirm patriarchy and evangelicals who are Quiverfull.
descriptive, only becoming more self-referential toward the end. Joyce does not offer any theoretical or critical approach to the Quiverfull discourse other than to occasionally express her dismay at a particular experience or teaching. Thus, her book is not a theoretical engagement with Quiverfull theology and practice, but an informative interpretation of the Quiverfull movement based upon her journalistic research.

Part One, “Wives,” is essentially an exploration of biblical patriarchy as preached, taught, and practiced within conservative evangelicalism. She begins in Chapter 1 with the teaching of Douglas Phillips, then president of Vision Forum Ministries and Vision Forum Inc., and uses his rhetoric to introduce the biblical texts employed by patriarchy proponents to support wifely submission and male headship. Then, in Chapter 2, she points to feminism as a key “rallying point” for conservative and orthodox believers across the spectrum of American Christianity, citing influential books on biblical manhood and womanhood, as well as telling the story of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, which was started in 1987 to take on the feminist threat in evangelicalism. Next, she spends two chapters exploring the theological roots of “biblical patriarchy” in Reformed theology as expressed in the work of R.J. Rushdoony and Reconstructionism (a.k.a., Dominionism), Albert Mohler, Jr. and other conservative Southern Baptists, as well as proponents of “muscular” Christianity, such as Mark Driscoll, then pastor of Mars Hill Church. In Chapter 5, Joyce discusses prominent teachers of wifely submission using both published materials and interviews with a number of influential women, including Nancy Campbell, Mary Pride, Martha Peace, and Nancy Leigh DeMoss. Then, in Chapter 6, Joyce offers a journalistic account of her

72 Interestingly, Joyce does not explain to her readers what Quiverfull proponents and evangelicals mean by the terms “feminist” and “feminism.”
participation in a Titus 2 women’s mentoring event in Clarksville, TN as a living instantiation of the wifely submission discourse. In Chapter 7, Joyce presents the controversial teaching of Michael and Debi Pearl who advocate total submission of the wife, even in cases of abuse, and the wife’s constant “sexual availability” to her husband.\(^{73}\) This leads into a discussion of domestic abuse in Chapter 8 and the conservative women within evangelicalism seeking to temper the patriarchal discourse in a way that protects women. Finally, she concludes Part One with an extended discussion of the influential organization, Vision Forum, and its partnering teachers, as well as a long narrative detailing the story of one couple’s falling in and falling out with then VF president, Douglas Phillips.

In Part Two, “Mothers,” Joyce hone in on the heart of the Quiverfull “belief system”: women’s choice to eschew all forms of family planning in order to receive all pregnancies as gifts of a sovereign God. Chapter 11 introduces the pronatalist movement by orienting readers to the most prominent Quiverfull teachers and networks, while also revealing the pronatalist public policy advocates who are seeking to promote similar ideology in the public sphere. In Chapter 12, Joyce introduces one of the earliest critics of contraception among Protestants, lay theologian Charles Provan, along with his belief that the Christian woman’s submission to childbearing is proof of her salvation. Chapter 13 explores the latter point further by introducing Quiverfull writers like Rachel Scott and Nancy Campbell, whose promotion of and faith in the power of the womb and children to bring revival to America “approaches mystical proportions.”\(^{74}\)

\(^{73}\) Joyce is right to set the Pearls apart from the rest because their teaching is by no means widely accepted. Even among Quiverfull families, the Pearls are a matter of controversy. We will be discussing the Pearls in more detail in the chapters that follow.

\(^{74}\) Joyce, *Quiverfull*, 158.
and 15 further explores the supporters of the pronatalist cause, first at the level of grassroots believers and then at the level of public policy in the work of Phillip Longman and Allan Carlson, both of whom use demographic data to encourage large families and a return to agrarianism. Chapters 16, 17, and 18 continue with the demographic theme, as Joyce shows the many links between fundamentalist patriarchy and the emphasis on winning the American culture wars through “militant fecundity.”\textsuperscript{75} Part Two ends with the story of one woman, Cheryl Lindsey Seelhoff, who “exited” the Quiverfull movement and draws on her testimony to shed light on Quiverfull’s darker side of poverty and abuse.

Part Three, “Daughters,” is composed of only one chapter: “Victory through Daughters.” It appears that Joyce places this chapter at the end of the book in order to draw the reader’s attention to the as-yet-unrealized affect the nascent Quiverfull movement will have on women and girls in the future. Indeed, the content of Chapter 20 is arguably the most disturbing of the book. Joyce introduces the teaching of Anna Sofia and Elizabeth Botkin, daughters of Geoffrey Botkin, a leading voice in the movement. In a book written when they were teenagers, the sisters teach that a daughter’s submission to her father is preparation for her submission to her future husband. Joyce also brings to the forefront the educational philosophy of teachers like R.C. Sproul, Jr., who focuses upon training daughters for their “dominion” over the domestic realm, rather than focusing on their grasp of mathematics or reading. Joyce observes that Quiverfull teachers understand that persuading girls to embrace their vision of girlhood is key to the success of the movement. She introduces readers to the blogs, books, toys, and other materials used by Quiverfull teachers to indoctrinate girls into the ideology of “beautiful girlhood.” This

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 179.
ideology includes an emphasis on purity, male protection, submission, denial of self, and looking forward to becoming mothers that bring about “multigenerational faithfulness” through childbearing and homeschooling.\textsuperscript{76}

It is clear from this brief overview that Joyce’s book covers a lot of ground. As an informative journalistic account, her work is immensely valuable in and of itself. Yet, there are two specific aspects of Joyce’s book that are particularly helpful for someone seeking to contextualize the Quiverfull movement historically and culturally. First, she understands and takes seriously the persuasive symbolic power of the movement among evangelicals. Joyce writes,

Quiverfull is not yet a large movement. The number of families who have committed themselves wholly to the Quiverfull path doesn’t represent any pollster’s idea of a key demographic. But the movement is nonetheless significant for representing an ideal family structure that many conservatives reference as a counterexample when they condemn modern society. Not every family has to be Quiverfull in the sense of having eight children for the movement to make an impact.\textsuperscript{77}

Even though Quiverfull families represent a small subgroup within evangelicalism, evangelicals take “the family” very seriously in their lived religion and there is no doubt that Quiverfull families are an instantiation of what many evangelicals would say is the ideal family. The Quiverfull women, in particular, are an embodiment of what many evangelicals believe is the ideal of Christian womanhood: stay at home moms, open to bearing many children, focused on discipleship, and submissive to their husbands. While conservative evangelicals are prone to strongly criticize those perceived as being more “liberal,” they remain quite happy to support those who take the Bible more literally and apply it more stringently than they do. As a result, some evangelical

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 229.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 171.
leaders are pointing toward the Quiverfull way of life—particularly their openness to many children and commitment to homeschooling—as an example worth honoring and emulating. Joyce is right, therefore, to point out the symbolic appeal of Quiverfull families within an evangelical milieu that strongly values (at least rhetorically) the way of life they represent. It is the deep symbolic resonance of the movement within the broader evangelical subculture that, among other things, points us toward the need for contextualization. Moreover, the persuasiveness of the Quiverfull symbolism suggests that their practice of the family is a direction in which more “conservative” evangelicals are likely to move in the future.

Another important strength of Joyce’s work is that she has demonstrated for researchers the fact that the Quiverfull movement is not simply an anti-feminist or pronatalist discourse, although these are arguably the more prominent features. Instead, Quiverfull represents an overlapping amalgam of discourses that includes antifeminism, gender hierarchy, pronatalism, homeschooling, “family integrated church,” homesteading, and revisionist history. Although Joyce does not pursue the relationship

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79 This is particularly true among evangelicals within the Reformed tradition. Reformed leaders are showing a public friendliness to the movement and Reformed-oriented blogs have begun to publish material very much in line with Quiverfull teaching regarding contraception, children, and motherhood. I also conducted interviews with at least two Reformed subjects who, while not adopting the Quiverfull label, happily espouse Quiverfull ideology. All of this together suggests to me that a further rightward shift may be in progress among Reformed evangelicals, motivated at least in part by the persuasive symbolic power of the Quiverfull family as presented in their literature and media.
between these discourses in a substantive way, the broad scope of her narrative draws together the many strands of the Quiverfull subculture and pinpoints the key teachers, organizations, practices, and theological commitments that hold it all together. By calling attention to each of these elements, Joyce demarcates multiple areas worthy of further research.

Along with these strengths, however, Joyce’s book has a number of limitations. First, Joyce uncritically employs the language of “movement,” suggesting that Quiverfull families are part of a growing social movement, rather than simply a curious subculture within evangelicalism. Although this may, in fact, be the case, the categorization of Quiverfull as a social movement is a contested sociological point that needs to be considered more critically. This leads to the related and logically prior question of what exactly constitutes a Quiverfull family, anyway. What qualifies a family for the label “Quiverfull”? There are other religious groups that refuse to utilize family planning and practice “male headship.” The Amish and certain groups within Catholicism come to mind. What makes Quiverfull families different from other groups, which are living out the same basic commitments? These two points—the identity of Quiverfull families (as distinct from other families) and their relationship to each other (movement or subculture?)—are fundamental analytical matters that merit serious consideration.

Second, Joyce’s study is primarily focused upon the elites of the Quiverfull subculture, with the bulk of her attention paid to leaders, organizational heads, and...
published authors. Although the research she has provided on these aspects of the subculture is vitally important, much remains to be done to consider the lives of Quiverfull families on the ground, who operate at a great distance from the elite proponents of their way of life. Sociologists Christian Smith and Sally Gallagher, for example, have argued through their research among evangelicals that the lived experience of believers at the grassroots level often differs markedly from the rhetoric presented at the elite level. Both in terms of rhetoric and practice, Smith and Gallagher have found that very often, evangelical Christians on the ground do not evidence the same level of dogmatism and zeal as the elite spokespersons who appear in public media, publish books, and speak at conferences. The distinction between the elite and lay levels of the Quiverfull movement is a matter in need of further exploration.

Finally, because it is a journalistic narrative, Quiverfull cannot provide sustained attention to history, culture, and theology that is needed for a thorough consideration of the movement. The limitations of her methodology prevent Joyce from providing a broader historical context for the emergence of the Quiverfull discourse within late twentieth century evangelicalism. She rightly views Quiverfull families as possessing ideological continuity with evangelical subculture, but work remains to be done on the historical development of the movement. Furthermore, Joyce focuses primarily upon the gender ideology, choosing to frame Quiverfull subculture as the “Christian patriarchy movement.” Without denying that gender hierarchy is key to Quiverfull practice, I want to point to the centrality of homeschooling as a practice within these families, as well.

81 To be fair, Joyce does provide information gathered from a number of ordinary Quiverfull women, but they are certainly not the focus of her work.
Indeed, I suggest that conservative Christian homeschooling is the “umbrella” movement and Quiverfull families operate within the networks and organizations established by homeschooling. Within that social context, Quiverfull subculture exists at the intersection of three major discourses: homeschooling, pronatalism, and gender hierarchy. (More reflection and explanation of these discourses will be provided in Chapter 2.) Finally, Joyce’s journalistic approach rules out attention to the theological issues at work in and emerging from Quiverfull subculture. As an intentional, theologically driven instantiation of the family, Quiverfull practice engages multiple theological issues, all of which offer fruitful locations to think theologically about the Christian family in contemporary American life.

At the end of Christel Manning’s review of *Quiverfull*, she came to the following conclusion: “When all is said and done, we still do not fully understand the Christian patriarchy movement.”\(^3\) Without undermining the great value in Joyce’s work, I have to agree with Manning. In what follows, therefore, I begin a broader and deeper discussion of the Quiverfull movement that attends to historical, cultural, and theological studies. I begin with a narrative of evangelical history in matters central to Quiverfull discourse so as to show how Quiverfull families fit into the larger story. Before that narrative can commence, however, it is important to establish the terms and frameworks I intend to utilize along the way.

III. Terms and Frameworks: The Challenge of Evangelical History

Telling the story of evangelicals in America is complicated by the slippery nature both of evangelicalism (and evangelicals) as a subject and the relationship of evangelicals

\(^3\) Manning, “Quiverfull,” 377.
to the wider American culture. First, it is important to recognize that defining
“evangelical” and “evangelicalism” has been a notorious problem for scholars. Much ink
has been spilled over the proper historical and theological understanding of these two
words. Donald Dayton has called evangelicalism an “essentially contested concept” and
even suggests doing away with it altogether. While Dayton makes a fair case for his
approach, there is no getting around the fact that evangelical is a widely used term that
retains usefulness, particularly in historical studies of Protestantism in America.

My use of “evangelical” draws on historian David Bebbington’s well-regarded
approach, which locates the roots of evangelicalism in the pietist revivalist movements of
Britain and North America following the Protestant Reformation. Bebbington proposes
four key traits of evangelicals that include the following: 1) belief in conversion or
changed lives, 2) belief in the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Bible, 3) activism
through evangelism (proselytizing) and missions (proselytizing in other cultures), 4)
crucicentrism or the belief that Christ’s death is central to the salvation of humankind.
The difficulty with this definition, of course, is that these four ingredients do not
necessarily simplify the task of locating and discussing evangelicalism. Rather, they
identify for researchers a vast swath of churches, societies, networks, publishing houses,
books and periodicals, practices and rituals, beliefs and values, and other cultural items,
which share a common kinship. Still, Bebbington’s approach has become a standard

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84 Donald W. Dayton, “Some Doubts about the Usefulness of the Category ‘Evangelical,’” in The
of Tennessee Press, 1991), 245. For more on the problem of defining evangelicalism (and fundamentalism),
see George Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,
1990), 66-68, 100-101.

85 David Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s
(London/New York: Routledge, 1989), 1-17. See also, Mark Noll, The Rise of Evangelicalism (A History
of Evangelicalism Series; Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 17-20.
way of discussing evangelicalism and we will rely on this broad understanding of the subject for the following history.

Bebbington’s approach to the definition of evangelicalism is helped by Molly Worthen’s recent historical contribution in *Apostles of Reason*. In her study, Worthen proposes that the evangelical story is a story about the crisis of authority, one that has been shaped by three unresolved problems: how to reconcile faith and reason; how to know Jesus; and how to act publicly on faith in a post-Christendom society. Worthen’s focus on the questions with which evangelicals are engaged provides a more three dimensional approach to evangelical identity. I would add to her list of unresolved tensions, the matter raised by Margaret Bendroth in her book on *Fundamentalism and Gender*: the impulse toward egalitarianism vs. the impulse to gender hierarchy. More than simply a group of people who hold to Bebbington’s four traits, therefore, evangelicals are also persons engaged in the unresolved tensions over faith and reason, the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the public work of Christians in a pluralistic world, and egalitarian and hierarchical approaches to gender.

How does this understanding of evangelicals differ from fundamentalists? In my estimation, the simple answer is not much. Evangelicals and fundamentalists share many of the same assumptions and traits outlined above and engage in many of the same arguments about authority, faith and reason, and political engagement. Generally speaking, though, “fundamentalist” is best understood as a more narrow historical term referring to a coalition of conservative Protestants that distinguished themselves in the late nineteenth century due to their rejection of modernist influences in the church and

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academy. Historic fundamentalists were principally focused on the interpretation of scripture and the veracity of the miraculous elements of the Christian tradition. Eventually, a group calling themselves “neo-evangelicals” emerged from post-WWII fundamentalism and tried to broaden its cultural appeal through intellectual engagement. Still, these “neo-evangelicals” and the “evangelicals” who followed them did not differ markedly from their fundamentalist forbears except in their pursuit of more widespread cultural influence. The emphases and expressions of historic fundamentalism (e.g., biblical inerrancy, gender hierarchy, and moralism) have been very influential in American evangelicalism as a whole, such that distinguishing the two today is a matter of serious debate. Still, it must be acknowledged that most evangelicals today eschew the label “fundamentalist” due to its negative connotations. Therefore, I have opted in this project to speak of “evangelicals” (and “evangelicalism”) unless I am speaking of historic fundamentalists in the early 20th Century, both because the term evangelical is preferred by most insiders and because the term is broader, maintaining the link between today’s evangelicals and the pietist revivalist movements of the 18th and 19th Centuries.

Besides the identification of evangelicals and evangelicalism, it is also important to recognize the complications involved in discussing the relationship between evangelicals and American culture. While both evangelicals and their critics have often made much of the disparities, recent sociologists of religion, perhaps none more so than Christian Smith, have helped us to see that evangelicals are thoroughly embedded in American culture even as they are in constant negotiation with it. Smith’s “subcultural identity” theory of religious strength allows us to recognize that evangelicalism is a subculture at once “embattled and thriving.” That is to say, evangelicalism has thrived in
the US because it “possesses and employs the cultural tools needed to create both clear
distinction from and significant engagement and tension with” the rest of American
culture, “short of becoming genuinely countercultural.” As we shall see, this existence
of “embattled and thriving” has been a hallmark of evangelical subculture throughout the
interconnected histories of their gender and family norms, approach to schooling, and use
of communication technology. That is to say, in each of these areas, there are ways in
which evangelicals exhibit commonalities with American culture and there are ways in
which evangelicals differentiate themselves from the same. And the way that these
negotiations take place is not always predictable.

New historians of evangelicalism affirm this basic approach to framing the
evangelical story. For example, Paul Boyer’s work on evangelicalism highlights the
complexity of evangelicals’ relationship to modernity and American culture. He states,
“Culturally, evangelicalism has crucially influenced the secular world, while at the same
time modernity in its varies manifestations has impinged on the evangelical realm,
sometimes in ways that make this subculture seem almost a mirror image of the larger
world beyond.” Axel R. Schäfer follows the same line of thinking in his book

Countercultural Conservatives, where he claims that “modern conservative Protestantism
was characterized less by the effort to assert fixed traditional moral and theological
concepts than by the attempt to reconcile conflicting impulses. Christians conservatives,
though often regarded as staunch traditionalists, were both remarkably modern and

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87 Christian Smith, American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving (Chicago and London:
88 Paul S. Boyer, “Back to the Future: Contemporary Evangelicalism in Perspective,” in American
remarkably worldly.”

It is in the negotiation between the traditional and worldly poles, on a vast number of matters from theology to gender to new media, that evangelicalism has been formed as a subculture in the American context. The following history will aim to keep this crucial aspect of evangelical identity in the forefront of the discussion.

IV. An Overview of Gender, Family, and Schooling in American Evangelicalism

In the Introduction, I suggested that the Quiverfull subculture exists at the intersection of three major discourses: homeschooling, pronatalism, and gender hierarchy. Thus, in order to contextualize the Quiverfull subculture properly, we need a broad narrative of evangelicalism that takes into consideration the development of evangelical gender and family ideology and the story of evangelicals and schooling in the US. Many historians and sociologists of religion have documented these narratives individually, but in what follows I will attempt to bring these strands together. We start in the Victorian period because most historians agree that American evangelicals are deeply beholden to Victorian notions of gender and domesticity in their contemporary discourse. For the sake of clarity, I have divided the following narrative is into discreet

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90 A fuller discussion of the term “subculture” and how I am using in this project will be provided in Chapter 2.

91 What follows by necessity entails some summation, drawing on the work of scholars who have devoted considerable time and energy to more elaborate and in-depth studies of the same topics. The reader is referred to the footnotes for sources that provide a fuller and more nuanced picture of the matters described.

92 In fact, Colleen McDannell claims that even the fairly recent development of homeschooling has roots in Victorian “domestic Christianity.” She argues, “To understand fundamentalism’s impact on both American society and religion, we must recognize that conservative fascination with the home is not merely a result of political choices. It is rooted in a long tradition of Protestant domestic Christianity, articulated by Victorian ministers, novelists, reformers, and theologians. As with their Victorian counterparts, contemporary Christians understand the creation of an alternative Christian culture as beginning in the home” (Colleen McDannell, “Creating the Christian Home: Home Schooling in
time periods, but the reader must keep in mind that these are not rigid, disconnected units. Once the historical context for Quiverfull families has been explained, Chapter 2 can take up the task of analyzing the Quiverfull movement as a discourse, subculture, and special purpose group.

A. 1820-1875: *The Self-Made Man, the True Woman, and the Victorian Family*

From the time of the Revolution through the Jacksonian era, American evangelicals went through significant transformation. The most important of these transformations was their demographic ascendency. In the words of Mark Noll, “Protestantism boomed in the early United States, and the Protestant bodies that led the way were the most militantly evangelical churches.”

During and after the period often called the Second Great Awakening (c. 1790-1820), the “old guard” Calvinism that had reigned prior to and immediately after the American Revolution was shuttered in favor of reviveralist style worship and preaching, with an emphasis on human freedom and personal holiness. Almost all American denominations saw an increase in adherents during this period, but it was the reviveralist evangelicals that saw the most growth. Although by no means homogenous in their theology and practice, by 1860 the vast majority of American congregations were evangelical. Whether Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Friends, or Restorationist “Christians,” all of them enjoined their


95 According to many historians it is only at this time after the American Revolution that the American population could be referred to as largely Christian.
neighbors to put their faith in Jesus Christ as God’s Savior for the world and look to God’s unique revelation in the Bible for life orientation and instruction.\textsuperscript{96}

i. Evangelicals Embrace Dual Spheres and Gender Hierarchy

As evangelicals increased in number, historians suggest that their relationship with the surrounding American culture became ever warmer. John Bartkowski argues that as the philosophy of John Locke and other Enlightenment thinkers saturated the new republic’s social imagination,\textsuperscript{97} the egalitarian impulses within evangelicalism underwent significant change. The patriarchal structure of Locke’s “dual spheres” and a delineated “chain of duties” between husbands and wives (as well as parents and children, masters and servants) took hold in evangelical families. A new commitment to “highly ordered family relations” took center stage as evangelicals began to view the well-ordered family as key to the health of both the church and the nation.\textsuperscript{98}

The centrality of hierarchy in the male-female relationship was not always the norm for evangelicals. Susan Juster has shown that New England Baptist communities in the pre-Revolutionary era functioned in stark contrast to their Puritan neighbors by rejecting social stratification and gender inequality in the church.\textsuperscript{99} The focus of these revivalist evangelicals upon the individual’s direct relationship with God and their employment of ecstatic worship style resulted in egalitarian ecclesial practices where

\textsuperscript{96} Noll, \textit{America’s God}, 170-171.


women held governing positions and preached at church gatherings.\textsuperscript{100} Even though revivalists still gendered religion in feminine terms (because of the prevailing belief that women were naturally more feelings-oriented, sensuous, and disorderly), Juster sees in these early evangelical communities a “significant widening of women’s sphere of authority within the church.”\textsuperscript{101} Yet, with the American Revolution and the mainstreaming of evangelical religion, the egalitarian impulses in evangelicalism were tamed and brought more fully into alignment with American cultural ideals. In Bartkowski’s words, “In short, the egalitarian impulse within evangelicalism gave way in large part to a patriarchal family structure. And, although evangelical churches had previously concerned themselves with winning souls, it was now the family…that became elevated in status in the eyes of evangelical leadership.”\textsuperscript{102}

Thus, Bartkowski posits of evangelicals two general poles, or tendencies, within their gender ideology. On the one hand, evangelical biblicism and commitment to a rational faith tends to produce an ordered gender hierarchy, which places the husband as the head of the wife and the wife as his subordinate. On the other hand, the evangelical emphasis on conversion and life transformation tends to produce a flattening of hierarchy due to the “priesthood of all believers,” each of whom is thought to be equally filled with and gifted by the Holy Spirit. Similarly, Noll differentiates between formalist and antiformalist evangelicals, with the formalists being more committed to rationalism and order and the antiformalists being more revivalist and experientially oriented. As one

\textsuperscript{100} Mark Noll quotes Catherine Brekus, who acknowledges that in the intensity of revival, the differences between men and women could recede: “The gendered self became meaningless at the moment of union with Christ” (Catherine Brekus, Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845 [Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998], 42; quoted by Noll, America’s God, 178).

\textsuperscript{101} Juster, Disorderly Women, 44.

might expect, the evangelical poles on gender tend to break down along formalist and antiformalist lines. Still, due to the inherent tensions within evangelical theology, we must recognize that the dominant evangelical gender discourse in the Victorian period (and up to the present) contains fundamental tensions over which evangelicals are constantly arguing and within which evangelical men and women are continually maneuvering.

What did the highly ordered gender hierarchy of post-Revolutionary evangelicals look like? The answer is, a lot like that of the dominant American middle class. Put simply, evangelicals in the Victorian period imagined the male and female ideals in terms of the so-called Self Made Man and the True Woman, each of which occupied a different “sphere.” The Self Made Man occupied the cutthroat sphere of work and politics where he was “freed” from traditional obligations and dependencies in order to pursue his own self-interest as an uninhibited actor in the competitive market. The True Woman occupied the private sphere of hearth and home where she cultivated and guarded Christian moral virtue through her affection, altruism, and dependence. The True Woman’s “work” was sharply demarcated from the Self Made Man’s as she presided over domestic labor in the home and, sometimes, religious charity outside of it. Barbara Welter’s classic essay on “true womanhood,” drawing on countless Victorian women’s magazines and religious literature, has shown that the True Woman was characterized chiefly by the four “cardinal virtues” of piety, purity, submissiveness, and

103 Noll, America’s God, 175-176, 178.
104 Gaither, Homeschool, 34; Coontz, The Way We Never Were, 52.
106 Coontz, The Way We Never Were, 52-53.
domesticity. Welter concludes, “Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife—woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement, or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power.”

It’s important to realize the extent to which the Self Made Man and the True Woman were interdependent. Historian Stephanie Coontz argues: “Self-reliance and independence worked for men because women took care of dependence and obligation. In other words, the liberal theory of human nature and political citizenship did not merely leave women out: it works precisely because it was applied exclusively to half the population. Emotion and compassion could be disregarded in the political and economic realms only if women were assigned these traits in the personal realm.” Coontz goes on to quote the early nineteenth century observation of Alexis de Tocqueville that America had “applied to the sexes the great principle of political economy which governs the manufacturers of our age, by carefully dividing the duties of man from those of women so that the great works of society may be better carried on.”

Moreover, historian Nancy Hewitt argues that Victorians used the “carefully constructed ideal” of the True Woman “to stabilize gender relations in the midst of rapid economic, social, political, and technological change.” In short, white middle-class men of the Jacksonian era entrusted their women with the responsibility of maintaining traditional values of home

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110 It was only the middle class white women of the Victorian period who could be “ladies” and, thereby, the symbol of bourgeois American prosperity. Working women, who made up the lower classes, by definition could not be ladies and fell short of the true woman’s high standards. There is much more that could be said about the dependence of the middle class ideal upon the oppression of lower classes and minorities, but space constraints prevent further elaboration.
and church so that they could embrace secularism and materialism in a rapidly changing society.  

As Coontz argues, Victorian gender dualism led to a romanticization of love and nurturing as uniquely female qualities and the idealization of the family as “the site of altruism” in a society increasingly driven by (male) individualism and market principles. Together, the Self Made Man and the True Woman constructed an idealized family that was private, ordered around affection and loving self-sacrifice, with children entrusted primarily to their mothers for education and character formation. As mothers, True Women were the guardians of private virtue, the “effective teachers of the human race” and “God’s own police” in the benevolent protection of Christian moral principles. Fathers were important in terms of the idealized domestic hierarchy, but their increasing relegation to the public sphere of work and politics in many ways undermined their moral authority in the home. Still, for father and mother, the idealized and sentimentalized home was increasingly important in the Victorian period,

111 Welter, “Cult of True Womanhood,” 151; Hewitt, “Religion, Reform, and Radicalism,” 117. Gerda Lerner has shown that the relegation of the white middle-class woman to the home was the result of increasing wealth, urbanization, industrialization, and professionalization in American society from the colonial period to the 1830s. Indeed, with the social “progress” of American capitalism came the gradual shrinking of “woman’s proper sphere.” For more on this transformation, see Gerda Lerner, “The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson,” in The Majority Finds its Past: Placing Women in History, Second Ed. (Chapel Hill/London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 12.

112 Coontz, The Way We Never Were, 55.
113 Gaither, Homeschool, 34.
114 Daniel Webster, quoted by Gaither, Homeschool, 34.
115 Gaither, Homeschool, 35.
116 Gaither notes that it was during the Victorian period that institutions like family vacations and family-oriented celebrations like the birthday party, Christmas, and Thanksgiving were invented or acquired their contemporary form. This entailed a shift from the community carnival “that often mocked the social order to private, ‘sentimental occasions’ that reinforced it.” Whether or not the family ideal of print media was achieved by most families remains to be seen, but it was certainly the ideal to which all Americans aspired both then and now (Gaither, Homeschool, 35).
especially for evangelicals who looked to the well-ordered private sphere as the primary means of maintaining good, Christian society.

ii. Innocent Children and Domestic Schooling

The Victorian notions of gender and family were strengthened by the emerging American social imagination about children. Following the theological triumph of Arminian “free will” over Calvinist determinism in the Second Great Awakening, children were less often conceived of as innately depraved sinners in need of discipline (the perspective of the older Reformed traditions), and more often seen as precious, innocent gifts from God in need of nurturance and education. Historian Milton Gaither cites, for example, the *New England Primer* of 1760 that contained a foreboding section entitled, “Duty of Children to Parents,” which promised hellfire for disobedient children. Later, however, it was replaced by the “Cradle Hymn” of Isaac Watts, which opens with the sentimental couplet: “Hush my dear, lie still and slumber / Holy angels guard thy bed.” The most popular treatise of the early 1800s, Horace Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture*, emphasized not revival conversion or eternal election for the production of good Christians, but the formative power of good parenting. Within this new mindset, childhood (for middle class families, at least) became a period of formative innocence entrusted to the altruistic mother for cultivation.

Of course, in this convergence of evangelical and Victorian ideals of gender, children, and family, schooling became vital to the formation of children. Education was

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119 Ibid., 30.
to serve the purpose of forming children in Christian virtue and preparing them (mainly boys) for competition in the industrialized world. The goal for Victorian mothers was, in the words of Gaiter, to make of “[e]very moment, every experience…an opportunity for inculcating morality and intelligence into one’s children, not through harangues and lectures but through subtle suasion and example.”\(^{120}\) The most popular books and magazines of the Victorian period were works of domestic advice that attempted to harmonize Protestant Christianity with the works of Locke or Rousseau (and the “new humanitarian sensibility”) on the nature of children.\(^{121}\) Mothers were urged to make a school of the home, both figuratively and literally.

For example, in 1869, Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe explained in *The American Woman’s Home*, “a small church, a school-house, and a comfortable family dwelling may be all united in one building.” The Beecher sisters provided an architectural plan showing a cost-effective way to integrate into one space the locations for worship, education, and domesticity. As Colleen McDannell notes, this spatial imagining of family life was a visible representation of the ideological construction of the family, such that the family served as the central integrated hub for life. The Christian family, presided over by the omni-competent, omni-benevolent wife and mother, would serve as “the grand ministry, as [it was] designed to be, in training our whole race for heaven.”\(^{122}\)

\(^{120}\) *Ibid.*, 37.

\(^{121}\) *Ibid.*, 36.

iii. Summary

To summarize, during the period from 1820 to 1875, helped along by rapid numerical growth as a result of the Second Great Awakening, evangelicals moved from the fringe to the center of the American religious landscape. The rapid increase in the number of evangelical Christians in the US coincided with a swing in evangelical gender norms away from the more egalitarian tendencies of prior generations to a highly ordered family hierarchy with sharply demarcated spheres for men and women. The Self Made Man and the True Woman occupied a thoroughly privatized and idealized home that was supposed to be insulated from the cutthroat, secular sphere of business and politics. In the sentimental space of altruistic affection, innocent children could be nurtured in virtue through the careful and intensive care of good parents. Mothers, with their innate piety, were expected to cultivate a domestic space suitable for family worship and the education of children. The fate of the church and nation rested upon the middle class mother’s ability to maintain her true womanhood and to nurture godly offspring.

Yet, as we will see in the following section, the Victorian era status quo would undergo some major change in the coming decades. Indeed, Victorian norms were slowly undone by a number of economic and social factors. The rise of fundamentalist Protestantism was, in large part, due to the widespread disruption of their gender and family ideals. And, att the same time that they protested modernists and condemned feminists, fundamentalists also embraced public schooling as a means of shoring up their

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123 Bartkowski concludes, “[T]he cultural accommodation of evangelicalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries led to the gradual convergence of evangelical and Victorian gender ideals. In fact, the cultural dominance of Victorian gender norms was accompanied by the rise to prominence of evangelical religion in America: the ‘upstart’ evangelical sects of the eighteenth century had effectively moved, during the course of the nineteenth century, from the cultural periphery to the religious mainstream” (Bartkowski, Remaking the Godly Marriage, 23).
vision of the American family. We will explore this period of upheaval and change in the next section.

B. 1875-1930: The Demise of Victorianism, the Rise of Fundamentalism, and the Ascent of Public Schools

i. The Decline of the Self Made Man and Rise of the Activist True Woman

For many reasons, the evangelical and Victorian convergence on gender and the family began to decline by the end of the nineteenth century. Bartkowski, drawing on the work of Betty DeBerg, suggests three reasons for the change. First, major economic transformations, especially the shift from cottage industries to corporate capitalism, gradually undermined the Victorian ideal of the Self Made Man. In DeBerg’s words, “Manly work in one’s own shop, office, vehicle, or factory gave way to employment in bureaucratized, sterile corporate offices… When American business became big business, men’s ability to play the ‘economic warrior’ was reduced…and men became mere bureaucratic cogs in large business organizations.”

We should add that mechanization also played an important role in the re-imagining of man’s role as breadwinner. As Alan Trachtenberg notes, “The process of continual refinement and rationalization of machinery, leading to twentieth-century automation, represented to industrial workers a steady erosion of their autonomy, their control, and their crafts.” As the laborer was more and more conceived of as “an interchangeable part” and business was increasingly professionalized and incorporated, the Victorian masculine identity became more and more difficult to sustain.

124 DeBerg, Ungodly Women, 25.
125 Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 56.
126 Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America, 56-69.
Such broader economic changes further contributed to the erosion of Victorian gender and family norms as “the incorporation of America” had major effects on the domestic realm.\textsuperscript{127} As men’s work outside the home required longer commutes and increased hours, husbands and fathers were spending less and less time physically in the home. The result was that the “absentee Victorian husband/father was fast becoming a patriarch in name only.”\textsuperscript{128} And, as the family unit began to cease its economically productive functions and take on an increasing consumptive function, the Victorian patriarch was ever more alienated from the daily activities of the household, particularly childrearing and education. Again, in the words of DeBerg, “As often as not, women had more say in the decisions made about their children than did men. And with the responsibility for training and guidance of the young came much real and symbolic power.”\textsuperscript{129} Thus, even as many evangelicals held firmly to notions of male leadership and fatherly authority, the structure of their daily lives slowly whittled away at the substance of these ideas until they were left with little more than patriarchal rhetoric.

Finally, Victorian gender and family norms were also undermined by their own ideals, especially that of the True Woman. The presumed superior piety of the True Woman eventually justified the entrance of the True Woman into the public sphere as she sought to bring her innate Christian virtue to bear on society. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and other historians have documented how the perceived moral superiority of women, coupled with dissatisfaction with male abuse of power (particularly in sexual licentiousness), led directly to militant moral reform efforts, which were the immediate

\textsuperscript{127} I am borrowing this language from Trachtenberg, \textit{The Incorporation of America}.
\textsuperscript{128} Bartkowski, \textit{Remaking the Godly Marriage}, 24.
\textsuperscript{129} DeBerg, \textit{Ungodly Women}, 35.
forerunners of the movement for women’s rights. Abolitionism was led and widely supported by the efforts of women and, following the Civil War, women also spearheaded reform efforts addressing temperance, child protection, and more. Women’s political activism was rooted in Victorian gender norms, but also subverted it by calling into question the constricted parameters of feminine domesticity. Speaking of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, the most famous women’s activist group of the period, DeBerg writes: “Through such organizations, women across the country, but particularly urban middle class women, burst into the public sphere with a reforming zeal rooted in evangelical religion and the cult of domesticity. These wives and mothers may not have been employed, but leave the house they did, and men no longer could claim the political world as their own.”

Of course, even if women’s entrance into the public sphere had roots in evangelicalism, we should not make the mistake of assuming that most evangelicals supported this move. As Bartkowski points out, here again the historical evidence suggests that evangelicals were continuously wrestling with the tensions internal to evangelical religion as they responded to wider social transformations. For example, the proliferation and wide scale success of women’s missionary societies produced ambivalence among evangelical denominations regarding women’s “proper place” in the church. As historian Jean Friedman has shown, women in the Southern Baptist Convention’s Women’s Missionary Union received public praise from the Convention

130 Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 109-128. Smith-Rosenberg points out that the Moral Reform Society of New York preceded the Seneca Falls Convention by fourteen years. She says, “Women advocates of moral reform were among the very first American women to challenge their completely passive, home-oriented image… They began, in short, to create a broader, less constricted sense of female identity” (127).

131 DeBerg, Ungodly Women, 32.
for their fundraising and educational work, even as they had to be careful not to appear to usurp the male-dominated missionary boards or call into question the general rule of male authority in church life.\textsuperscript{132} Friedman concludes that evangelicals were forced to live with a problematic cultural paradox in which “[t]raditional attitudes concerning women’s domestic role existed simultaneously with acceptance of women’s religious and social leadership.”\textsuperscript{133}

ii. The Rise of Antifeminist Fundamentalism

As economic, social, and cultural changes seriously weakened Victorian “separate spheres” and undermined male authority in the home and church, a faction of American evangelicals began to unite in common cause under the banner of fundamentalism. Although they first joined forces in reaction to the perceived threats of modernism—particularly the application of higher critical methods to the Bible and the promotion of Darwinian evolutionary theory—historians Bendroth and DeBerg have shown that gender ideology was central to the fundamentalist movement. Indeed, the fundamentalism of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} Century was, in large part, a reaction against Victorian notions of superior female piety and the resulting influx of women into activist work beyond the home. Moreover, the constructions of gender at issue within the fundamentalist movement necessarily entailed a particular construction of the family. Thus, even though debates about the authority of Scripture and Christianity’s “fundamentals” were at the forefront of fundamentalist discourse, matters of gender and family were always at work, as well.


\textsuperscript{133} Friedman, \textit{The Enclosed Garden}, 127.
According to Bendroth, the reason for fundamentalism’s inextricable entanglement with issues of gender and family is rooted in evangelical revivalism. Revivalism’s Arminian emphasis on free will and Christian perfection led to a widespread concern for social reform. As we have already discussed, activist evangelical women had been entering the public sphere since at least the time of the abolitionist movement and their zeal for social transformation only increased following the Civil War. Separate women’s organizations on behalf of charity, missions, and temperance avoided male participation and control, thereby carving out a large field of influence within the public sphere previously assigned to men alone. The result of this female empowerment, however, was that by the end of the nineteenth century “[r]eligion had become an area of female prerogative.” This led to a perceived widespread disaffection from religion among middle class men with evangelical leaders of the day identifying “masculine passivity” as “one of the burning questions of the hour.” In this way, the socio-economic decline of the Self Made Man and patriarchal family, detailed above, was met by a decline in male religious participation, creating a situation where, in the words of Bendroth, “[m]asculinity seemed everywhere on the retreat.”

In response to the disruption of gender and family norms, fundamentalist leaders posited a “muscular Christianity” that they believed could remedy America’s ailing middle class men. Rhetorically, the fundamentalist insistence on biblical inerrancy and

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134 Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 16-17.
135 Ibid., 17.
136 Ibid., 17. Still, it’s important to point out that American evangelical leaders have considered “male passivity” in religion a problem from very early on. Yet, women’s historians have shown that despite the ubiquity of this “feminization” narrative, women have been a dominant force within American Christianity from the start. See, for example, Ann Braude, “Women’s History Is American Religious History,” *Retelling U.S. Religious History* (Ed. Thomas A. Tweed; Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 87-107; also, Catherine A. Brekus, “Searching for Women in Narratives of American Religious History,” *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past.* ed. Catherin A. Brekus (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 1-34.
rigid orthodoxy was gendered in virile, masculine terms, while liberal acceptance of modernism was gendered as a weak, effeminate alternative. Bendroth quotes the words of Minnesota Baptist William Bell Riley, “The only churches in America that have any considerable number of big hearted brainy men in them are those churches that stand for...biblical doctrines—the great verities of the good Word of God.”\textsuperscript{137} By casting Christian faith in terms of spiritual battle, “power to serve,” and the “Victorious Life,” fundamentalist preachers sought to overcome the stereotypically feminine cast given to things like penitence, surrender, and service. Rather than seeing conversion as a self-negating experience, preachers drew upon the holiness tradition to portray men in God’s service as dynamic, brave, and bold. In the words of Baptist preacher A. J. Gordon, “A single man filled with the Holy Spirit, can of course do what a thousand cannot do without it. He is the strong man, the wise man, the effective man.”\textsuperscript{138} Furthermore, Bendroth shows that they drew upon the Calvinist tradition to teach that victory over one’s sins requires perpetual vigilance and unflinching trust in God’s power to save.\textsuperscript{139} These masculine emphases, combined with the intentional targeting of men in evangelistic crusades and regional Bible conferences, gave fundamentalism an increasingly male-oriented focus.\textsuperscript{140} Still, fundamentalist influence was largely dependent upon the support of its women. Therefore fundamentalist leaders had to take care not to

\textsuperscript{137} Bendroth, \textit{Fundamentalism and Gender}, 19.  
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 22.  
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 22.  
\textsuperscript{140} This is not to say that women didn’t continue to enjoy the freedoms and influence gained through suffrage, denominational work, and their women-only organizations. This trend continued even as fundamentalist leaders increasingly identified feminine religiosity as a problem and rhetorically aligned femininity with liberalism. Many male evangelists shared the stage with capable women and evangelical women flocked to newly formed Bible schools such as the Moody Bible Institute with great enthusiasm. Still, fundamentalist leaders eschewed cooperation with women’s auxillaries and other such organizations, asserting that a truly faithful church would require no such assistance. See Bendroth, \textit{Fundamentalism and Gender}, 25-30.
entirely alienate their female base. Bendroth notes, “[T]he popular appeal of early fundamentalism was shaped by two opposing forces: a desire to win the hearts of men, and the practical necessity of involving women.”\footnote{Ibid., 30.}

But, over time, the fundamentalist targeting of men and promotion of “muscular Christianity” led to an overt fundamentalist antifeminism that emerged with gusto in the 1920s. The roots of fundamentalist antifeminism are varied. First, is a literalist interpretation of scripture, particularly the first chapters of Genesis, which relegated women to subordinate status due either to a foreordained divine plan (according to Calvinist interpreters) or the divine punishment of women for their participation in the Fall (according to dispensationalist interpreters). Dispensationalists especially scorned activist women who put their efforts into social reform, arguing not only that their work violated God’s gender hierarchy but also their “brazenness” served as evidence of the evil “last days” and the nearness of Christ’s return. Furthermore, both the dispensationalist and Calvinist branches of fundamentalism placed high value upon order, with gender and family hierarchy seen as offering a spiritual antidote for the lax morality of the roaring twenties. In the words of Bendroth, “When the fundamentalist movement entered its militant, confrontational phase in the 1920s, the ‘woman question’ took on new immediacy. Women’s increasing social freedom in the postwar era, symbolized by the passage of the suffrage amendment and typified by the rebellious ‘flapper,’ irrefutably proved the negative effects of unregulated feminine freedom and the necessity of imposing order.”\footnote{Ibid., 51.}
While fundamentalists sought to employ their gender ideology to bring order and security to an insecure time in American culture, they were forced to negotiate with two internal tensions. First, fundamentalist theologies (both Calvinist and dispensationalist) emphasize male authority and female submission, but this emphasis was always in tension with revivalist practices that depended upon women for success. Bendroth refers to the power of the “feminine substructure” of the fundamentalist culture that its leaders could never entirely escape. Second, fundamentalists were always vacillating between the desire to insulate themselves from the world and the desire to engage and evangelize the world. As a result of this second tension, fundamentalists often unwittingly mirrored and magnified the gender and family patterns of the mainstream American culture, even in times of transition (like the 20s and late 40s) when their antifeminism found the sharpest expression.  

iii. The Ascent of Public Schooling

Along with the demise of Victorian gender ideology and the rise of Protestant fundamentalism, the period from 1875 to 1930 also saw a major shift in the practice of schooling. Throughout the Victorian period, the home had been considered the proper site of instruction; but by the 1930s, there was widespread consensus in America that children should be educated in schools. Milton Gaither notes a number of important social changes that contributed to this shift including the spread of industrialization, the gradual movement of Americans from rural farms into the cities, the spread of affluence and broadening of the middle class, the expanding options for women beyond domestic

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143 This is a point made explicit by Christel Manning, “Review of Fundamentalism and Gender by Margaret Lamberts Bendroth,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, vol. 33, no. 3 (Spring 1994): 286.
sphere, and the declining birthrate among married couples. At this point, I will not repeat Gaither’s narrative of how these changes impacted the social imagination of Americans regarding school. Instead, I will focus on three changes that are particularly important for the story of evangelicals and schooling in America: the conservative trust in government to bolster the “traditional family,” the large influx of immigrants into the US between 1870 and 1920, and the professionalization of parenthood and education.

As Victorian gender and family ideals dissolved and the Anglo-Saxon Protestant hegemony began to dissipate, many Americans sought to shore up the social order with the help of the government. In Gaither’s words,

> In the early twentieth century, government was on the side of the moral conservatives. This explains why American fundamentalism, a religious movement among Protestants explicitly directed against modernizing and liberalizing trends in society, did not mount a war against political institutions and figures. Fundamentalists of the early twentieth century did not leave the public schools. They did not homeschool. Why? Because the schools, like other government institutions, enforced Victorian morality and traditional religion.  

When schools did not provide this expected enforcement, such as in the case of John Scopes teaching evolution in Dayton, Tennessee, fundamentalists took the system to court. And, as Gaither reminds us, they won. The American government and conservative Christians shared a concern for protecting the “traditional family” even as they embraced all of the changes that came with modern industrial capitalism. For example, the declining birthrates and soaring divorce rates among white Americans scandalized President Theodore Roosevelt and officials in his administration. Roosevelt famously called this state of affairs “Race Suicide” and rhetorically shamed American women who shirked their duty to bear native children for the good of the nation.  

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144 Gaither, *Homeschool*, 62.
145 Ibid., 62-63.
Gaither also notes that many social programs in this period were aimed at saving the “traditional American family” (i.e., the white, middle class, Protestant family with a homemaking mother and bread-winning father) by offering training for rural family life, such as what was offered by Homemaker and 4-H Clubs, or encouraging the production of “Better Babies” and “Fitter Families” via the work of the American Eugenics Society. Furthermore, many New Deal programs functioned in a similar way: the “family wage” was offered to men and not to women, the Social Security Act guaranteed pensions for jobs typically fulfilled by male breadwinners, home ownership programs were established that provided long-term loans to two-parent households, and new housing construction was promoted through federal insurance for developers. Gaither’s conclusion on this subject is worth quoting at length:

All of these were government initiatives to save the two-parent, working father and stay-at-home mother, family. … Reformers might differ on specific remedies, but they were all united by the belief that to save America from dysfunctional homes “it was necessary to expand the state’s supervisory and administrative authority.” All this energy produced what Morton Keller has called a “revolution in public philosophy” about the relationship between parents and kids. By the early twentieth century, government was taking a much more active role in overseeing and regulating parenthood, and it was doing so, it must be stressed, to save the traditional family. Faced with large-scale breakdown of the stable two-parent family, Americans turned to their government to solve the problem. Family courts were created to deal with parental neglect, adoption, juvenile delinquency, and custody after divorce. “Manual training” programs in public schools, houses of refuge, reform schools, YMCAs in cities for disoriented rural migrants, penitentiaries, and all sorts of other institutions were modeled on the family and implemented as surrogates for those whose own families were dislocated by industrial change. Whereas past generations of Americans had to look to the family to keep the nation strong, it was now up to the nation to save the family through the interventions of professional expertise.\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{146} More about the cooperation of mainline Protestants with these efforts can be found in Amy-Laura Hall, \textit{Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

\textsuperscript{147} Gaither, \textit{Homeschool}, 64.
What does all this mean for our narrative? The point here is that American evangelicals and fundamentalists in the early twentieth century regularly turned to the government for help in establishing stability and security amidst the cultural shifts of their day. Thus, when it came to the proper instruction of the young, evangelicals also looked increasingly to schools to accomplish the intellectual and moral purposes that used to be entrusted to the family, especially the mother. In this way, evangelicals and fundamentalists were very much a part of the emerging consensus in early twentieth century America that government run schools were the best places for children to learn.148

Another factor that is important for the evangelical turn to institutional schooling is the gradual professionalization of homemaking and education, something that corresponded to the professionalization of a variety of disciplines in the same time period. In the early twentieth century, reforming women with college degrees produced an array of advice literature and help manuals to provide “scientific” information regarding everything from housework to infant feeding to child personality development. Just as the husband and father applied scientific techniques to his job in the factory or office, the wife and mother would be equipped with state-of-the-art materials and information for the management of the home. Thus, household work became “home economics” and “homemaking” (words coined during this period) and a vast number of self-proclaimed domestic professionals joined in the effort to help the family to modernize itself in light of the new industrialism. Gaither summarizes as follows:

[Domestic professionals] tirelessly preached a new sort of domestic education, an education conducted not by parents for children in the home but by experts on parenting itself. A host of institutions joined in the effort: kindergarten and infant...

148 Ibid.
schools; public schools offering new programs in parent education, home visits, and domestic science; universities sponsoring child study projects, home economics courses, and “practice houses;” and of course, American businesses, whose advertising relentlessly targeted the American mother with pitches explaining why their products were safer, better, more modern than the homespun and scratch-made fare of yore.\textsuperscript{149}

With this new professionalization of parenting and education, it is perhaps no surprise that the number of children attending public schools rose dramatically from the time of the Civil War through the 1930s. High school enrollment, especially, almost doubled every decade from 1890 to 1930, and by 1935, 40 percent of all American young people were graduating from high school.\textsuperscript{150} This major influx of enrollees forced school leaders into the difficult work of forming a school system that could manage all of these students in a cost-effective and, of course, scientifically astute way. The goals of these increasingly large and more structured public schools were overall efficiency and the production of beneficial social outcomes (i.e., a regular output of civilized, capable American citizens). In this way, Gaither notes, “Even as the family was becoming more intimate and informal, the school was growing larger, more impersonal, and further removed than it had been from home life, taking on more and more of the functions parents had historically performed.”\textsuperscript{151} Thus, everything from health and hygiene to vocational training to social events was added to the work of the public school, turning it into an “incubator for peer culture and adolescent identity-formation.”\textsuperscript{152}

A final factor that contributed to the triumph of the school over the fireside was the massive number of immigrants that flowed into the United States between 1870 and 1920. Most Americans viewed these immigrants with suspicion, particularly those of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 65. \\
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 66. \\
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 67. \\
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Catholic and Jewish faith. Concern for Americanizing and civilizing these strange new inhabitants was at the forefront of most social reform efforts in the early twentieth century. Furthermore, a Great Migration was happening within the United States between 1910 and 1930 as millions of African Americans migrated from rural, southern states into northern, urban states. A subtext of most parenting manuals during this period was the suspicion of “bad parents”—especially poor or foreign parents—who did not properly educate their children, relied upon their children for labor and contribution to the family income, and would not raise their children up with the proper American values.  

Obviously, an important way to undermine the authority and control of the parents in these “bad” homes was to require their children to attend public schools. Thus, compulsory schooling was supported by the majority of middle class white Americans (evangelicals included) as a way of ensuring that poor migrant families and immigrants to the US were properly mixed into the “melting pot.”  

Of course, not all Americans were included in this early twentieth century push toward universal public schooling. Gaither notes that some wealthy and/or very rural families in the Western states continued to conduct school for children in their homes, using either hired tutors or the work of parents. During this period of time, correspondence education emerged to meet the needs of families on the frontiers, the most famous of which were the Calvert correspondence curriculum and the Home Study

153 Ibid., 66.  
154 In large part, compulsory schooling is what compelled Catholic communities to develop their own schools so as to disallow their children from being completely “Americanized.” Urban America from 1880 to 1930 saw a dramatic rise in Catholic school enrollment as church officials borrowed the institutional schooling model from the public sector and used it to educate the children of Catholic immigrants. See, David Baker, “Schooling All the Masses: Reconsidering the Origins of American Schooling in the Postbellum Era,” Sociology of Education vol. 72, no. 4 (October 1999): 209; referenced by Gaither, Homeschool, 68.  
155 Gaither, Homeschool, 74-76.
Institute (originally the Fireside Correspondence School).\textsuperscript{156} Moreover, many poor families remained beyond the reach of child labor laws and compulsory schooling. By and large, these (typically large) families needed their children at home to help with their siblings or in the workplace to contribute to the family income. Thus, although most Americans in the early twentieth century had come to embrace the idea that children should be educated in schools, there remained many families on the margins that continued to practice home education of one sort or another.

The demise of Victorian gender and family norms, the rise of male-oriented, antifeminist fundamentalism, and the professionalization of education that resulted in the widespread acceptance public schools all contributed to the support of a particular construction of the family amongst middle class evangelicals. Evangelicals wanted desperately to salvage the separate spheres gender dualism of the Victorian period (one they saw rooted in the teaching of scripture), so they endorsed a vision of family life with a breadwinning, solitary, “soldier for Christ” father and a chaste, submissive, supportive mother.\textsuperscript{157} Evangelical leaders eschewed the entrance of women into the workplace and advised godly women to look to motherhood and family as the site of their vocation. Due, in part, to the perceived weakness of their women, men were expected to work tirelessly and exercise great discipline in their spiritual lives. The naturally more virtuous Victorian wife faded away in favor of the natural spiritual leadership of the husband. Children were trusted largely to the mother who was supposed to ensure that they were raised up with the proper “moral compass and stable character traits” that could endure a rapidly changing society. The virtuous family would produce a virtuous society and, as a result,

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 76-77.
\textsuperscript{157} Bendroth, \textit{Fundamentalism and Gender}, 68-72.
the goal of the family was to produce “the disciplined, autonomous self, created in the bosom of the bourgeois family.” Even so, the family occupied a shrinking sphere among evangelicals (along with the rest of American society), as work and education both were separated from the home. The domestic sphere, overseen by the Christian mother, was the site of instruction in Christian morality and proper etiquette, but also, more and more, the site of conspicuous material consumption.

iv. Summary

To summarize, in the period from 1875 to 1930, evangelicals in the United States participated in and negotiated with a number of major social shifts. First, longstanding Victorian gender and family ideals were seriously undermined, both by the new economic situation under corporate capitalism and by the expansion of women’s activities and rights in the public sphere. Second, the dramatic shifts in gender and family norms served as a major impetus for the Protestant fundamentalist movement, which looked to a highly masculinized form of Christianity to rescue society from the threats of liberalism, sin, and chaos. This male-oriented version of evangelicalism eventually led to an outright antifeminism. Antifeminist fundamentalism promoted a vision of gender in which women were naturally sensuous and weak (a reversal of Victorian gender norms) even as they continued to be entrusted with the moral formation of children and the activities that helped to keep the fundamentalist movement going. More and more, though, the evangelical middle class family resembled that of their secular counterparts: a small sphere of influence focused mainly upon maintaining middle class morality and

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158 Gaither, Homeschool, 72.
habits of consumption. The shrinking and sentimentalizing of the family sphere corresponded to the expansion of public schools, which saw enormous growth in popularity as both parenthood and education were professionalized. Also, evangelicals joined with majority of Americans who saw the public schools as the answer to the dramatic rise in immigration—the best method of integrating the millions of immigrants into the American melting pot.

As we will see in the following section, evangelical anxieties about the family did not dissipate in the post-war period. As they dealt with multiple massive cultural shifts, evangelicals continued to promote the Victorian rooted “traditional” gender and family norms. Despite undergoing their own kind of sexual revolution in the 1960s, gender hierarchy remained a cornerstone of evangelical notions of marriage and family. As men were more and more physically absent from the home, their authority as the spiritual head of the household grew in importance. Although fundamentalism continued to use modernism and communism as motivating threats, they told their women that the best way to oppose these forces was to serve God faithfully in the home. As we will see, evangelicals did undergo their own version of a sexual and feminist revolution, but these did little to change the dominant evangelical ideal of the hierarchically ordered family. By the end of the 1960s, evangelical cultural anxieties caused many to turn against the public schools they had championed for several decades. In arguments parallel to the liberal counterculture, evangelicals began to doubt both the educational efficacy and religious friendliness of American public schools.
C. 1945 to 1970s: Neo-Evangelicals, Cultural Revolutions, and the Triumph of Public Schools

Following the Second World War, a number of rapid changes to American society served to exacerbate the anxieties of fundamentalists and evangelicals about gender norms and the family. First came suburbanization, as more and more middle class families moved away from the cities and into the suburbs. They were aided by federal grants and loan guarantees, which made both housing development and home ownership easier for white, two-parent middle class families.\textsuperscript{160} Suburbanization coincided with extraordinary economic expansion. The middle class grew in affluence in an unprecedented way in the post-war years and consumption became the central function of the single-family home.\textsuperscript{161} There was also an increasing geographic and social mobility, which spread across the socio-economic spectrum. During this time, there was another massive migration of African Americans from the south into the north, which historians often call the Second Great Migration. This migration lasted from 1940 to 1970 and resulted in the urbanization of the black population with 80 percent of African Americans living in cities. All of these social and economic changes were in the background as evangelicals negotiated with American culture regarding gender and family norms.

In the post-war years, some fundamentalists sought to transform both their public reputation and methods of engagement with the modern world. Elites like Carl F. H. Henry and Harold Ockenga christened themselves neo-evangelicals and pursued scholarly and cultural respectability in America and Europe, a posture in contrast to the hard-line separatism of early fundamentalism. During this post-war rapprochement with American culture, neo-evangelicals created a number of institutions intended to transcend

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{160}] Cohen, \textit{A Consumer's Republic}, 194-256.
\item[\textsuperscript{161}] Ibid., 112-165.
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the bitter interdenominational fighting that had taken place in the previous decades. *Christianity Today*, Fuller Seminary, and the National Association of Evangelicals were all the result of the neo-evangelical entrepreneurial spirit. Despite the intention of neo-evangelicals to form a coalition with a vast swath of American Christians in the evangelical tradition, the elites like Henry and Ockenga were fiercely wedded to biblical inerrancy and Reformed theology, both of which stood in the way of trans-denominational evangelical unity.¹⁶²

i. Evangelicals Defend “Traditional” Gender and Marriage Norms

In the same time period, the broader cultural understanding of marriage continued to change. Even though many middle class women made their way back to the home following the war, marriage and family were increasingly understood in individualistic, therapeutic terms. That is to say, the more traditional functions of marriage and the family, such as long-term commitment, raising children, and social stability, were eclipsed by ideals of personal fulfillment.¹⁶³ The rise of the companionate marriage was troubling to fundamentalists, especially, who were heavily invested in a gender essentialism that stressed the fundamental differences between the sexes. An emphasis on romance, friendship, and personal fulfillment did not mesh well with their concern for hierarchy, order, and obedience to God’s design. And, in the end, feminist critiques of women’s “traditional” roles would draw strength from the re-defined notion of marriage in personal, self-fulfilling terms.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 131.
¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 131-132.
Some evangelicals responded to the cultural shift by shoring up traditional notions of gender and the family with familiar theological categories. Many of them, especially those in the neo-evangelical camp, turned to a Reformed (Calvinist) vision of a divine “order of creation” to support women’s subordinate position in marriage and family with correspondingly limited roles in church and society. Their Reformed vision of gender and family only differed from the prior Victorian norms in one respect: women were no longer considered naturally more virtuous than men. In church and home, in particular, God had ordained men to be the guardians of religion and morality. Therefore, women’s leadership was unnecessary as their “dominion” is relegated to the domestic sphere by divine design. This argument from the created order for gender essentialism and feminine domesticity would remain relatively unchanged among Reformed evangelicals through to the present day.

As fundamentalists saw their vision for family life under siege by modernist and communist threats, most fundamentalists continued to exalt the Victorian family ideal as the norm. But, unlike their Victorian foremothers, fundamentalist mothers did not view their domestic responsibilities as a basis for social reform. Fundamentalist homes “were arenas where women could do indirect battle with modernism, from the safety of their private, domestic sphere.”165 Mothers were expected to begin their children’s religious instruction as soon as possible, occupying the “first line of defense” against worldly influences outside the home. Bendroth asserts that much fundamentalist motherhood relied on manipulation because the Christian mother was a role with great responsibility but little moral authority. Popular preachers and evangelists, especially John R. Rice,

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165 Bendroth, Fundamentalism and Gender, 97-116.
strongly emphasized male leadership in the home.\textsuperscript{166} The fundamentalist father was supposed to be quick to confront and punish rebellion in children because his role is modeled on that of God the Father. Although often physically absent from the home due to work responsibilities and long commutes (a social shift mentioned above), the fundamentalist father was to “[express] his love through discipline and sacrifice.”\textsuperscript{167} Bendroth says that his care for children was indirect, as he represented the need for obedience (through the threat of punishment) and provided for the family’s material needs.\textsuperscript{168}

Through the 1950s and 1960s, the fundamentalist family continued to search for order in the midst of multiple challenges. Some of these include an ever-present nuclear threat, the increase of women in the workplace, a rising divorce rate, and the continued confusion of masculinity due to suburbanization and the triumph of corporate capitalism.\textsuperscript{169} Women’s roles were declining in denominational organizations, auxiliaries, and local churches, just as fundamentalist preachers and authors highlighted woman’s place in the home. Homemaking became the purview of the truly good Christian woman because capable Christian homemaking “freed men for higher service.”\textsuperscript{170} Bendroth points out that in this ordering of the household under male leadership, fundamentalists actually differed very little from most middle-class white Americans. But, of course, they insisted that they were different. The key difference in the mind of evangelical leaders was the presence of an ordered hierarchy with obedience expected from wife and children.

\textsuperscript{166} See, for example, the highly patriarchal rhetoric in John R. Rice, \textit{The Home: Courtship, Marriage, and Children} (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1946); and John R. Rice, \textit{God in Your Family} (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1971).

\textsuperscript{167} Bendroth, \textit{Fundamentalism and Gender}, 104.

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 104.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 105-107.

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 108.
in all things. Popular authors across the theological spectrum, including John R. Rice, P. B. Fitzwater, and Charles Ryrie, were essentially united in their understanding of the properly ordered household. Both dispensationalists and Calvinist neo-evangelicals traded in the language of divine order.\footnote{Ibid., 111.}

ii. (Limited) Evangelical Sexual and Feminist Revolutions

Despite their insistence of separateness from American culture, evangelicals in interaction with the 1960s counterculture also went through something of their own sexual revolution.\footnote{Amy DeRogatis provides a detailed discussion of this evangelical sexual revolution through a close reading of evangelical marriage and sex manuals in \emph{Saving Sex: Sexuality and Salvation in American Evangelicalism} (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 42-70.} In his essay, “Sex and the Evangelicals,” Daniel Williams shows that evangelicals responded to the sexual revolution with their own “celebration of marital sex.” Although, for the most part, they maintained their conservative stance on gender roles, homosexuality, and abortion, evangelicals “devote[d] more attention to sex than they ever had before” and some even “liberalize[d] their sexual ethics” on matters like birth control and masturbation.\footnote{Daniel Williams, “Sex and the Evangelicals: Gender Issues, the Sexual Revolution, and Abortion in the 1960s,” in \emph{American Evangelicals and the 1960s}, 101-104.} The new emphasis on the pleasures of marital sex led to frank discussions of female sexual needs, something that had been taboo in previous generations.

Still, the rhetoric of gender hierarchy was largely maintained. For example, even though Marabel Morgan’s book \emph{The Total Woman} urged women to embrace their sexuality, she also advised that a woman becomes truly beautiful to her husband only when she “surrenders her life…reveres and worships him.”\footnote{Marabel Morgan, \emph{The Total Woman} (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1973), 127, quoted by Williams, “Sex and the Evangelicals” 110.}

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  \item \footnote{Marabel Morgan, \emph{The Total Woman} (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1973), 127, quoted by Williams, “Sex and the Evangelicals” 110.}
\end{itemize}
marriage manuals pushed the cultural boundaries by teaching couples to prioritize the woman’s sexual needs, they simultaneously reinforced traditional gender hierarchy as the key to a happy and sexually fulfilling Christian marriage.

At the same time, some in the early 1970s began reformulating evangelical religion in feminist terms. With the marital sexual relationship envisioned in terms of mutual giving and equal pleasure, and men encouraged to attend to their sexual needs of their wives, it is perhaps not surprising that some evangelicals were led into a more egalitarian vision of marriage and gender roles. Drawing on alternative readings of Scripture, the longstanding egalitarian impulses within evangelicalism itself, so-called evangelical or “biblical” feminists argued for gender equality in home, church, and society. And, by the mid-1970s, a number of social and economic changes helped to buttress the cause of evangelical feminists. Inflation, the increasing price of housing, and the stagnation of men’s wages all made the employment of middle-class women more and more necessary to maintain a middle class standard of living. Sally Gallagher suggests that in light of these significant social shifts, conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists had very little in their “cultural toolbox” with which to combat the threat of evangelical feminism. They were forced simply to insist that it was a secular, liberal intrusion into the church. Biblical feminists remain a target of conservative evangelicals to this day.

Even if the majority of evangelicals did not join the biblical feminist bandwagon of the 1970s, they were affected by the rise to prominence of a number of evangelical

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176 Ibid., 49-50. In a lecture given at a Family-Driven Faith conference in Cincinnati, Ohio in September 2013, Voddie Baucham said of egalitarianism: “Egalitarianism is what people call feminism in the church.” The statement elicited approving laughs from the congregation.
women writers and speakers. Whereas before the 1960s, male preachers and teachers communicated the evangelical vision for gender hierarchy, by the late 1960s women were taking a public role in promoting the cause of evangelical gender and family norms. Christian magazines gave recurring columns to women writers and Christian publishing houses published books directly marketed to women in order to address the needs of wives, mothers, and even single women. Women’s conferences and retreats became popular among evangelical churches, led by notable speakers like Beverly LaHaye and Marabel Morgan. While their messages of male headship and wifely submission were directly opposed to the emerging feminism of the 1960s, the popular women speakers and writers glorified women’s roles and domestic duties as a calling from God outlined in scripture. Williams summarizes the appeal of these messages:

Borrowing heavily from “separate spheres” ideology of the Victorian era, the conservative evangelical women who emerged as leaders in their movement in the late 1960s and 1970s outlined a vision for women that placed them as the center of the social and moral order. Because evangelicals believed that the home was the foundation for a stable society, a social vision that highlighted women’s roles as moral guardians of the home appeared to give them a tremendous degree of moral authority. At a time when the feminist movement was beginning to make national headlines, conservative evangelical women posited an alternative model of female empowerment. 177

iii. Public Schools Triumph while Evangelicals Begin to Doubt

Alongside of shifts in marriage and gender ideology, what happened to evangelicals and schooling from 1945 to the 1970s? From the 1930s onward, the US had seen a steady rise in the rates of public school attendance, especially for students in higher grades. Gaither notes that in 1930, just under half of children between fourteen and sixteen were in school. But, by 1950, over 77 percent of this age group were in

school. As schools grew in enrollment numbers the school year lengthened dramatically. Many schools were consolidated from local districts into larger, regional organizational units. Textbooks, buildings, testing, professional organizations, and federal involvement further standardized and homogenized schools across the country. During this period, fundamentalists and evangelicals very much supported the cause of public schools. Despite their concerns about worldliness and maintaining godly separation, they more or less cooperated with the rapidly expanding public school system from the late nineteenth century through the 1970s because they continued to perceive the government as more or less on the side of “traditional” values. According to Gaither, “By 1970 sixty million Americans were enrolled in some sort of school, and 80 percent of school age Americans were graduating from high school,” including evangelicals and fundamentalists.178

Still, the winds of change were blowing among evangelicals in the 1960s. Even as the liberal counterculture was beginning to call into question the wisdom and efficacy of public schooling, so also conservative evangelicals began to express similar doubts. Although homeschooling among evangelicals did not begin to gain traction until the 1970s and 80s, its roots lie in the counterculture of the 1960s which reacted strongly against “the profound expansion and standardization” of public schools in the post-war period. Gaither states: “Homeschooling, like so many of the other significant cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s, was very largely a reaction against the mass culture of the modern liberal state, a culture realized perhaps most perfectly in the consolidated public schools located on metropolitan outskirts amidst the rapidly expanding suburbs.”179

178 Gaither, Homeschool, 85.
179 Ibid.
Thus, at the same time that evangelicals were engaged in cultural debates with feminists about gender and the family, they were also experiencing increasing doubt about the influence of public schools, in both teaching methods and content. Although their publications and sermons at this time were focused mainly on the threat of secular feminism (and “biblical feminism”), it’s reasonable to think that the increasingly homogenized practice of public schooling may have also contributed to evangelical anxieties about the Christian family. When you add to this the national drama surrounding the racial integration of schools, especially in the South, then the rising evangelical suspicion toward public schooling begins to make more sense. Whereas in the post-Victorian period, evangelicals and fundamentalists perceived government schools as a helpful, conserving influence on the family, in the post-war period this assumption fell by the wayside.

iv. Summary

Evangelicals in the post-war period continued to hold on to their “traditional” notions of gender and family. Despite going through their own feminist and sexual revolutions, which had the significant effect of prioritizing female sexual satisfaction and imbuing marriage with therapeutic purposes, evangelicals maintained a loud and public antifeminist stance. Evangelical women continued to be taught that their proper place was in the private home submitting to the divinely ordained leadership of her husband. Up to the 1960s, evangelicals had been supporters of American public schools, assuming that the government should be used to enforce and promote traditional moral norms in society. But, by the end of the 1960s, evangelicals began to doubt the schools that they had spent several decades promoting. Alongside the liberal counterculture, some
evangelicals began to question both the efficacy of public education and its compatibility with Christian values. This shift set the stage for the rise of the countercultural right and the conservative Christian homeschooling movement. The following section will consider these related movements in more detail.

D. 1970s to Present: Countercultural Right and Conservative Christian Homeschooling

In the 1970s and following, conservative minded evangelicals and fundamentalists were increasingly aware of the displacement and marginalization of their values on marriage and the family in the US. It is no surprise, therefore, that this period produced a seemingly endless number of books and articles on the subject of gender, marriage, sex, family, and parenting, as evangelicals attempted to shore up their discourse in the face of ceaseless social and economic pressure. The messages of evangelicals also proliferated through the work of TV and radio preachers and, later, Internet websites, email newsletters, and blogs. Also, following on the heels of a number of events, especially Supreme Court rulings on prayer, Bible reading in schools, and abortion, evangelicals in this period began a variety of organizations and “ministries” intended to turn the tide of social change back in their favor. The most visible result of this push into the public square was the rise of the Christian Right, led by Jerry Falwell and his Moral Majority. But, alongside the political activism of the Christian Right during this period was the birth of the conservative Christian homeschooling movement. In the homeschooling movement, some evangelicals and fundamentalists found a way, not only to reclaim their children’s education from “worldly” public schools, but also to structure the Christian home in harmony with their persistent sense of gender norms and family values.
i. Evangelical Gender Hierarchy for a New Generation

Despite the more vocal presence of evangelical feminists and others who supported gender equality, evangelical notions of gender after 1970 continued to owe much to the modified Victorian vision of manhood and womanhood that had been retained since the turn of the century. Although the increasing numbers of evangelical women in the workplace resulted in less strident condemnations of “working women,” the basic hierarchical construction of gender roles remained the same. In fact, the change among many evangelicals from the one to two breadwinner household, seems to have caused evangelical elites to imbue the gender-based order in the marriage and family with even more symbolic significance.

The packaging and delivery of this vision was quite different than in times past. Evangelicals borrowed heavily from the therapeutic language of self-fulfillment offered up by pop psychology and, by and large, they let women lead the way in its proclamation. Elisabeth Elliot, Beverly LaHaye, Marabel Morgan, and Phyllis Schafly, each published their own handbook on godly womanhood during this period. They made arguments from the Bible, biology, psychology, and even business for the submission of wives to their male “heads.” Male headship was not only God’s good design but also the way to a successful marriage and fulfilling life. Although affirming the fundamental equality of men and women, these writers marked off the home as a private institution where equality was irrelevant. Differences between men and women were viewed as essential, unchangeable, and translatable into a divinely ordained plan for both. As the years passed, the language of hierarchy would eventually be replaced by language of complementarity, interdependence, and servant leadership. Still, even with the softening
of patriarchal language and warnings against male authoritarianism, in evangelical
literature on womanhood today the fundamental hierarchal relationship between the
genders remains intact.\textsuperscript{180}

For scholars discussing evangelical approaches to the family since the 1970s,
James Dobson gets a lot of attention—and rightly so. His psychological take on family
and parenting has been very influential, both within evangelicalism and beyond. With a
Ph.D. in child psychology, Dobson’s approach to gender roles and the family was
ultimately fueled by a concern for the development and perceived wellbeing of children.
Thus, despite holding to his own version of gender essentialism (and corresponding
hierarchy) in the family, Dobson tended toward a more pragmatic approach to marriage,
urging reciprocity, mutual submission, and interdependence in the home. Most
evangelicals, and even some beyond the evangelical subculture, came to see Dobson as
an expert on parenting and looked to his organization Focus on the Family for guidance
as they navigated a culture seen as increasingly hostile to traditional Christian values. In
recent years, Dobson’s partisan political activism has caused his influence to wane.
Although still a member of the evangelical elite, his opinions no longer have the
influence they once did during the height of the Christian Right as a social movement.

\textsuperscript{180} The narrative I have provided thus far, focused as it is upon conservative evangelicals, presents
a more-or-less monolithic approach to marriage and gender roles among evangelicals. John Bartkowski
warns us in \textit{Remaking the Christian Marriage}, however, not to assume that evangelical elites, let alone
evangelical laypeople, are entirely united on their approach to manhood and womanhood. In fact,
Bartkowski goes so far as to argue that “no consensus about gender and family relations” exists among
evangelical elites (163). He says that even as many popular authors during this period were beholden to
separate spheres and gender hierarchy, their perspectives remain hotly disputed within evangelicalism by
biblical feminists and equality-minded conservatives. While I concede the point that evangelical feminists
and more egalitarian conservatives have always contested the more hierarchal approaches to gender norms
post-1970, I think a case can still be made for a shared construction of gender roles that is historically
rooted in the Victorian bourgeois ideal. Even if the rhetoric is varied, the fundamental structure of the
marriage and family, I would argue, remains the same.
Dobson is a figure recognized outside of evangelical circles, but another important figure in the 1970s and 1980s that gets considerably less attention is Bill Gothard.\textsuperscript{181} Gothard is an important person for the present narrative because he was one of the first evangelical figures to link hierarchal gender norms with homeschooling. Although he always remained outside of the homeschooling movement, Gothard’s influence on evangelical homeschoolers can hardly be exaggerated. During Gothard’s heyday in the late 1970s and 1980s, his conferences and seminars drew tens of thousands of people at a time. In the early 1980s, 300,000 people were attending his conferences every year.\textsuperscript{182} Although no longer offering seminars of that scale, Gothard’s Institute in Basic Life Principles (headquartered in Oak Brook, IL) created several other organizations including a medical facility, law school, a secularized character-building program for public schools, and a correspondence homeschooling program (Advanced Training Institute).\textsuperscript{183}

Gothard’s teaching doesn’t differ markedly from the evangelical approaches to gender and family that had come before. But, as has we have seen already, the packaging and presentation was different. Gothard offered his conference attendees a lecture-style introduction to the “universal principles of life” that he promised would lead to life success if followed correctly. In Gothard’s words, “Every problem in life can be traced to seven non-optional principles found in the Bible. Every person, regardless of culture,

\textsuperscript{181} For example, Sally Gallagher relegates Gothard to one footnote in \textit{Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life}, 212n.10. Gothard does not feature at all in John Bartkowski’s \textit{Remaking the Godly Marriage}.

\textsuperscript{182} Figure provided by Wilfred Bockelman, \textit{Gothard: The Man and His Ministry} (Santa Barbara, CA: Quill, 1976).

background, religion, education, or social status, must follow these principles or experience the consequences of violating them."^{184}

Gothard placed heavy emphasis on the “chain of command” in the family, with children submitting to parents and wife submitting to husband. His workbooks came complete with official looking diagrams and charts, backed up by the claim that every principle is divinely ordained.\(^{185}\) For women, Gothard taught that employment beyond the home is wrong and the wife’s focus was to be on supporting her husband and caring for their children. Furthermore, God entrusts children to their parents for education, therefore homeschooling is the only real option for Christians. Fathers should be the breadwinner and spiritual head of the family, overseeing the work of the mother and children. Gothard also warned against the evils of family planning and endorsed “open embrace” sexuality for married couples that welcomes any and all children as divine gifts. This emphasis on inviolate principles for the family “erased all shades of gray.” Under Gothard’s teaching, one admirer quipped, “I’m convinced that God did not make gray. When it comes to moral issues, things are black or white.”\(^{186}\)

Despite its stridency, the appeal of this kind of approach among evangelicals in the 1970s and 80s is not difficult to understand. In the words of one critical observer, “In an era when general morality is at a low ebb, he is providing clues for establishing a clear biblical base for Christian thought and action. What’s more, people are convinced it will work.”\(^{187}\) Certainty is always more appealing than ambiguity, especially among evangelicals who, by the late 1970s, had a long-established cultural identity as a people

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\(^{184}\) Gothard, quoted by Gaither, *Homeschool*, 151.

\(^{185}\) Bockelman, *Gothard*, 44.

\(^{186}\) Ibid., 117.

\(^{187}\) Ibid., 49.
under attack (by modernists, liberals, communists, feminists, hippies, homosexuals, and more). 188 Although his influence has faded considerably since the 1980s, Gothard’s interpretation and application of scripture has proved immensely influential in Christian homeschooling circles into the present day. In the words of homeschooling historian, Milton Gaither, “If the public stereotype of the homeschooling family is that of the firm but gentle patriarch, the Titus 2 mom shrouded in a loose fitting jumper and headcovering, the quiver-full of obedient stairstep children dressed in matching homespun, we have Bill Gothard to thank as much as anyone.” 189

ii. The Birth of the Christian Homeschooling Movement

Undoubtedly, Bill Gothard was a significant influence on the culture of evangelical homeschoolers. But how did evangelical homeschooling come about in the first place? Gaither begins the story in the 1960s, where the evangelical interaction with the 1960s counterculture created what he calls “the countercultural right.” Although denominational distinctions began to fade away during this period, replaced by a sharp divide between “conservative” and “liberal” churches, conservative churches came to find a kind of cultural unity through alternative cultural institutions “that mimicked even as they condemned the cultural mainstream.” These alternative cultural institutions included Christian bookstores, romance novels, radio and television stations, concerts and festivals, music awards, amusement parks, and summer camps. This “parallel Christian culture” was separatist even as it was accommodating to American cultural mores.

Gaither argues that the rise of the politically active Christian Right developed in cooperation with this alternative evangelical culture. In his words, just as the Christian

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188 Bockelman, Gothard, 120.
189 Gaither, Homeschool, 152.
subculture emerged in interaction with leftist counterculture, so also the Christian Right
developed as “[m]oral conservatives, shocked and outraged by social change, adopted the
techniques of the Left to forward their own agendas.” Impulses toward political activism
had been present in evangelicalism from early on, evidenced by their work on behalf of
prohibition or the anticommunist fights of the 1950s. But in those days the government
had been perceived to be on the side of evangelicals. Gaither notes, “[N]ow conservatives
suddenly found themselves fighting not just immigrant vice, urban decadence, smut
peddlers, or communist traitors. The enemy had suddenly become their own
government.”190

As the Christian Right got organized through various clubs, societies, and
organizations, they did so in large part through the home-based activism of conservative
evangelical women. Although often employing stridently antifeminist rhetoric, the
homemakers and mothers of the Christian Right drew on the strides made in women’s
liberation to forward their cause through reading groups, women’s clubs, voter
registration drives, and campaign volunteering. Like their Victorian foremothers,
conservative women in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s sought to preserve the safety and purity of
the domestic sphere by organizing and acting in the public sphere. The issues of abortion,
the Equal Rights Amendment (which was perceived as a threat to the wages of male
breadwinners), and education especially motivated evangelical women. As schools were
integrated and prayer and Bible reading were outlawed, many evangelical women joined
together in support of separate Christian schools. Independent Christian schools
proliferated in the 1980s and 90s, with conservative estimates ranging from 6,000 to

190 Ibid., 103.
15,000 schools in operation.\textsuperscript{191} Whatever the exact figure, though, Gaither argues that this period marks a major shift in how evangelicals thought about education. Even though the majority of evangelicals kept their children in public schools (and do so to this day), as a group they no longer took for granted the friendliness of “government schools” to their way of life and began imagining new ways of providing their children with an education.

It is out of this milieu that homeschooling emerged as a viable option among evangelical families. Although previously associated with leftist liberals, conservatives seem to have first turned to homeschooling as they encountered a variety of challenges posed by private Christian schools, including high tuition, poor organization, personality conflicts, theological differences, and dissatisfaction with the meeting of their children’s individual needs.\textsuperscript{192} For these reasons and others beside, evangelical women began giving homeschooling a try. “The circumstances were right,” Gaither says,

By the late 1970s many conservatives lived in comfortable suburban homes that could easily accommodate a homeschool. Many housewives were well educated and committed both to their children and to staying at home. … These were empowered women, politically astute and activist. Housewives, as we have seen, “formed the backbone” of most pro-family movements. If such women as these could protest, organize voters, conduct study groups, and lead Bible studies and women’s clubs at their churches, could they not teach their own children how to read, write, and cipher? Many decided they could.\textsuperscript{193}

As more and more families chose the homeschooling option, they began putting their entrepreneurial spirit and organizational skills into building networks, cooperatives, and other organizations to support families like them. Out of these efforts, evangelicals birthed a movement.

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 109.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 110.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.
iii. Four Key Figures

Evangelical families were helped along in their move toward homeschooling by the work of four elite figures whose writings on and advocacy for home education was key to the movement’s success: John Holt, Raymond and Dorothy Moore, and R. J. Rushdoony. Although space constraints prevent an in-depth consideration of these figures, they deserve limited discussion at this point.

John Holt was a teacher who turned his years of work in elite schools into a book, *How Children Fail*, that was published in 1964. It became a bestseller and continues to be popular to this day. Holt’s basic argument was that “compulsory schooling destroys children’s native curiosity and replaces it with a self-conscious and fearful desire to please the teacher. Kids learn not rich subject matter but skills necessary to pass tests and charm authorities.” In his sequel, *How Children Learn*, Holt continued to denounce formal education and described in positive terms the education children receive in the home. Holt created stark and compelling contrast between natural, caring education provided at home and the fear-based, restrictive education provided in schools.194

In the 1970s, Holt decided to devote his energy to helping the underground families who were educating their children at home. The tangible result was a newsletter, *Growing Without Schooling*, which served as the beginning of the first homeschool network. Holt became the *de facto* leader of the homeschool movement and he spent a lot of his own money travelling the country speaking, witnessing in court, and demonstrating on behalf of homeschooling families. Eventually, despite his own location on the political left, Holt realized that on the subject of schooling, he had common cause with the right.

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One couple, in particular, caught his attention: Seventh Day Adventists and lifelong educators, Raymond and Dorothy Moore.

Raymond and Dorothy Moore had a handful of education degrees between the two of them, a lifetime of participation in education and education reform, and the experience of raising nine children. Despite the growing conviction among many in universities and government that children should start school at earlier ages (with programs like Head Start), the Moores became convinced, through the writings of Ellen White and their own research, that “whenever feasible children should remain longer in the home.”195 Through their Moore Foundation, the Moores deepened and broadened their research, concluding that children were not emotionally, mentally, or physically ready for formal schooling until the eight to ten age range. They published these findings in articles in Harpers, Reader’s Digest, and the Congressional Record. Their publications elicited a strong reaction from all sectors, some (especially parents) wholeheartedly agreeing and some denouncing the Moores’ research as selective and un-nuanced. The Moores first book, Better Late than Early, was published in 1975 to moderate success and they began travelling the country, speaking against early schooling and the desirability of children remaining in “reasonably good homes” until ages eight to ten.

The “Christian tipping point” came, however, in 1977 when the Moores were featured on the Focus on the Family radio show of Dr. James Dobson.196 The listener reaction to their appearance was extraordinarily favorable and the Moores became a favorite guest of Dobson, having them on his show a record 21 times over the next decade. Their third book, Home Grown Kids (1981), emerged after the Moores became

195 Raymond Moore quoted by Gaither, Homeschool, 130.
196 Gaither, Homeschool, 132.
convinced that home schooling was not just preferable for younger children, but also for older ones. *Home Grown Kids* was widely influential in the homeschooling movement, undoubtedly because it was a comprehensive, jargon-free child-rearing manual that spoke fluently the language of evangelicalism. The following excerpt, quoted by Gaither, shows just how well the Moores struck the chords of the evangelical subculture:

> The family was given to us by the same God in whom our country trusts… Nevertheless, we have gone a long, long way toward putting it down and substituting parenting-by-state. Now leading social researchers predict the death of our democratic society within a generation. If we are to retrieve it—and our schools—we would do well to look again to God and the home.  

By 1982, Raymond Moore was the most sought after homeschooling leader in the country, providing expert testimony on behalf of homeschooling families, speaking before legislatures on education related laws, and appearing on mainstream TV talk shows like *Oprah* and *Donahue*.  

If Holt led the way into homeschooling for progressive, left-leaning parents, then Raymond and Dorothy Moore led the way for evangelical, libertarian-leaning parents. The three met soon after their mutual cultural ascendancy in the early 1980s and they regularly shared the stage at conferences as the most popular homeschool activists in the country. Despite their divergent backgrounds and ideological commitments (for example, Holt was stubbornly anti-authoritarian and the Moores were very committed to the authority of parents), they shared the same convictions about the dangers of compulsory schooling and the home as the ideal environment for children’s educational

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198 Gaither, *Homeschool*, 133.
200 For more about the ideological differences between the Moores and Holt, see Stevens, *Kingdom of Children*, 34-41.
experience. Although there were other elite writers and activists at work during this period (including Llewellyn Davis and David Guterson), from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, the John Holt and Raymond and Dorothy Moore were the unquestioned leaders of the homeschooling movement. Eventually, however, the warm cooperation between leftists and conservatives would fade away as conservative Christian homeschoolers began to dominate both the local homeschooling networks and the national homeschooling organizations. This dominance was fueled, in part, by the ideological influence of the last key figure in the origins of homeschooling.

Rousas J. Rushdoony was a conservative minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and second generation Armenian American. Dutch Calvinist philosopher, Cornelius Van Til, was a major influence on Rushdoony. He adopted Van Til’s presuppositionalist approach to truth, which asserts that first principles must be assumed in discussions, rather than argued for. Once the presuppositions are established, then a coherent philosophy or theology can be articulated. The presupposition that the Bible is the inspired Word of God was paramount, of course, and formed the basis, in Van Til’s mind, for all rational thinking.

Rushdoony took this biblical presuppositionalism with utmost seriousness (and far beyond the work of Van Til), concluding that the Bible should be the basis for all of human life, serving as the divine template for government, schooling, family, agriculture, and more. He wrote occasionally for evangelical publications and spoke to local churches throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, eventually founding the theological think tank, the Chalcedon Foundation, in 1965. Then, in 1973 he published his magnum opus, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, which promoted a whole cloth vision for Christian
Reconstructionism: a plan for reconstructing government and culture in light of Christian presuppositions drawn directly from scripture.\textsuperscript{201}

In his \textit{Institutes} and the books that followed, Rushdoony advocated \textit{theonomy} (the rule of God’s law) as the solution for the problems of the twentieth century. And in his other books, especially \textit{The Messianic Character of American Education} (1963), he asserted the biblical rationale for home education in uncompromising terms. Like Raymond Moore, Rushdoony was regularly called upon by homeschoolers as an expert witness, conference speaker, and educational advisor. Moreover, Rushdoony promoted what he called a “providentialist” interpretation of history, which discerns God’s hand in the movement of history, seeing it “not as a narrative of human actions but as a revelation of God’s sovereign will.”\textsuperscript{202} Within this framework, Rushdoony was one of the first and best promoters of the idea that America was a Christian nation until its recent descent into secularism.

Although Rushdoony’s full-scale Reconstructionism never gained a large following among evangelicals (most evangelicals do not even know his name), Rushdoony’s literal application of scripture’s “first principles” and “providentialist” interpretation of American history have been influential. Moreover, his impact on the conservative wing of the homeschooling movement can’t be exaggerated. Gaither summarizes his influence as follows: “His writings have bequeathed to the conservative wing of the homeschooling movement both a strong sense of opposition between God’s law and human laws and a tendency to think of itself as a divinely guided instrument in

\textsuperscript{201} Worthen, \textit{Apostles of Reason}, 226.
\textsuperscript{202} Gaither, \textit{Homeschool}, 135.
restoring a Christian America.” In other words, if John Holt and Raymond and Dorothy Moore provided evangelicals with the rationale for homeschooling, then Rushdoony provided evangelicals with a metanarrative and telos—a motivating vision of what their work in the home could accomplish on a grand scale.

Although early on, homeschoolers from the far left to the far right were able to cooperate in a loose coalition, in the late 1980s and 1990s, the uncompromising theological point of view that trickled down from Rushdoony drove a wedge into the homeschooling movement. Today, the homeschooling movement is starkly divided between what Mitchell Stevens calls “inclusives” (inclusive homeschoolers from all religious and political perspectives) and “believers” (separatist evangelical Christians). Estimates are that anywhere from sixty-five to ninety percent of homeschooling families are Christian. While “inclusives” often choose homeschooling as a matter of educational reform, homeschooling for the “believers” is a matter of religious reform.

iv. Homeschooling Mothers at the Grassroots

Although John Holt, Raymond and Dorothy Moore, and R. J. Rushdoony were by far the most influential figures for the homeschooling movement in America, we must not allow their significance to obscure the movement’s grassroots origins. On a day-to-day basis, the evangelical homeschooling movement is largely sustained by ordinary people, organizations, networks, publishers, and merchants, all of which provide a shared culture and sense of identity. At the grassroots level, homeschooling happens largely through the

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203 Ibid., 137.
204 Stevens, Kingdom of Children, 18-19.
205 Murphy, Homeschooling, 23.
work of women who have “jumped headfirst into an elaborate domesticity.”

These mothers often cooperate with a variety of local and regional homeschooling networks, which often pool resources and students for shared classes, social activities, field trips, sports, and more. Mothers also make use of a dizzying array of homeschooling curriculum offered by both mainstream and specialized Christian publishers, which they can choose from by reading the reviews offered in homeschooling magazines and newsletters. Also, these mothers often pay for “legal insurance” through the Home School Legal Defense Association, an organization that led the way in getting homeschooling legalized in the United States and, through its aggressive lobbying efforts, has been key in liberalizing and de-regulating homeschooling laws ever since. Moreover, homeschooling mothers often participate in regional and national conferences, which feature notable speakers, offer a stunning array of products and services, and the chance to visit with homeschooling families outside their communities. Finally, homeschooling mothers often interact with other mothers on the Internet through blogs and other online forums, from which they glean ideas, help, encouragement, and support for their home-based work. In all these ways, homeschooling as a religious practice is shaped and supported in the homes of evangelical Christians under the leadership of mothers.

The centrality of the mother in the evangelical practice of homeschooling raises an interesting question in relation to evangelical gender norms. Although I have argued the core of evangelical gender ideology, despite some alterations in language, has remained fixed since the Victorian period, there is a way in which homeschooling upsets

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207 Stevens, Kingdom of Children, 16.

208 The feminization of the domestic sphere under the mother’s leadership, a problem that led to the demise of the Victorian era gender norms in America, is something that is (often unsuccessfully) resisted by Christian homeschoolers. This is a matter we will discuss in more detail in the next chapter. See also McDannell’s perceptive observations in “Creating the Christian Home,” 205-207.
or at least complicates this model. While women remain relegated to the private sphere (and breadwinning men to the public sphere) the work of the mother-teacher within the private sphere is decidedly specialized, thereby altering her position vis-à-vis the working father-provider. While she may not receive financial remuneration for her labor, there is no doubt that most homeschooling mothers view teaching as their profession. McDannell recognizes the transformative potential of this scenario, claiming plainly, “Home schooling is…helping to rewrite conservative Christian gender relationships.”

Thus, it is important that we recognize the tension created by evangelical gender norms within the lived religious practice of homeschooling. Because mothers perform the overwhelming majority of the teachings, not to mention serving as the primary organizers, networkers, and bloggers of the movement, there is a sense in which they are unwittingly subverting evangelical gender norms even as they rhetorically affirm them. Still, because the domestic space remains a feminized one—an expanded, professionalized feminine space, at that—evangelical homeschoolers continue to face the challenge first posed to Victorians as the authority of the patriarch began shrinking under the circumstances of corporate capitalism. We will discuss the implications of this scenario in more detail in Chapter 4.

v. Why Homeschooling Happened

As we bring our discussion of the homeschooling movement to a close, I think Gaither’s summary of “why homeschooling happened” will help us to get a big picture of

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209 McDannell, “Creating the Christian Home,” 210. She goes on to explain, “To be a fundamentalist meant to believe that God placed women in the family (with the children) and men in the workplace. While such ideology still exists, home schooling complicates the simple dichotomies set up by fundamentalist writers and preachers. Women are still in the homes with the children. However, because they teach, they assume a professional attitude regarding their domestic activities.”
homeschooling’s place in the narrative we’ve covered thus far. First, Gaither says, homeschooling happened because the countercultural sensibilities about the priority and inherent good of personal fulfillment eventually became the dominant American sensibility, even among evangelical Christians. Second, homeschooling happened because of suburbanization, which segregated the population by race, class, age, and culture, incubated anti-government and libertarian sensibilities, and gave homemaking women a “base” from which to operate. Evangelical women who were mobilized in the work of the Christian Right were equipped by these experiences with the ideology and confidence to attempt schooling in their homes. Third, homeschooling happened because evangelical Christians possessed a view of children that was a combination of residual Victorian ideals of children as innocent gifts, revivalist ideals of children as free agents in need of cultivation, and therapeutic views of children’s as unique beings, full of potential. Fourth, homeschooling happened because of changes in both public schooling and the family during the latter part of the twentieth century. As public schools grew larger and less responsive to parents, and as social changes ensured that children were exposed to a plurality of people, religions, and values at younger and younger ages, evangelical parents began to conclude that public schools were no longer the solution to the cultural upheaval they were experiencing (as they had been in the early twentieth century). Instead, public schools were seen as part of the problem—a big part of the

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210 I differ slightly with Gaither on this point and have modified the summary to reflect my view. Gaither lays the conservative Christian view of children at the feet of the leftist counterculture, arguing essentially that Christians adopted the cultural perspective of the Left without knowing it. I would contend that the romantic, idealistic view of children has been extant in evangelical thought since before the turn of the century (as Gaither himself shows) and therefore giving credit solely to the progressive left is somewhat short-sighted. There is no doubt that the more progressive ideas of John Holt and other homeschooling pioneers had an influence over evangelical views of children, but these where not radically new ideas to evangicals, only ideas applied in a new way (i.e., children are too special to entrust their education to public schools).
problem. Finally, Gaither reminds us that homeschooling happened because people made it happen. Intellectuals, lawyers, politicians, parents, organizations, networks, publishing companies, and more combined their efforts so that homeschooling “progressed in just a few short years from being the furtive activity of a few radicals to a mainstream option chosen by millions of Americans, endorsed by government, praise by media, and accepted as legitimate education by most elite colleges and universities.”

vi. A Caveat

Now that we have discussed the evangelical wing of the homeschooling movement in America, an important caveat is in order. Despite the social mainstreaming of homeschooling and the increasing number of American evangelical families who turn to homeschooling at some point, homeschooling is by no means the norm among American evangelicals. The majority of evangelicals still have their children in public schools, despite possible qualms regarding the public school’s pedagogy and moral influence. Moreover, even though evangelical elites, by and large, support the practice of homeschooling, they have also resisted wholesale condemnation of public schooling in the style of Moore and Rushdoony. For example, a small group of Southern Baptists has tried unsuccessfully for the past two decades to pass a Convention resolution condemning “government schools” as godless and calling on Southern Baptists to stage a mass, immediate exodus. Lacking widespread elite support for the resolution, Southern

211 Gaither, *Homeschool*, 115. We could add a fifth, explicitly religious reason homeschooling happened: because some evangelical Christians have come to believe that God explicitly commands it. In their literal reading of the Deuteronomic command to teach one’s children all day long (Deut. 6:7), some evangelicals conclude that God does not permit Christians to send their children to others to be educated.

212 They were inspired by the advocacy of Pastor E. Ray Moore, who created Exodus 2000 (later, The Exodus Mandate) to encourage families “to leave government schools for the Promised Land of K-12 Christian education” (Exodus Mandate, May 13, 2015: http://exodusmandate.org). But, even with the
Baptists have repeatedly rejected these efforts. Thus, despite very real reservations and anxieties, it seems that the reforming, evangelizing impulse of evangelicalism remains strong enough to keep most of them in cooperation with the American public school system.

vii. Summary

In this section we have looked at the development of evangelical thought on gender, family, and schooling from the 1970s up to the present day. Although the Victorian rooted notions of separate spheres and submissive, domestic womanhood remained at the core of evangelical teaching, the new evangelical women leaders packaged their message of gender hierarchy in the language of therapeutic self-fulfillment provided by mainstream pop psychology. They also went through their own sexual revolution as discussions of women’s sexual needs became common and mutual self-giving in married sex became the ideal. Important during the 1970s and 1980s were the respective ministries of Dr. James Dobson and Bill Gothard. Dobson’s approach was decidedly pragmatic, while Gothard’s was a Biblicist application of divine “principles” that emphasized authority and obedience. These two poles—the therapeutic, pragmatic and the Biblicist, authoritarian—represent the continuum of evangelical thought during this period of time.

Eventually, many evangelicals were conscripted into the work of the Religious Right, which built its activism on the work of homemakers who were passionate about defending home and children from perceived secular, liberal threats. It was these same women who, in response to the perception that public schools were no longer safe or

support of James Dobson (starting in 2002), Dr. Laura Schlesinger, D. James Kennedy, and others, this absolutist approach to homeschooling has not gained traction across broader evangelicalism.
amenable to their values, turned to private Christian schools and then to homeschooling as a way of further defending hearth and home. Moreover, homeschooling provided a robust practice of domesticity that fully employed the education, gifts, and talents of evangelical women in the private sphere. The burgeoning homeschooling movement was led by pioneers John Holt, Raymond and Dorothy Moore, and R. J. Rushdoony, all of whom left their mark on homeschooling in America. It was Rushdoony’s biblical presuppositionalism and providentialist reading of history, however, that captured the imagination of many evangelical homeschoolers. Through the cooperatives, networks, organizations, publications, blogs, and websites of the homeschooling movement, Rushdoony’s ideas were borrowed and popularized, becoming so widely accepted that few today can say where they first originated. Furthermore, it was Rushdoony’s Reformed theology with its purist, separatist tendencies that eventually caused the division of the once loosely united homeschooling movement. Today, evangelical Christians predominate in American homeschooling, despite the movement’s origins in the 1960s countercultural left.

V. Evangelicals, Contraception, and the Emergence of Quiverfull

Thus far, this chapter has presented a narrative of evangelical Christians as they negotiated with American culture on the subjects of gender, family, and schooling from the Victorian period through the present. What we have seen is that despite changes in approach and delivery, the basic structure of evangelical gender and family norms has remained firm since the separate spheres and True Womanhood of the Victorian period. Although they began employing more pragmatic and therapeutic language after the 1950s, and despite the strong dissent offered by evangelical feminists, evangelicals in
general have steadfastly held on to the language of gender hierarchy and gender dualism as a cultural marker of Christian faithfulness. In a world gone awry, their construction of gender roles and the family provides a modicum of stability.

The evangelical perspective on schooling has undergone a few significant shifts since the Victorian period. Like most Americans, evangelicals joined the push for public schools at the turn of the century. They believed in the conservative work of the state on the family’s behalf and trusted common schools to help Americanize immigrants and other questionable citizens. But, in the post-war period, as schools became bigger, more homogenized, and more incubated against the influence of parents, evangelicals found common cause with the anti-establishment left in their questioning of the public school system. Inspired by the writings and activism of select leaders and empowered by the experience and example of the new Christian Right, many evangelical women jumped into the practice of homeschooling with both feet. In fact, Stevens argues from his ethnography of homeschooling families, “Ultimately, it is conservative Protestants’ deep commitment to full-time motherhood that has made them such a ready audience for home education.” In this way, the gender and family ideology that emerged in the Victorian period, combined with other factors like the anti-authoritarianism of the 1960s, set the stage for the emergence of homeschooling as a Christian practice among evangelicals in America.

Despite the fact that it remains a minority practice, homeschooling has become normalized in American evangelicalism, so much so that many see the full-time, stay at

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213 Whether rhetoric matches real life is another matter. Sally Gallagher’s research calls into question the congruence between evangelical “talk” and evangelical “walk” on matters of gender and family norms. See, Sally Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life.*

home, homeschooling mother as a sort of Christian ideal. This is just one way that the practice of evangelical homeschooling has had and will have a lasting effect on evangelical Christianity in America. And, more importantly for our purposes, the shifts and transformations within evangelicalism since the Victorian period set the stage in the late twentieth century for the emergence of an ideologically inflected subculture within the broader networks of evangelical homeschooling. Indeed, I contend (and will argue in more detail in the next chapter) that the identity of the Quiverfull movement exists where the discourses of gender hierarchy, homeschooling, and pronatalism overlap.

Before moving on to the emergence of the Quiverfull movement in particular, we must consider one element that has been missing from our narrative thus far: The subject of contraception. So, in this final section, I will begin by presenting a brief narrative of evangelicalism’s negotiations with contraception in America. Then, with that context in mind, I will explain the appearance of the Quiverfull discourse—with its anti-contraception and pronatalist practices—in more detail. Although it is impossible to pinpoint exactly when some evangelical families began to identify themselves as “Quiverfull,” we can point to a number of figures whose written work and public leadership provided a collective identity for some. We will save the majority of these figures for the next chapter. But, as we conclude this chapter, I will introduce Mary Pride, a figure whose rhetoric and practice reveals clear links to the narrative this chapter has sought to provide.
i. Evangelicals and Contraception in America

Other scholars have told the story of American Protestants and contraception in a detailed way. At this point, we need only a basic overview in order to situate the Quiverfull rejection of family planning within the larger story of American evangelicalism and birth control. When viewed in context, it becomes apparent that Quiverfull pronatalism is both a rejection of the widespread acceptance of contraception among American evangelicals and a reaction against the numerous social and cultural shifts of the 1960s, some of which were detailed above. In the following account, Quiverfull pronatalism and anti-contraception views will be treated as two sides of the same ideological coin.

Most historians note that prior to the twentieth century Protestants expressed a variety of views on the subject of fertility regulation. The majority of Protestants considered procreation one of the main purposes, if not the purpose, of marriage. Thus, actively limiting reproduction was a matter of debate. Still, according to historian Robert Schnucker there is evidence among English and American Puritans of the sixteenth century that some had begun to move away from the priority of procreation as the first

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216 Certainly, an anti-contraception ideology does not necessarily lead to pronatalism. For example, some Catholic families may eschew artificial birth control while still choosing to space and limit the number of children they have using other methods. For his part, John McKeown distinguishes between pronatalism (which he defines as the pursuit of an unlimited number of children) and natalism (which he defines as pursuing a more than average number of children but still limited). See John McKeown, “U.S. Protestant Natalist Reception of Old Testament Fruitful Verses” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Liverpool, 2011, 16. McKeown is building upon the categorization offered by Daniel Doriani, “Birth Dearth or Bring on the Babies? Biblical Perspectives on Family Planning,” Journal of Biblical Counseling vol. 12, no. 1 [Fall 1993], 24-35.). I don’t find the distinction McKeown makes particularly relevant for this project since the subject of my study are those associated with Quiverfull, a way of life that is inherently pronatalist—that is, seeking a “full quiver” of children without any attempt to limit reproduction. Thus, I will use the terms pronatalist and pronatalism throughout this project.
purpose of marriage. When this shift took place and sexual intercourse became as much about pleasure as about begetting children, the control of birth and intentional spacing of children slowly became more accepted.

By circa 1800, birthrates in the US began to fall even though Protestant denominations still officially outlawed contraception. By the turn of the century, national leaders began addressing the “gap between reproductive ideals” that had appeared between lay Christians and their leaders. In 1903, President Roosevelt was famously warning against the “race suicide” of “old-stock” Americans (Protestants from northern Europe) due to low fertility. Despite Roosevelt’s nativist protestations, which were shared by many others of the period, the practice of birth control continued to spread among US Protestants.

Some scholars suggest that evangelicals may have led the way to the general acceptance of birth control among U.S. Protestants. One study quoted by Patricia Goodson draws on data from a small Midwestern town in the late nineteenth century. Parkerson and Parkerson found that “pietist” (=evangelical) women delayed their first child seven months longer and consistently delayed their third child two years longer than their “liturgical” (=non-evangelical neighbors). Although taking note of possible economic factors contributing to this difference in practice, the authors of the study point

218 McKeown, “U.S. Protestant Natalist Reception,” 32.
219 Ibid.
220 Ibid., 33.
221 U.S. Protestant natalism in the early decades of the 20th Century was almost always paired with nationalist, racist, or nativist concerns. Above all, the higher fertility of recent immigrants, mostly Catholics from southern Europe, was perceived as a demographic threat to Protestant dominance.
to ideological elements within evangelical thought that they believe favored child spacing or limitation:

Pietists typically embraced a belief in spiritual free will, which nurtured a secular individualism offering women both an alternative to the domestic environment and a realistic option to limit their fertility. Moreover pietists placed greater importance on a personal conversion as well as intensive “Christian nurture” of their children. This encouraged pietistic women to have fewer children of “greater spiritual quality.”

Thus, while the official teaching of most Protestant denominations remained on the side of the Catholic Church against contraception, many Protestant Christians for a variety of reasons—including religious ones—practiced family planning in private.

Then, in 1930, the Anglican clergy decided at their Lambeth Conference to affirm the use of birth control within marriage. Other Protestants eventually followed suit, including the UK Methodists in 1939, the US Methodists in 1956, the Church of Scotland in 1944, and the Dutch Reformed Church in 1952. Even the most conservative groups, such as the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, underwent a shift in perspective leading to a near-universal acceptance of family planning by the mid-1960s. By mid-century, most historians agree that American Protestants, mainstream and evangelical, had reached a consensus accepting the legitimacy of contraception and family planning.

A 1965 symposium sponsored by Christianity Today and the Christian Medical Society produced a “Protestant Affirmation on the Control of Human Reproduction”

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224 McKeown, “U.S. Protestant Reception,” 34.
226 Goodson suggests the Protestant consensus had been reached by the late 1950s. See, “Protestants and Family Planning,” 356.
which was an evangelical consensus statement offering support for family planning.\textsuperscript{227} Among other things,\textsuperscript{228} the consensus statement references overpopulation as one reason for controlling family size. McKeown argues that this indicates not only a change in attitude toward contraception but also a shift away from natalism toward the acceptance of smaller family sizes.\textsuperscript{229}

As a result of this widespread consensus, anti-contraception statements among evangelicals were rare from the 1950s to the early 1980s. R. J. Rusdoony and Gary North, both leaders of Christian Reconstructionism, wrote in favor of pronatalism in 1974 and 1982, respectively.\textsuperscript{230} But, anti-contraception and pronatalist ideology was given wider support through the work of Mary Pride in \textit{The Way Home} (1985), Charles Provan in \textit{The Bible and Birth Control} (1989), and Rick and Jan Hess in \textit{A Full Quiver} (1996). Also worth mentioning is Joe Morecraft III, who drew on Rushdoony to promote pronatalism among Reformed, homeschooling evangelicals in the late-1980s.\textsuperscript{231} By 1991, \textit{Christianity Today}, which just 23 years earlier had helped publish a consensus statement in favor of birth control, was offering a cover story that framed birth control as a matter of contemporary debate.\textsuperscript{232} Clearly, the so-called Protestant consensus on family planning had been breached. In the decades that followed the \textit{CT} cover story, Christian publishers

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\item “The prevention of conception is not in itself forbidden or sinful providing the reasons for it are in harmony with the total revelation of God for married life. Disease, psychological debility, the number of children already in the family, and financial capability are among the factors determining whether pregnancy should be prevented” (Spitzer and Carlyle, “Affirmation” in \textit{Birth Control and the Christian}, xxv).
\item McKeown, “U.S. Protestant Reception,” 34.
\item Rushdoony and North were more pronatalist than anti-contraception. See, for example, R. J. Rushdoony, \textit{The Myth of Over-Population} (Fairfax, VA: Thornburn Press, 1974); Gary North, \textit{The Dominion Covenant: Genesis} (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).
\item See, for example, Joseph Morecraft, III, “The Bible on Large Families,” \textit{The Counsel of Chalcedon}, vol. 11, no. 8 (October 1989): 9-10.
\item Goodson, “Protestants and Family Planning,” 357.
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offered numerous books questioning or denying outright the ethical legitimacy of family
planning.233

But, Christian publications cannot be given sole credit for the shifting attitudes of
some evangelicals toward birth control. What other precipitating factors were involved in
this change? First, American evangelicals witnessed and participated in the
countercultural movements of the 1960s. All such movements, whether considered
“right” or “left” involved a readiness to question the cultural status quo on many subjects,
including family planning. During the 1960s, both feminists and cultural conservatives
called into question the safety and efficacy of artificial birth control, particularly the
Pill.234 Then, Roe v. Wade was decided in 1973, determining that the right to privacy
under the 14th amendment extends to the woman’s choice to have an abortion. Although
not immediately a lightning rod among religious conservatives, eventually the Religious
Right used abortion as a central issue for rallying support. Many evangelical writers who
have come out against contraceptives since Roe v. Wade link the practice of
contraception and abortion, describing the difference between them as one of degree
only. “Family planning is the mother of abortion,” says Mary Pride,

A generation had to be indoctrinated in the ideal of planning children around
personal convenience before abortion could become popular. We Christians raise
an outcry against abortion today, and rightly so. But the reason we have to fight

233 See, for example, Samuel A. Owen, Letting God Plan Your Family (Wheaton, IL: Crossway,
1990); Randy Alcorn, Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortions? (Eternal Perspective Ministries, 1997);
Nancy Campbell, Be Fruitful and Multiply: What the Bible Says about Having Children (San Antonio, TX:
Vision Forum, 2003); Sam and Bethany Torode, Open Embrace: A Protestant Couple Rethinks
Contraception (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); and Steve and Candice Watters, Start Your Family:

234 Elaine Tyler May, America and the Pill: A History of Promise, Peril, and Liberation (New
York: Basic Books, 2011). For example, the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective, which published the
groundbreaking book, Our Body, Ourselves (OBOS), offered a very skeptical perspective on the Pill in its
1973 edition due to concerns about side effects and risks of use. The 1984 edition was openly critical of the
Pill for the same reasons. By 1998, OBOS no longer supported use of the Pill. But, in the 2005 edition,
OBOS reverted back to a full support of the Pill due to the resolution of their concerns about its safety for
women (May, America and the Pill, 134-136).
Those battles today is because we lost them thirty years ago. Once couples began to look upon children as creatures of their own making, whom they could plan into their lives as they chose or not, all reverence for human life was lost.235

The Christian homeschooling movement, which arose shortly after the rise of the Religious Right and in which Mary Pride played a major role, was an ideal network for spreading an anti-contraception, pronatalist message. At once countercultural and anti-establishment, many in the homeschooling movement were able to combine their political opposition to abortion rights and fierce sense of familial independence with a personal practice of pronatalism. In a world they perceived to be under attack by feminists and secular humanists, what better form of counter-cultural rebellion than “militant fecundity”? While many in the Religious Right were mobilizing to win the “culture war” at the ballot box, pronatalist homeschoolers were committing themselves to a strategy of long-term demographic triumph.

By the 1980s, a few evangelical leaders began publicly condemning the practice of family planning while others simply cautioned their support with concerns about abortifacients and problematic anti-child mentalities. By 1991, enough evangelical leaders had shifted their opinion for Christianity Today to consider the legitimacy of family planning an open question. The 1950s Protestant consensus for birth control had splintered in the subsequent decades through a number of forces mentioned above. Today, there is recognizable segment of the evangelical population that denies the legitimacy of birth control for Christian use. Some of these evangelicals, though certainly not all, would consider themselves a part of the Quiverfull movement.

ii. Mary Pride and *The Way Home*

The Quiverfull discourse and subculture under consideration in this project emerged during the breach of Protestant consensus on birth control outlined above. Mary Pride, especially, was key in the shifting attitudes of evangelical homeschooling couples toward the limitation of family size. It is for that reason that she is often called the mother of the Quiverfull movement, as well as the mother of the Christian homeschooling movement. Pride’s many books include *The Way Home, All the Way Home,* and *The Big Book of Home Learning,* and she also publishes a monthly magazine, *Practical Homeschooling,* which now operates a very popular website. Her writing and example has been integral to the lives of millions of homeschooling families, especially in the early years of the movement, from the early 1980s to the 1990s. Many insiders to the Quiverfull movement speak of Pride’s first book, *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality,* as the catalyst for their chosen way of life. And, even though it is over 25 years old, it continues to inspire and motivate women today.

In *The Way Home,* Pride employs her fierce wit and knack for wordplay in an aggressive critique of what she simply calls “feminism.” In Pride’s construction, feminism is a selfish, power-hungry, man-hating, baby-killing, child-resenting, androgyny-promoting, monolithic and totalitarian movement that Christians must oppose.

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237 *Practical Homeschooling* can be found at http://www.practicalhomeschooling.com.

at all costs. What she offers instead is what she calls a “whole cloth alternative” to feminism: A life characterized by wifely submission, prolific childbearing, homeschooling, and home-working. In response to the vast numbers of evangelical women who had chosen employment beyond the home in the post-war period, Pride uses a loose exegesis of Titus 2 to call women back to the domestic sphere in an entirely home-centered lifestyle. And, in contrast to the therapeutic language of self-fulfillment that had proliferated since the 1960s, Pride offers a vision of marriage that is hierarchical and focused primarily on the production of godly offspring.

Her vision of home life, however, goes beyond a throwback to Victorian era ideals discussed above. Instead, she seems to be trying to resurrect the pre-industrial home of the Jeffersonian yeoman farmer, where the wife’s work in the home entails both reproduction and production—making babies and making goods. Well before the rise of Etsy and crafty mommy blogs, Pride’s book was a DIY manifesto for the Christian woman that offered an inspiring picture of creative housewifery that defied the portraits of bored suburban housewives in the 1950s. A good Christian woman, she argued, has as many babies as God gives her, educates all of them herself, and works in the home in ways that benefit her husband and the family as a unit. And, she offered the promise that, “[H]omeworking produces stable homes, growing churches, and children who are Christian leaders.”

At the time of its publication in 1985, Pride’s aggressive promotion of wifely submission and “homeworking” (which includes homeschooling) was not necessarily revolutionary. As we have seen, evangelicals had been hearing a number of voices

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239 Pride says flatly, “Feminism is a totally self-consistent system aimed at rejecting God’s role for women” (The Way Home, xii).
promote both for some time. But, one thing was revolutionary about *The Way Home*. In it, Pride denounced all forms of family planning—from condoms to the Pill to the rhythm method—as a dangerous perversion of God’s design. If children are blessings, Pride reasoned, then why would Christian couples seek to stop or limit such blessings? Mothers should embrace their unique ability to bear and nurse children and accept their calling as a “maternal missionary,” suffering and sacrificing courageously for the sake of children. 241 She asserts, “Childbearing sums up all our special biological and domestic functions.” Also, “[H]aving babies and raising them is our role, and we show we belong to God by persevering in it… Having babies is a Christian wife’s calling, whether first-time bride or remarried widow.” 242

Ultimately, Pride traces all of American society’s ills and all of the challenges faced by American women today to the widespread use of contraception. Moreover, the use of birth control and rejection of God’s purpose for women is ultimately about selfishness. And such womanly selfishness is the root of feminism’s greatest sin: Abortion. “Family planning is the mother of abortion,” Pride asserts. 243 Within an American evangelical culture politically united by opposition to abortion, it’s not hard to see why Pride’s link between birth control and abortion would be compelling to many in the mid-1980s. Thus, alongside gender hierarchy and homeschooling, Pride offered an anti-contraception, pronatalist discourse that fit neatly into her “whole cloth alternative,” home-centered lifestyle.

241 Ibid., 57.
242 Ibid., 43.
243 Ibid., 77.
VI. Conclusion

As we saw above, Mary Pride was certainly not the only evangelical Protestant to ever question or denounce the Christian use of contraception. Other outliers had questioned its use for some time (especially the Pill). But, she was the first recognizable figure to have such views published, distributed widely, and then speak of them publicly in such a winsome way. Pride combined a libertarian, anti-establishment, DIY ethos (that gained ascendancy in the Reagan years) with evangelical Biblicism, gender hierarchy, and homeschooling ideology, and delivered it in a spunky, humorous style. It is not surprising that many evangelical women found her case compelling.

By taking up Pride’s vision for Christian womanhood, some evangelical women in the late 1980s began to live out a three-part discourse that would eventually become recognizable to outsiders as a distinct subgroup within the evangelical milieu. Eventually, families who eschewed family planning and practiced gender hierarchy and homeschooling would come to be called “Quiverfull,” based upon their obedience to the “principle” of Psalm 127:4-5 that a man is blessed whose “quiver” is “full” of children. This particularly ideologically inflected subgroup of the evangelical homeschooling movement is the focus of the present project and it is to a more intensive consideration of their identity and discourse that we now turn.
CHAPTER 2
CONCEIVING QUIVERFULL

I. Introduction

I met homeschooling mother of five, Deborah Olson, at a Family-Driven Faith Conference featuring Pastor Voddie Baucham at a Baptist church in Cincinnati. She was eager to meet someone who lived near them since they had travelled quite a distance. The main draw was the chance to see Baucham in person because he has been inspirational for their chosen way of life. After a long conversation in the parking lot, I told Deborah about my research project on Quiverfull families and asked whether she would be interested in participating. She agreed and gave me her contact information.

About a week following, I sent Deborah an email telling her a bit more about my research and asking whether she would allow me to interview her. We found a mutually agreeable date and time and met at a chain restaurant for breakfast. Following that interview, I conducted many other interviews with Deborah, both in person and by phone, and spent one weekday afternoon in her home.

Deborah and Dan Olson live in a mid-sized city in the Midwest with a population around 25,000 according to the 2010 census. The city is predominantly white (90%)
with a median per family income of around $47,000. The Olsons are also white and both are college educated. Dan works for city government and Deborah is the full-time stay-at-home, homeschooling mother of their six children, ranging in age from two to 10 years. They live in their first purchased home in the suburbs of their city. Together, they have a significant amount of student loan debt that Deborah wishes they could have halved by her foregoing college entirely. Although she had planned to have a career in teaching, after she gave birth to their first child Deborah never went back to the classroom. She began homeschooling when her kids were old enough to start formal schooling. They have never attended a brick and mortar school. Both Deborah and Dan come out of a charismatic Christian background, which she describes as “legalistic.” The couple met in church, went to college together, and then wed following graduation. Deborah had always wanted a large family, but it was only after they had difficulty conceiving their first child that they decided to forgo birth control entirely. Now they are open to as many children as God sees fit to bless them with, even though Deborah has had “difficult pregnancies” that have taken a toll on her physically.

If it were possible to speak of a “typical” Quiverfull family, then Deborah and Dan would be good candidates for that designation. Unfortunately, sociological research has yet to be done to provide exact numbers on the number of American Quiverfull families, let alone the specific details of their households. Moreover, these families (like a lot of homeschooling families) are often skeptical of outsiders, especially anyone wanting to study and write about their way of life. That said, my research (including in-person interviews, observation at events, and data culled through Quiverfull blogs) allows me to sketch a very general picture. Broadly speaking, Quiverfull families are white, lower or
middle class, sustained financially by the male breadwinning husband, and a 
homemaking mother who has had some college education. From what I can tell,
Quiverfull families are evenly spread in suburban and rural areas, although all seem to 
idealize the rural life.246 The families I interviewed for this project were from the 
Midwest and Texas, but Internet searches for Quiverfull blogs yields results all over the 
United States, including Alaska. There is no way to know what the average number of 
children is for Quiverfull families, but of the families I interviewed, six was the least and 
eleven was the most. All of the mothers said that they remained “open to more.”

When I first made contact with Deborah, I sent her an informed consent form to 
sign so that she could affirm her participation in my project. Although her subsequent 
reply was positive and warm (as she was throughout our many interactions), Deborah 
expressed some incredulity that her way of life would be the subject of a research project, 
a sentiment she expressed repeatedly in the course of our interviews. I find her initial 
email a helpful starting point for the present chapter. Here’s one paragraph from the 
email:

I have to admit, it seems bizarre to me the notion that what I am doing with my 
life is a “movement.” Literally, it makes me giggle and feel sad at the same 
time. Clearly our convictions for living our lives the way we do is because we 
believe it was God’s intention from the very beginning and that hopefully it 
mimics in ways what early Christians would have been doing, minus a lot current 
day culture that is impossible to rid from our lives. For that, we depend on God’s 
grace; and a lot of it!247

In this short excerpt, Deborah puts her finger on a number of issues that I face as a 
scholar hoping to contextualize, explain, and dialogue with Quiverfull families in the

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246 I have yet to find a Quiverfull family that lives in an urban environment. It’s very likely that the 
commitment to living on one income and the proliferation of children make urban life cost prohibitive, not 
to mention practically complicated for Quiverfull families.

247 Deborah Olson, email message to author, September 21, 2013.
American context. First, we must ask, is it really a movement, after all? Is Deborah, despite her incredulity, part of a social movement bigger than herself and the other Christian homeschooling families with which she cooperates? Or, is Deborah’s amused reaction the correct one? Perhaps, those who would call Quiverfull a movement (thus far mostly journalists) are making a mountain out of a proverbial molehill.\textsuperscript{248} The categorization of Quiverfull families is something that must be considered with greater care. But, this leads naturally into the question of how to identify a Quiverfull family. If Deborah does not view herself as part of a “movement” (even finding the prospect laughable) is it really possible to identify her as Quiverfull? Or, is there more to being Quiverfull that extends beyond simple self-identification to include other beliefs and practices? Deborah’s expressed sadness and admission that her way of life differs from the status quo of “present day culture” suggest there are things that set her family apart from her neighbors. So, what makes a family “Quiverfull”? And, can you be Quiverfull without accepting the label?

The third and final question Deborah’s email raises is, for what reasons do these families practice the Quiverfull way of life? She claims they do so simply because they are convinced it was “God’s intention from the very beginning” and because “it mimics in ways what early Christians would have been doing.” She is referring to the assumed biblical foundation for Quiverfull, where “God’s intention” is found for evangelical Protestants, and to the historical precedence (whether real or imagined) in the early church, which she assumes can and should be replicated by Christian families today. But,

\textsuperscript{248} Sociologists of religion are often guilty of making much of small, marginal, and in many ways bizarre religious groups. Sociologist Grace Davie takes note of this tendency in her \textit{The Sociology of Religion: A Critical Agenda} (Los Angeles/London: SAGE Publications, 2013), 163ff. This tendency seems to be exacerbated in cases of fundamentalist groups.
isn’t there more to the Quiverfull way of life than simply replicating what they think the Bible teaches and the early church practiced? My suspicion is that there is more, but careful study will be required to answer that suspicion with evidence.

The following chapter will take up the challenge of providing a thorough account of Quiverfull as a phenomenon in contemporary American evangelicalism. To start, I will offer an explanation of both “Quiverfull” and “movement,” clarifying how I intend to use these terms in this project. Then, bringing into play the work of other scholars of American religion, I will offer a few conceptual lenses through which the Quiverfull movement may be viewed. I proceed with this descriptive and analytical chapter keeping in mind both Deborah’s skeptical giggling and her implicit admission that her way of life is, in fact, different from her neighbors. It is this difference that the present chapter seeks to explicate in more detail.

II. Speaking of the Quiverfull Movement: Defining Terms

Although I have been using the terms “Quiverfull” and “movement” thus far without explanation, it is important to pause at this point and consider in more detail what these terms mean. In what follows, I will explain where these terms come from, how I plan to use them in this project, and why.

A. Quiverfull

The term “Quiverfull” is used both by outsiders and insiders to the movement and has its origin in the language of Psalm 127:3-5, which says:

Children are a heritage from the Lord,  
offspring a reward from him.  
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior  
are children born in one’s youth.
Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.
They will not be put to shame
when they contend with their opponents in court.249

Although this psalm was referenced in Mary Pride’s early book, The Way Home, co-authors Rick and Jan Hess popularized it with their book, A Full Quiver (with a foreword by Mary Pride), published in 1990.250 In it, the Hesses argue strongly for viewing children as an unqualified blessing and childrearing as the primary work of the Christian marriage. Although A Full Quiver has been out of print for some time, their book seems to have been the prime catalyst for the widespread use of the term “Quiverfull” for those who eschew family planning. Those who adopted the Hesses’ perspective began to use the term to describe themselves (i.e., “We are a Quiverfull family”). This led to the creation of a website devoted to the subject, Quiverfull.com, which also offers the Quiverfull Digest, an email newsletter available by subscription.251 Quiverfull.com came online in 1995, which suggests that within five years of the publication of A Full Quiver, the term had become popularized and adopted by many families to describe their way of life—enough families, at least, to support a website and monthly newsletter devoted to discussing life in large Christian families. The Internet also allowed for the popularization of the term through the proliferation of merchandise using the Quiverfull moniker.252 Members of the media picked up the term, too, as

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249 Unless otherwise noted, I will use the New International Version (NIV 2011) of the Bible.
251 It seems that Quiverfull.com has not been updated since 2011, which calls into question the usefulness of the website as a site of ongoing activity for Quiverfull families today. But, there is no doubt that it has been a location for networking and information sharing among Quiverfull families up until recently.
252 See, for example, the variety of things available at http://www.cafepress.com/+quiverfull+gifts, including bibs and hats imprinted with “Militant Fecundity” and tongue-in-cheek T-shirts that say, “Birth control is for sissies” or “Yes, they’re all ours.” Interestingly, Café Press groups other
reports began to surface on the Quiverfull way of life. By the time Kathryn Joyce published her book, Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement, in 2009 it seems that the word had been in use by insiders and outsiders for about ten years.

What do people mean by the term Quiverfull? Joyce and other outsiders who write about Quiverfull families typically have in mind conservative Christian families that have intentionally large families and believe in some kind of “Christian patriarchy” (a.k.a., “male headship”). Some outsiders emphasize the stated long-term goal of some evangelical Christian pronatalism: the transformation of American culture through a major demographic shift. When families call themselves Quiverfull, they are typically referring to their willingness to have as many children as possible (that is, “as many children as God gives”). Such families may or may not assign to their reproduction the goal of long-term cultural transformation, but all of them would eschew all forms of birth control. In all of these cases, the focus is primarily upon the practice of prolific childbirth; or, to be clearer, a constant openness and willingness to bear as many children as their married union produces. Thus, for insiders and outsiders, the term Quiverfull is being used to pinpoint both a practice (not using birth control and being open to many children) and a belief (children are an unqualified blessing—the more the better), which may or may not be linked to Christian patriarchy.

merchandise with their Quiverfull materials, including the categories patriarch, antifeminism, and modesty. This is indicative of the way that the beliefs and practices overlap among people who participate in Quiverfull discourse.


Still, the complicating factor in discussing the use of the term Quiverfull is the fact that in recent years the label has taken on some distasteful stereotypes and weathered some public scandals. For this reason, many families today, despite affirming the practices and beliefs indicated above, would reject the label “Quiverfull” due to its negative connotations. For example, prominent homeschooling blogger Heidi St. John said the following when commenting on the scandals involving Bill Gothard and Doug Phillips, both of whom are associated with the Quiverfull movement: “By not speaking out, we become guilty by association. For example, it pains me that the seven children God has blessed me and my husband with automatically associates us with the ‘quiverfull movement.’ Frankly, I’m embarrassed to be associated with such a movement. I have finally decided to be brave and just say it: I don’t believe this movement is biblical.”

Here we see that despite the fact that St. John and her husband have seven children, educate all of them at home, and believe in a form of male headship, she rejects her association with the “quiverfull movement,” going so far as to call it “unbiblical”—a very strong denunciation in evangelical circles.

Many who commented on St. John’s post offered their support and personal desire to disassociate themselves with the perceived problems of the “quiverfull movement,” despite the fact that they are, for all intents and purposes, living the kind of life advocated by Quiverfull proponents. Even Deborah, who we met above, wants to be careful about the designation, saying, “I’m not part of anything purposefully. I know that I’m very conscious about not following individuals. But that doesn’t mean that if you were trying to do a sociology project that I’m not going to get grouped with other people.

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like this… But any group of people that you write about will have divisions within them.”

For the purposes of this project, I will use the term Quiverfull to refer to families who participate in a discourse ordered by three practices: homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and pronatalism. (A detailed explanation of each aspect and how they relate to each other will be provided below.) Participants in this discourse are also participants in a subculture of evangelicalism. Thus, individuals and families can be Quiverfull; and these individuals and families, by participating in certain cultural institutions, are also participants in the Quiverfull subculture. But, both the families and the subculture are identifiable as Quiverfull because of the presence of all three aspects of their discourse: homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and pronatalism.

By linking the definition of Quiverfull to a three-part discourse, there is a way in which I am expanding the scope of the term as it has been used to this point. Rather than see militant fecundity as the focal practice, I am including homeschooling and gender hierarchy, as well (something I will argue for in more detail below). In my usage, the three practices demarcated by the shorthand term “Quiverfull” may or may not include an orientation toward the goal of cultural transformation via demographic shift. Moreover, I will use the term Quiverfull for teachers, leaders, authors, bloggers, and families at the grassroots level, regardless of whether they use it to describe themselves.

Due to the negotiations taking place around the application of the term “Quiverfull,” it would, perhaps, be preferable to use another word. But, I have been

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256 Stacy McDonald, a leading voice in the Quiverfull subculture, began to separate herself from the term long before the scandals involving Bill Gothard and Doug Phillips. On December 12, 2010, McDonald said the following on her blog: “Am I ‘quiverfull’? No, I think I’d rather be ‘Jesus-Full,’” (accessed December 2, 2014, http://steadfastdaughters.com/jesus-full/).
unable to find a label that encompasses and properly names the combination of three practices outlined above. At this point, it has been almost 25 years since *A Full Quiver* was published and the term is now part of the vernacular of American evangelicalism. Also, it continues to be used by journalists and bloggers. And, perhaps most importantly, it retains the symbolic link to Psalm 127:4, which is key to the lives of the families under consideration in this project. Thus, I will retain the term Quiverfull as a shorthand for persons and families who participate in the three practices of homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and pronatalism, as well as the subculture they have produced, all the while cognizant of the fact that I will sometimes do so in the case of people who would personally eschew the label for various reasons.

**B. Movement**

Kathryn Joyce’s book, *Quiverfull*, employed the term “movement” in reference to proponents of what she called “Christian patriarchy.” It is unknown whether she was the first to do so, but there is no doubt that her book and the articles that followed spread the phrase “Quiverfull movement” into the American mainstream. A survey of articles written by outsiders suggests that “Quiverfull movement” has become a normal way of speaking of the evangelical families who choose to eschew family planning, homeschool their children, and practice male headship. Despite its popularity, however, it is important to recognize that the term “movement” is sociologically inexact. Scholars of contemporary social movement theory debate several ways of understanding social movements. For a review of approaches and concepts, see, Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts* (Second Edition; Malden, MA/Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
identity, and personal biography and agency.\textsuperscript{258} Compared to classic social movements like the American civil rights movement, as well as so-called new social movements like the LGBT rights movement, Quiverfull families cannot properly be categorized as part of a movement in the strict sociological sense of the term. Instead, as I will explain in more detail below, it is better to see them as part of a discernible subculture of American evangelicalism that has developed within the networks and institutions of the Christian homeschooling movement over the past 30 years.\textsuperscript{259}

Even so, with the above qualifications in mind, I think it both unnecessary and undesirable to toss out the term altogether. As stated above, “Quiverfull movement” has become a commonplace way of referring to Quiverfull families in the media. To remain conversant with the public discussions happening around this issue, retaining the term movement is preferable to seeking to impose another one. But, perhaps more importantly, the term “movement,” while inexact sociologically, does manage to articulate the way that many Quiverfull proponents view their own cultural action. Even if sociologists would be disinclined to name the work of Quiverfull families as composing a movement, there is no doubt that many such families are trying to bring about widespread social and cultural change. The goal of cultural transformation is not new to evangelicals, of course, but constitutes a defining element of the evangelical ethos discussed at the beginning of

\textsuperscript{258} Of course, some scholars make use of more than one theory, but the literature tends to coalesce around one approach over against another. For a helpful introduction to each of the abovementioned approaches, as well as a discussion of how religion requires a more prominent place in social movement theory, see Sharon Ericson Nepstad, \textit{Convictions of the Soul: Religion, Culture, and Agency in the Central America Solidarity Movement} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3-29.

Chapter 1. The evangelistic zeal of evangelical Christians to share the Gospel with “all nations” is almost always paired with an activist sensibility toward broader society. Thus, while acknowledging that Quiverfull families do not constitute a movement in sociological terms, I will continue to use the term “movement” because of pre-existing usage and because of the way that it names the evangelical zeal for cultural transformation that is very much a part of the Quiverfull subculture.

Now that we have a better sense of what I mean when I speak of the Quiverfull movement, the following section will present a number of analytical tools for helping us better understand the movement. Although these do not represent the only ways to examine the lived religion of Quiverfull families, I think these are the best theoretical lenses for making Quiverfull lived religion intelligible to outsiders. First, we will consider Quiverfull as a discourse ordered around particular practices. This will entail a view of Quiverfull as a three-part discourse of homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and pronatalism, which was put forward in the Introduction. Second, drawing on the work of Robert Wuthnow, we will consider Quiverfull as a transdenominational special purpose group. Third, drawing on the work of Christian Smith, we will look at Quiverfull as an evangelical subculture, followed by a sketch of Quiverfull subculture that highlights the elite and lay cultural producers. Each of these perspectives should be understood as offering different ways to view Quiverfull, moving from the micro level (discourse and practices) to the macro level (special purpose group and subculture).

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261 I say almost always because there are fundamentalist groups that have, at various times in U.S. history, totally eschewed social and cultural involvement to avoid being tainted by the sins of the world. Still, these instances of extreme separationism represent irregularities in what is, as most historians would argue, a general trend among evangelicals toward social, political, and cultural activism for the purpose of effecting change.
III. Three Perspectives on the Quiverfull Movement

A. Quiverfull as a Discourse of Practices

The first conceptual lens through which to view the Quiverfull movement is to see them as a discourse ordered around particular practices. Due to the significance of discourse to this project, I have already offered an overview of Quiverfull as a discourse in the Introduction. Thus, what follows is simply a review of the material already presented. In this project, I am employing discourse in a way first developed by Michel Foucault. Sociologist Iara Lessa helpfully summarizes Foucault’s complicated view of discourse in the following way: “systems of thought composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak.” Discourse in this sense means more than simply written and spoken communication or a way of thinking, but also includes bodily activities, rituals, materials, and places where these things come together, all of which contribute toward a particular construction of subjects and the world of which they speak and in which they act. In short, “Discourse encompasses any signifying or meaning-making element,” to quote Mary McClintock Fulkerson, and must take into consideration both the signs of language and the “statements,” or “situations of utterance.” The Quiverfull discourse constitutes more than simply the content of their published materials and sermons, but also includes

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264 Mary McClintock Fulkerson, Changing the Subject: Women’s Discourses and Feminist Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 77.
the institutions, actions, practices, and objects of material culture, which make up their
day-to-day life.\textsuperscript{265}

At this point, we must clarify that discourse is not something static and
monolithic. Because discourse is more than ideas and beliefs located in the mind, but also
daily practices and materials—including “little things” and “subtle arrangements”—
Quiverfull discourse must be thought of as constantly emerging through a process of
negotiation and conflict.\textsuperscript{266} Although I am seeking to render the Quiverfull discourse
intelligible to outsiders, which implies the expectation of some measure of coherency, we
must be careful not to assume that there \textit{must} be some internal logic. Furthermore, for
Foucault, discourses are “marked by ruptures, lacunae, and incoherences.”\textsuperscript{267} This means
that not only can we expect discourses to be contested and internally inconsistent, but
also that beliefs and practices often work themselves out in unpredictable ways.\textsuperscript{268}

\textsuperscript{265} Therefore, Fulkerson is right to say, “The turn to discourse is not idealist in the sense of
denying the existence of reality outside of minds; it is, in fact, materialist. The differences that construct
signification are widened to include the discourses of a mode of production, the processes of the democratic
state and the ‘ideological’ discursive processes of the culture” (\textit{Changing the Subject}, 93). Fulkerson is
speaking of the construction of woman as a subject, but I think her point applies well to the present project.
While I will not be able to be as thorough in my analysis of the women and families of Quiverfull, I hope to
be ever mindful of the wider discourses Fulkerson mentions that come to bear in real ways upon the
Quiverfull discourse.

\textsuperscript{266} Julie Ingersoll, \textit{Evangelical Christian Women: War Stories in the Gender Battles} (Qualitative

\textsuperscript{267} Vincent J. Miller, “History or Geography? Gadamer, Foucault, and Theologies of Tradition,” in

\textsuperscript{268} There is some overlap between discourse and the concept of lived religion. I could just as easily
say that the term Quiverfull refers to families whose lived religion takes on a very particular shape. The
term “lived religion” means what it sounds like: the way a particular people practices their religion in every
day life. Like discourse, lived religion entails not just beliefs and texts, but also the rituals, experiences,
relationships, and things that make up a people’s religious life. In the words of Robert Orsi, “The study of
lived religion situates all religious creativity within culture and approaches all religion as lived experience”
Quiverfull as a lived religion would still prioritize the practices of homeschooling, pronatalism, and
patriarchy. Each of these things entails certain beliefs, which emerge from particular biblical texts, but
more importantly, they are practiced—or, lived out in daily life. For more on the study of American
religion in terms of practices, see David D. Hall, ed., \textit{Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of
Rather than frame Quiverfull primarily in terms of patriarchy (or what I choose to
call gender hierarchy), I have proposed that Quiverfull families should be seen as players
within a discourse composed of three parts: homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and
pronatalism. If we can conceive of these parts as circles in a Venn diagram, it is at the
center where the three circles converge that the Quiverfull discourse is located. As we
proceed, we must keep in mind our explanation of discourse above: it is more than simply
written and spoken communication, but also includes practices—the bodily activities and
rituals of daily life—as well as material things and the places where the discourse is
performed. Although we will not have space at this juncture to highlight all of these
aspects, the following explanation always has in mind the multiple ways that discourse is
voiced and embodied in any given context.

i. Homeschooling

The first element in the three-part discourse of the Quiverfull movement is the
practice of homeschooling. As I argued in Chapter 1, the Quiverfull movement as it has
come to be recognized today is a subgroup that developed over the past forty years within
the broader networks of the Christian homeschooling movement. Although Joyce and
other commentators focus almost exclusively on the patriarchal and pronatalist practices
of Quiverfull families, it is important to see that homeschooling is just as central to their
lived experience. For Quiverfull families “on the ground,” the practice of homeschooling

269 Blogger and Quiverfull daughter, Libby Anne, of *Love, Joy, Feminism*, confirms my
interpretation of homeschooling’s centrality to Quiverfull discourse in her post “Christian
Patriarchy/Quiverfull” saying, “Christian Patriarchy/Quiverfull is made up of a loosely connected group of
organizations that promote extremely strict gender differences, submission to the family patriarch, and
raising up armies of children for Christ. These organizations have gained a great deal of influence in the
Christian segment of the homeschool movement, and evangelicals and fundamentalists who homeschool
encounter Christian Patriarchy/Quiverfull, sometimes unwittingly, through homeschool literature,
conferences, and leaders. This is how Christian Patriarchy/Quiverfull gains its new recruits.”
is the primary structure within which the family’s way of life is ordered. The Quiverfull couple’s “militant fecundity” has a clear goal: the rearing of godly Christian children who will carry on the faith and transform society in the decades and centuries to come.

Christian homeschooling is the primary means by which this training is carried out. Although homeschooling curriculum and pedagogy will vary considerably from family to family, the central practice is the same: the education of children is undertaken as the primary responsibility of parents and conducted within the home. Thus, while there are many homeschooling families that are not Quiverfull, there is no such thing as a Quiverfull family that does not homeschool. Quiverfull homeschooling is oriented toward one purpose: “multigenerational faithfulness.” This phrase, coined by Voddie Baucham, expresses their desire to ensure that all of their children continue on the Christian faith, as they understand it, for multiple generations.

ii. Gender Hierarchy

As we saw in Chapter 1, despite some inherent egalitarian sensibilities, the essentialist gender hierarchy of evangelical Protestantism has been around for a long time. With that narrative in mind, the link between gender hierarchy and the practice of homeschooling is not difficult to understand. Mitchell Stevens has observed that gender dualism is both ubiquitous and central to the Christian homeschooling movement.271 He

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270 David Bentley Hart, quoted by Joyce, Quiverfull, 179. The larger context, which speaks of how to win cultural battles, is as follows: “[P]robably the most subversive and effective strategy we might undertake would be one of militant fecundity: abundant, relentless, exuberant, and defiant childbearing. Given the reluctance of modern men and women to be fruitful and multiply, it would not be difficult, surely, for the devout to accomplish—in no more than a generation or two—a demographic revolution” (“Freedom and Decency,” First Things, June 2004). Of course, as an Orthodox theologian, Hart is not a member of the Quiverfull movement.

271 Stevens distinguishes between two different kinds of homeschoolers: “inclusives” and “believers.” Inclusives are homeschoolers from a variety of faith traditions and cultures who do not separate themselves for religious reasons. Believers are homeschoolers from conservative Christian
argues that, “it is conservative Protestants’ deep commitment to full-time motherhood that has made them such a ready audience for home education.”

Quiverfull families call their practice of gender hierarchy many different things, including biblical patriarchy, Christian patriarchy, male headship, beautiful womanhood, and visionary womanhood. For the past few decades, many Quiverfull families have openly embraced the term patriarchy for its anti-feminist valence, but recent years has seen a slow defection from the term because of its association with some public figures who have been denounced as extreme of late. As I explained in the Introduction, I have chosen in this project not to employ the term patriarchy to characterize the gender dynamics of Quiverfull discourse. Instead, I will use the terms gender hierarchy, gender dualism, and male headship, depending on the subject under discussion. I make this choice in part to avoid the implication of universality or a shared experience of oppression. Also, I wish to avoid becoming entangled in the internal debates of Quiverfull and homeschooling families regarding the right or wrong application of the term patriarchy. As I am using it, gender hierarchy refers to the biblically rooted belief in male headship (the language of which backgrounds who tend to separate themselves from inclusives and form their own networks, co-ops, and other organizations. Although the early homeschooling movement was inclusive in nature, Stevens claims that “believers” now make up the majority of American homeschoolers. The story of this shift is told in Stevens, Kingdom of Children, as well as Gaither, Homeschool.

272 Stevens, Kingdom of Children, 187.

273 There was even a Patriarch magazine published by Philip Lancaster from 1993 to 2004. Their website described their mission as follows: “Patriarch’s mission is to bring about a return to patriarchy, leadership by strong, godly men in every sphere of life. For this reason we promote: Christ-like manhood, neither wimpy nor tyrannical; a home-centered lifestyle, from homeschooling to courtship; transformed churches, Bible-based and family friendly; vigorous Christian citizenship, to reclaim the nation; a Biblical worldview, comprehensive yet practical.” Lancaster was an associate of Douglas Phillips who spoke at many Vision Forum events and homeschooling conferences around the country. Also, he is the author of the book Family Man, Family Leader: Biblical Fatherhood as the Key to a Thriving Family (San Antonio, TX: Vision Forum, 2003).

274 The scandals alluded to here will be discussed in more detail below. Whether these denunciations are sincere or simply the result of a desire to avoid guilt by association with disgraced persons is a question that has yet to be answered. Prominent ex-Quiverfull and ex-homeschooling blogs call into question the denunciations of patriarchy now coming from leaders who have, in the past, certainly endorsed it. See, for example, R. L. Stollar, “What Patriarchy is Not,” April 28, 2014, accessed May 5, 2014, http://homeschoolersanonymous.wordpress.com/2014/04/28/what-christian-patriarchy-is-not/.
comes from Eph. 5:23), which posits a general principle of male rule in all areas of life, due primarily to the order of creation (Gen. 2), which is understood to teach both gender-based roles and a dualism of gendered spheres.

Within the three-part discourse of Quiverfull, gender hierarchy (and corresponding gender dualism) is described in markedly consistent terms: husbands and fathers are the God-ordained, breadwinning leaders of the home, working primarily in the public sphere, while wives and mothers are the God-ordained submissive, supportive “keepers of the home,” working primarily in the private sphere. Within the Quiverfull discourse, though, included in women’s primary responsibility for the care and nurture of children is the responsibility for their education. While fathers, the leaders and providers, work outside the home to support the family, mothers, the supporters and nurturers, are the primary laborers in the work of Christian homeschooling.

Even so, there persists an apparent tension within Quiverfull practice between the tacit patriarchy they endorse and the mother-centered nature of the homeschooling endeavor. In Colleen McDannell’s essay on Christian homeschooling she makes the following observation:

Being the sole provider for their children’s education not only increases a mother’s responsibility, it gives her a respectable career… Teaching becomes their profession. They no longer see themselves as simply housewives or mothers. They have found an occupation that is fully acceptable within their religious and cultural milieu… Through homeschooling the home becomes a workplace; a “school” where a “teacher” performs her professional duties.275

Not only does the housewife become professionalized through homeschooling, but McDannell also notes that the homeschooling practice can effectively domesticate the

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Christian patriarch. Yes, the men are thought to be providers and spiritual leaders of the home, but part of that expectation includes providing assistance and support to their wives. This support is required not only in the work of education, but also in the maintenance of the household. The responsibility to support their wives in tangible ways can serve to tie the men closely to the domestic sphere and encourage them to become adept in the “feminized” space of the home. This participation in the home is interpreted as part of their divine calling to be the “family shepherd.” Thus, for some families, the affirmation of patriarchy works itself out on the ground in surprisingly non-patriarchal ways, particularly when combined with the daily work of homeschooling a large family. The details of this modification and negotiation between homeschooling and gender hierarchy will be considered in more detail in Chapter 4.

iii. Pronatalism

Pronatalism names the Quiverfull rejection of birth control and desire to have as many children as God chooses to give them. As I said in the Introduction, when it is practiced, pronatalism has active and passive aspects. On the one hand, Quiverfull wives reject the Pill, condoms, and other forms of birth control in order to, in their terms, leave control of their fertility to God. In this sense, pronatalism is about what a couple is not doing. On the other hand, the choice to have sex during the fertile times in a woman’s cycle might be called active pronatalism. This is a practice that moves beyond merely not preventing pregnancy to actively pursuing it. The active and passive aspects of Quiverfull

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277 This is by no means the norm, however. One of my informants repeatedly speaks of her disappointment that her husband did not take on a more active role in the education and formation of their children. She wanted him to be more of a “patriarch” than he actually was. We will discuss this scenario in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.
pronatalism will vary depending on the couple and fluctuate based upon a variety of circumstances in the family’s life. No matter how the practice takes shape in the lives of Quiverfull couples, two convictions are constant: 1) the belief that God is in direct control of the conception of children; 2) the belief that all children are an unqualified blessing or gift from God.

Some, though not all, families have as the goal of their pronatalism the production of “arrows for the war” over American culture. This recalls our discussion of what constitutes Quiverfull as a discernible movement. Among many Quiverfull couples, the activist impulse inherent to evangelical Christianity works itself out in a transformative goal for their pronatalist practice. For these couples, it’s not simply about having many children for their own sake, but also for the sake of spurring a massive demographic shift over the next few hundred years. The reasoning is, if the average American family has two children while Quiverfull families have six, and this discrepancy continues for another couple of centuries, then a substantial demographic shift will take place, thereby “Christianizing” American culture in the long term.

iv. Putting it All Together

I have argued that Quiverfull families can be understood as participants within a three-part discourse ordered around particular practices. Homeschooling forms the operative framework for their daily life and has a significant influence on the way the pronatalism and gender hierarchy of Quiverfull families gets performed. Although other

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279 Of course, the efficacy of this long-term plan is a matter of debate. In *To Change the World*, Hunter criticizes evangelicals who envision cultural change in this way, calling it simplistic and shortsighted.
interpreters and critics of Quiverfull have focused mainly on the pronatalism and gender hierarchy of the movement, it is my contention that all three aspects are the essential elements to Quiverfull lived religion. If we can conceive of these three parts as circles in a Venn diagram, it is at the center where the three circles converge that the Quiverfull discourse is located.

But, it is important to recall the contributions of Tanner, Garriott, and O’Neill referenced in the Introduction. They help us to see that not all Quiverfull families will conceive of and participate in these practices in the same way. The movement is not monolithic, but evidences widespread differences in the way they perform their discourse. Thus, while establishing Quiverfull practice with a three-part discourse of homeschooling, pronatalism, and gender hierarchy, I acknowledge that this conception remains dialogic: something that is always emerging and a matter of debate.\(^\text{280}\)

v. Additional Practices

While the three-part discursive web described above forms the basis for the Quiverfull identity, it is also worth pointing out that two other elements that often play a part in the lives of such families. First, many Quiverfull families operate within the nascent family-integrated church movement,\(^\text{281}\) which has a corresponding point of view that prioritizes the family unit, led by the father, even within the church. Broadly speaking, FIC is a reaction against the common practice of age-segregated teaching in

\(^\text{280}\) Nowhere is this dialogic nature of Quiverfull discourse more readily apparent than in Quiverfull online forums where the question of who is and is not “Quiverfull” is always being debated. For example, ChristianForums.com features a Quiverfull forum that has been active since 2006 and currently features 202 discussion threads. Participants in the forum regularly return to the question of whether you can be Quiverfull if you use contraception or natural family planning.

\(^\text{281}\) I am skeptical about the accuracy of the term “movement” in regards to FIC. I do think a case could be made, however, that the FIC is an informal, transdenominational special purpose group, in Robert Wuthnow’s terms. Because it is tangential to my focus, however, I will not make that case at this time. I will suggest how this concept applies to the Quiverfull movement below.
Protestant churches and an attempt to reverse trends that show Christian families are less and less successful at keeping their children within the faith as they grow up. FIC adherents eschew any kind of segregated teaching for children and youth and prioritize the parents’ role as the primary teachers of their children. It is easy to see why many Quiverfull families who homeschool, a practice that envisions parents as the primary teachers of children, would cooperate as well with FIC institutions. The FIC movement is most visible in the National Center for Family Integrated Churches, which has as its mission the promotion of what they understand to be the proper relationship between the church and the family. Although they will have varying levels of cooperation with FIC networks and organizations, most Quiverfull families will choose churches that promote what they see as the “biblical family” (read: headed by the husband/father) and support their practice of keeping the family together for worship, Sunday School, and other events. FIC teachers argue that children are to be instructed in religion by their parents at home and often stress the need for daily “family worship” led by the father. Families committed to FIC will often speak of the priority of “multigenerational faithfulness,” which means the goal of having their children and children’s children for many

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282 See, for example, Scott Brown, *A Weed in the Church: How a Culture of Age Segregation is Destroying the Younger Generation, Fragmenting the Family, and Harming the Church* (Merchant Adventures, 2010); Voddie Baucham, *Family-Driven Faith: Doing What it Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

283 The NCFIC mission is as follows: “1) Proclaim the sufficiency of scripture for church and family life; 2) Promote the centrality of the church in God’s plan for families; 3) Recover the biblical doctrines of manhood and womanhood in church, family and civil life; 4) Identify the marks of worldliness in church and family in the 21st century; 5) Explain the complementary roles of church and family; 6) Facilitate church planting and relationship building; 7) Communicate the biblical doctrines of the church and family; 8) Restore the biblical pattern of age integrated worship, discipleship and evangelism.” Notice the way in which biblical literalism, gender dualism, and FIC concepts are interconnected. This is not only because these emphases have an inherent complementarity but also because FIC leaders cooperate with and participate in Quiverfull supporting organizations and publications. National Center for Family Integrated Churches, “About,” undated, accessed December 5, 2012: https://ncfic.org/about.
generations continue in faithfulness to Christian teachings, as they understand it. More often than not, this multigenerational faithfulness means replicating their particular practice of large families, homeschooling, and gender hierarchy. Moreover, many people who are considered Quiverfull leaders are also figure prominently in the FIC movement, including Douglas Phillips, Voddie Baucham, and Scott Brown.

In addition to the family-integrated church movement, some Quiverfull families will also participate in what has come to be called the “new domesticity.” Emily Matchar, among others, has identified a resurgence in American culture over the past few decades of the so-called “domestic arts,” which are practices conducted mainly in the home and uniformly coded feminine. The newfound interest in the work of homesteading and homemaking crosses traditional political boundaries, including both liberal hippy “tree-huggers” in Portland and conservative suburban housewives in Dallas. Under the label “new domesticity,” Matchar includes gardening (especially organic and urban gardening), the production of homemade goods (i.e., canned foods, soaps, candles, clothing, and more), “attachment parenting” and extended breastfeeding (which are often linked), mommyblogging, and the attempt to make money for the household based upon the mother’s productive work in the home. The “new domesticity” phenomenon is fueled primarily by the Internet, both through websites like Etsy, where women can sell their products, and through domesticity blogs, which are overwhelmingly used and frequented.

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284 This language seems to originate with Voddie Baucham and his book, *Family Driven Faith.*
285 Deborah Olson said as much in one of our conversations. She expressed a hope that her daughters will choose to be stay-at-home moms and commit to homeschooling their children, too. Although she leaves room for the possibility that they will not carry on this particular way of life, she definitely sees the replication of her convictions as the ideal.
287 Matchar notes the way disparate people are brought together by domesticity (*Homeward Bound*, 213-229). This seems to parallel the way the early homeschooling movement united liberals and conservatives (Stevens, *Kingdom of Children*).
by women. In my research it has become apparent that many women committed to the Quiverfull way of life also participate in this revival of domestic practices, as well as the online conversation about them. Although not all of them can attain to the ideals presented by new domesticity websites, like family gardening or baking their own bread, many express a desire to do so and a conviction that homesteading, especially, is the Christian ideal. Indeed, I see a parallel between the family-integrated church emphasis on the family’s autonomy and the “new domesticity” aim to be a more self-sufficient household.

As we have seen, the three-part discourse of Quiverfull families, composed of homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and pronatalism, is often combined with two other elements: family-integrated church and “new domesticity.” Although the family-integrated church movement could be viewed as a separate entity operating within evangelical culture, it has been widely influential among Quiverfull proponents due in large part to the ideological complementarity between the two. And, new domesticity, which appears to transcend religious traditions, can be influential within Quiverfull families because it is simply an intensification of the commitments inherent within gender hierarchy to the eternal significance of the (feminine) domestic sphere. But, with or without the additional elements visibly present, the lived religion of Quiverfull families as it is recognizable within American evangelicalism is identifiable by a combination of homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and pronatalism. Although many Quiverfull families demonstrate more qualities than this, they most certainly are not less.

288 Deborah Olson often speaks of her desire to adopt a more rural, agrarian lifestyle: “I would rather have an old beat up farmhouse out in the middle somewhere where we don’t have to worry about the road, where the kids can be in and out all day, every day.”
B. Quiverfull as a Special Purpose Group

The previous section provided us with a perspective on the Quiverfull movement at the micro level, revealing Quiverfull families as participants in a discourse oriented around particular practices. Another fruitful way to think about Quiverfull families is to see them from a macro perspective, as a transdenominational special purpose group. In his important book, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, Robert Wuthnow provides a historical survey and analysis of “special purpose groups.” Special purpose groups (SPGs) are organizations or coalitions with firm roots in religious life that are formed to address issues of concern to both churches and the broader society. Although they are not denominations or churches, SPGs draw their resources, leadership, and participants mostly from churches and church agencies and they frame their action chiefly in religious terms. In Wuthnow’s words, “They take their legitimating slogans from religious creeds.”289 Despite their religious roots, however, most of such organizations do not draw people away from established churches or cause the formation of new denominations or churches. Instead, SPGs generally are oriented toward a specific objective “and their tactics involve mobilizing resource toward attaining this objective.” Once the objective has been achieved, they dissolve or find another discreet objective to pursue. In this way, SPGs are not seeking to take the place of existing churches or sects, but simply mobilizing personnel and resources toward attaining a particular religiously inflected objective. While the significance of denominations is declining in American religion, Wuthnow claims the significance of SPGs is gaining in importance.290

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Wuthnow argues that SPGs are not new to American religion, nor are they unique to the United States. In the United States, Wuthnow highlights the American Bible Society (founded in 1816) and the American Temperance Union (formed in 1836), among many others. Many of these organizations follow a typical pattern of development and organization, but Wuthnow notes that not all SPGs develop into formally coordinated agencies: “[O]ther special purpose groups had a significant impact on the formation of American religion in the nineteenth century without ever becoming formal organizations.” These informal SPGs are fed mostly by “popular zeal” and contribute greatly to local church vitality and enthusiasm without every formally organizing. Wuthnow cites the prayer meeting movement in New York City that developed in the 1850s, as well as the abolitionist movement, which appeared in the mid-nineteenth century. He observes: “Rather than being directed strictly toward serving the churches themselves, it became a vehicle for articulating religious themes in relation to issues of broader social significance… Indeed, its effectiveness lay in its ability to cut across denominational lines and mobilize action among the members of many different kinds of churches.” Today, we can identify the Christian homeschooling movement as one such informal SPG and the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) as a formal SPG that grew out of the informal movement.

As a group that emerged from within the structures and networks of the Christian homeschooling movement, the Quiverfull movement fits quite well into Wuthnow’s definition of a SPG. Although lacking organizational structure and formal leadership, it

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291 Ibid., 102-103. He notes the Oxford movement in England as one prominent SPG (originating in Oxford in 1833), along with the missionary societies like the Society of Foreign Missions (formed by a Jesuit in 1663) and charitable organizations like the Society of St. Vincent DePaul (organized in Paris in the 1830s).

292 Ibid., 104-105.
very much resembles the informal groups fed by “populist zeal” like the NYC prayer meeting movement and abolitionism mentioned above. Quiverfull families are not located in one particular denomination, but are members of many different Christian denominations, including Orthodox Presbyterian, Southern Baptist, Reformed Baptist, the Assemblies of God, and all manner of independent evangelical or fundamentalist congregations. Like the homeschooling movement more generally, Quiverfull families fellowship and cooperate across denominational and ecclesial lines. While they may participate in a local denominational church and identify with a particular Christian tradition over another (i.e., Southern Baptist or Presbyterian), when they find common cause with others on the threefold discourse of homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and pronatalism, they come together in a number of venues (i.e., homeschool co-operatives, regional conferences, Internet chat rooms and blogs, etc.), for the purpose of encouragement, resource sharing, and mutual support.

Still, as I have already noted in Chapter 1, the Quiverfull movement cannot rightly be seen wholly independent of the Christian homeschooling movement. If we posit the Christian homeschooling movement as one SPG that emerged in the late 1970s, then we must see the Quiverfull movement as a smaller SPG that emerged from the homeschooling movement sometime in the 1980s. The two groups are closely related, share members and resources, but are by no means equivalent.

While there is much in Wuthnow’s discussion of special purpose groups that is applicable to the Quiverfull movement, I find his observations about the sources of growth for SPGs and the implications of SPGs for the character of American religion particularly helpful. First, he notes that nearly 500 new SPGs have been formed since
World War II such that by the mid-1970s SPGs outnumbered denominations. He cites a number of causes for this rapid growth, including the professionalization of religious workers and the general rise in affluence among American Christians. But, the most important factor, according to Wuthnow, is the expanding functions of the state. He says, “As the state has expanded its functions, particularly in areas of welfare, education, equal rights legislation and other kinds of regulations that affect the day-to-day activities of citizens, special interest groups have arisen for the express purpose of combating, restraining, or promoting certain types of government action.” 293 As we saw in Chapter 1, the expansion and homogenization of the American public school system, along with the perceived moral shift in American culture, compelled many Christians to leave public schools for mother directed schooling at home. And, it is out of the Christian homeschooling movement that Quiverfull families began to emerge in the 1980s. Their radically home-centered, family-focused approach to the Christian life can be seen, at least in part, as a reaction to the perceived encroachment of the state.

Another factor Wuthnow notes in the rise of SPGs is “the higher levels of public awareness through the expansion of television, other sources of mass communication, and education.” 294 When his book was published in 1988, Wuthnow had in mind “new technologies” like “direct-mail techniques and computers,” but now we must include the Internet as the most prominent contemporary avenue for the connection and coordination of people with common interests. The Internet, especially its capacity to provide a virtual community for the likeminded, has been vital to the growth of the Christian homeschooling movement and the Quiverfull movement within it. Also, the higher levels

293 Ibid., 114.
294 Ibid.
of public awareness brought about by the Internet and television makes it possible for scholars to find and study a group like Quiverfull, which might otherwise remain under the radar due to their low numbers and limited public action.

Finally, it is worth noting that, for some families, faithful participation in the threefold Quiverfull discourse trumps denominational and church affiliation. Each of the families that I interviewed has had difficulty finding a suitable “church home” due to their prioritization of the Quiverfull discourse. That is to say, sometimes the way they think church should be conducted (i.e., family-integrated, pro-homeschooling, pronatalism) comes into conflict with the ecclesial status quo. In one case, the family’s commitment to pronatalism and homeschooling put them at odds with church leaders and teachers, eventually leading to their departure from the church. In another case, the family intentionally sought out a church with a large number of homeschooling families so as to have likeminded Christians with whom they could socialize. Also, each family in my study has, at one point or another, participated in “home church” for an extended period of time, a situation in which they conduct a church service in a private home (including music, preaching, and communion) with likeminded Quiverfull friends. In one case, the family’s home church substituted for their denominational church participation for a few years. But, in every case, home church was a “stop gap” measure until another suitable church could be found.

These experiences help to validate Wuthnow’s concern regarding the implications of special purpose groups for American religion, which he calls “the heightened potential for religious communities to become fractionated” along ideological lines.295 Because of their narrow focus, SPGs like Quiverfull tend to be homogenous and very limited in their

295 Ibid., 130.
interaction with people holding different ideological commitments. And, as the experience of my subjects shows, sometimes the loyalty to the Quiverfull discourse and the perceived rightness of their practices trumps loyalty to a denomination or church.296 Thus, churches and denominations that were once able to contain a significant degree of diversity within their ranks might become less able to do so. In the future, ideological commitments that are activated in special purpose groups like Quiverfull may well result in split churches and denominations.

Seeing the Quiverfull movement through the analytical lens of the special purpose group helps us to situate them among American denominations and churches. While not existing within any one denomination or church, the Quiverfull movement as an SPG can certainly have a significant effect on both, as my informants’ experiences of “church hopping” and “home churching” testify. While these experiences suggest a tendency to break away from rather than transform churches and denominations from within, it is not outside the realm of possibility that Quiverfull minded leaders could shift denominations (particularly those with a more “conservative” quality) to offer official support for

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296 The existence of the Church and Family Network on the website of the National Center for Family Integrated Churches is further proof of the way that the ideological commitments of special purpose groups can come before denominational loyalty. Through the Church and Family Network on the NCFIC website, a family or individual can locate a church in their area that affirms the tenets of family-church integration. The search engine allows you to search by government, doctrine, confession, and worship, in addition to location. The NCFIC website offers the following perspective on their Church and Family Network: “Welcome to the National Center for Family-Integrated Churches, ‘Church and Family Network.’ For over a decade this network has been a unique tool facilitating connections between churches who worship in an age integrated fashion and the families looking for them. This network is simply a connecting tool. The churches listed here do not comprise a denomination. Further, our network is not an approved list of healthy churches. Nor does the NCFIC endorse all of the listings on this network. It is simply an online networking tool, which creates a platform for Churches to present their information for the sake of connections. Likewise it is a tool for families and pastors to present their information and seek to connect with other likeminded people in their area for the purpose of building healthy congregations.”
aspects of the Quiverfull way of life. Moreover, if Quiverfull continues to flourish as an instantiation of evangelical lived religion, it is likely that we will begin to see consequences of their impact on broader evangelical institutions like colleges, seminaries, and publishing houses.

Despite its usefulness as a conceptual tool, Wuthnow’s transdenominational special purpose group isn’t enough. Seeing Quiverfull as a SPG does not help us to see the way that Quiverfull proponents are constantly constructing their sense of self and difference from others through language, objects, practices, narratives—“the stuff of human cultural production.” In what follows, therefore, we will consider a final way of conceiving Quiverfull from a macro perspective: Quiverfull as an evangelical subculture.

C. Quiverfull as a Subculture

Another lens through which Quiverfull may be viewed is that of subculture. In this sense, the Quiverfull movement can be understood a subculture that has developed within the networks and organizations of the Christian homeschooling movement over the past few decades. Scholars of American religion often speak of evangelicalism as a subculture, so it is a rather small step to envision Quiverfull as a subculture of evangelicalism. But, let’s start by establishing what is meant by the term subculture. The body of sociological research concerning the nature, scope, and composition of subcultures is broad and deep and I will not attempt to summarize all of it here. Instead, I

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297 For example, the Southern Baptist Convention already has gender hierarchy in their official confession of faith, the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. And, for the past several years, messengers to the annual convention have repeatedly attempted to issue a formal resolution condemning public schooling as ungodly and urging Christian parents to remove their children from “government schools.”

will draw on the work of Christian Smith whose research on evangelicalism is highly applicable at this point.

According to Smith, subcultures are social groups with a collective identity that is maintained through the establishment of symbolic boundaries, which help create a sense of “us” in opposition to a perceived “them.” Smith elaborates:

[I]dentity distinctions are always created through the use of socially constructed symbolic markers that establish group boundaries. It is through languages, rituals, artifacts, creeds, practices, narratives—in short, the stuff of human cultural production—that social groups construct their sense of self and difference from others.\(^\text{299}\)

Yet, this collective identity is not static because the boundaries between “us” and “them” also serve as frontiers for activity and engagement.\(^\text{300}\) That is to say, the boundaries of a subculture are porous and always serve as sites of negotiation with outsiders. This ongoing give-and-take between the subculture and the surrounding culture(s) also means that subcultural boundaries are not static, but constantly emerging.

In Smith’s words,

[E]very group’s sense of self is always the product, not of the essential nature of things, but of active, continuing identity-work… That is, collective identity is always an ongoing social achievement, accomplished through processes of social interaction, in which identity-signifying symbols are collectively generated, displayed, recognized, affirmed, and employed to mark differences between insiders and outsiders.\(^\text{301}\)

Thus, a subculture is necessarily relational, created through an interdependent relationship with a variety of “others,” and always being performed and practiced. It is in this sense that Quiverfull families are a subculture of evangelicalism. By engaging in particular practices, both individually and collectively, they draw symbolic boundaries

\(^\text{299}\) Smith, American Evangelicalism, 92.
\(^\text{300}\) Thanks to my advisor, Vincent Miller, for calling attention to this dynamic.
\(^\text{301}\) Smith, American Evangelicalism, 92.
and form distinctions between themselves and other outgroups. Although this boundary
drawing is not necessarily the primary focus of Quiverfull cultural action, for many it is
an inevitable result of their chosen way of life. As we have seen, Quiverfull families have
larger than normal families, school their children at home, rely on the father’s income
alone for financial support, and construe gender roles in a hierarchical fashion. Moreover,
they advocate for, defend, and support one another in these practices through social
media, blogs, Internet forums, books, magazines, and other publications. (This is not to
mention the ways some intentionally mark themselves as different through Quiverfull T-
shirts, bumper stickers, clothing designs, and more.) Moreover, discussions taking place
on Quiverfull blogs, forums, and chat rooms reveal that most of these families consider
themselves part of a collective group that is to be differentiated from broader
evangelicalism and American society. Any of the above characteristics taken individually
would not necessarily entail the creation of a distinct subculture, certainly not one that
differs markedly from American evangelicalism. But viewed altogether, these
characteristics make up a lived religion that is readily distinguishable from the
surrounding society.

In his subcultural identity theory of religious strength, Smith argues that, “In a
pluralistic society, those religious groups will be relatively stronger which better possess
and employ the cultural tools needed to create both clear distinction from and significant
engagement and tension with other relevant outgroups, short of becoming genuinely
countercultural.” At this point, I do not think it is necessary to engage the question of
whether Quiverfull subculture qualifies as a group that displays “subcultural religious

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302 For example, most evangelicals affirm male headship of one kind or another, while a sizeable minority has been a part of the advancement of the Christian homeschooling movement.
303 Smith, American Evangelicalism, 118-19.
strength” in this way. Although it seems clear to me that Quiverfull families, like other evangelicals in Smith’s study, view themselves as “embattled,” it is not clear to me whether I can assert that they are “thriving.” But, I do find Smith’s account of subculture to be a helpful theoretical tool for understanding Quiverfull families, particularly as they recognize themselves to be a part of a distinct social group.

At the close of Chapter 1, I introduced author and homeschooling mother of nine, Mary Pride, whose book *The Way Home* is key for understanding the particular emphases of Quiverfull families. After the publication of her book in 1985, a discernible subculture began to emerge within the organizations and networks of the Christian homeschooling movement that looked very much like the “home-centered” lifestyle offered by Pride as the “whole cloth alternative” to feminism. These families were recognizable from other evangelical homeschooling families chiefly due to their refusal to control their family size, which often (though not always) led to having larger-than-normal families of six, seven, or more children. These families began to produce organizations, networks, websites, and more that could provide advocacy, apologetics, and mutual support for their chosen way of life. These institutions, along with the pre-existing networks and organizations of conservative Christian homeschoolers, provided a means for Quiverfull minded people to connect, cooperate, and promote their practices. In what follows, I will review the major figures and institutions of the Quiverfull subculture, as well as the most important characteristics that identify Quiverfull as a distinct group within American evangelicalism.

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304 Smith proposes multiple ways that evangelicals see themselves as “embattled”: a sense of strong boundaries with the nonevangelical world; a sense of possessing ultimate truth; a sense of practical moral superiority; a sense of lifestyle and value distinctiveness; a sense of evangelistic and social mission; a sense of displaced heritage; a sense of second-class citizenship; and (for some) a sense of menacing external threats (*American Evangelicalism*, 123-143).
IV. An Overview of the Quiverfull Movement

In what follows, I will provide an overview of the Quiverfull movement, drawing upon the conceptual tools outlined above. The following overview will focus on the key leaders, organizations, networks, books, magazines, catalogues, and Internet sources that serve as resources for creating and maintaining Quiverfull as a discernible special purpose group and subculture within evangelical Christianity.\(^{305}\) To this end, I suggest that we imagine Quiverfull institutions in two basic levels: elite and lay.\(^{306}\) By elite, I mean the Quiverfull teachers, authors, organizations, and publications that operate at a significant distance from the lay families that make up the grass roots. These are people, organizations, and publications that have national name recognition (at least among Christian homeschoolers or American evangelical Christianity at large), a substantial base of financial support, and disproportionate influence over the narrative, materials, and other items through which the Quiverfull subculture is constructed. By lay level, I mean the Quiverfull families at the grass roots, as well as their local homeschooling networks, newsletters, and personal blogs. The laity is concerned mainly with the day-to-day activities of living as growing Christian families in contemporary America. As such, their cultural production is heavily focused on their local context. The cultural production of the elites is targeted to the laity and the laity consume, employ, and distribute elite products. But, as we will see, the laity also critically interact what is produced by elites, even to the point of subverting the ideology found therein. And, the platform created by the Internet allows lay level Quiverfull members to voice these critiques to a broad

\(^{305}\) Kathryn Joyce has already covered some of this ground quite skillfully and I will not attempt to duplicate her efforts here. Even though for the sake of comprehensiveness I will mention figures that show up in her narrative, I will also include persons and organizations that she does not consider in depth.

\(^{306}\) The distinction between elite and lay level of Quiverfull subculture was inspired by the work of Julie Ingersoll in her book, *Evangelical Christian Women*. 
audience. We must not make the mistake of assuming that the elites of Quiverfull subculture are wholly representative of the laity. As we have already discussed, both their discourse and subculture must be seen as constantly contested territory that emerges through debate, both internal (among Quiverfull comrades) and external (between Quiverfull practitioners and the surrounding culture).

A. Elite Producers of Quiverfull Subculture

Any discussion of the elite level of Quiverfull subculture should begin with Bill Gothard, who was discussed in Chapter One. We return to him at this point in order to provide more information about his background and organizations, as well as the scandals that have lessened his influence in recent years. Historically, Bill Gothard’s ministry precedes Mary Pride and The Way Home by a couple decades. Gothard has a B.A. in biblical studies and an M.A. in Christian education from Wheaton College, as well as a Ph.D. in biblical studies from Louisiana Baptist University (which is not a regionally accredited university). In 1961, he began a ministry called Campus Teams which would be renamed Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts in 1974 (which, in turn, later became Institute in Basic Life Principles in 1989). Through this organization, Gothard held conferences around the country offering instruction in the “universal, underlying, non-optional” principles of Scripture. During his heyday in the late 1970s and 1980s, his conferences and seminars drew tens of thousands of people at a time. His website claims that 2.5 million people have attended his Basic Seminar.

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Despite the popularity of his conferences, however, Gothard’s influence among homeschooling Christians has been maintained primarily through his homeschooling curriculum, Advanced Training Institute, which was founded in 1984. Since then, ATI has expanded considerably and now has training centers throughout the US, as well as Romania, Australia, and New Zealand. ATI produces homeschooling curriculum through the college level, all of which starts with Scripture as “the main textbook” and then adds instruction in various fields of study and “life principles” in a thematic, integrated way. ATI also regularly convenes national and local conferences for their families, which expand upon and reinforce the content of their homeschooling curriculum, as well as provide opportunities for ATI families to meet and interact. ATI also offers internships and various other service opportunities for grown children of ATI families.\textsuperscript{309}

Gothard’s teaching on the family offered the earliest unification of the three parts of Quiverfull discourse: a strong affirmation of male headship and female submission,\textsuperscript{310} an uncompromising affirmation of homeschooling as the only option for Christian families,\textsuperscript{311} and a promotion of intentionally large families.\textsuperscript{312} And, the popularity of his

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{309}Certainly, not all Quiverfull families are ATI families, but all ATI families are Quiverfull families. Anecdotal evidence of this link between Gothard’s ATI and Quiverfull is that the blog \textit{A Quiver Full of Information} includes Quiverfull and ATI blogs under the same heading: “Pro-Quiverfull/ATI Blogs and Websites,” last updates October 18, 2013, accessed March 21, 2014, http://quiverfullmyblog.wordpress.com/pro-quiverfull-blogs-web-sites-publications/.
\item \textsuperscript{310}See, for example, Bill Gothard, \textit{Basic Seminar Workbook} (Oakbrook, IL: IBLP Publications, 1993), 16. Gothard’s teachings on male headship are the most well known among evangelicals. Many are familiar with his “umbrella diagram,” which depicts a series of three umbrellas, one on top of the other. The wife falls under the umbrella of her husband, who is responsible for provision and protection of his family, and the husband falls under the authority of Christ. To step outside one’s “umbrella” is to court disaster. For more on “umbrellas of authority,” including photos of IBLP materials, and the detrimental teachings that arise from it regarding spousal and child abuse, see “There is No Victim,” \textit{Recovering Grace}, April 25, 2014, accessed July 12, 2015, http://www.recoveringgrace.org/2014/04/there-is-no-victim-a-survey-of-iblp-literature-on-sexual-assault-and-abuse/.
\item \textsuperscript{311}In all of his material, Gothard teaches that the home should be a “learning center” based upon the idea that God has instructed parents to teach their children. See, for example, his instructions to fathers in Bill Gothard, \textit{Men’s Manual}, Vol. II (Oakbrook, IL: IBLP Publications, 1993), 169-173. See also the IBLP website, “Home: A Learning Center,” \textit{IBLP}, undated, accessed July 12, 2015, http://iblp.org/questions/how-can-i-maximize-my-homes-potential-be-learning-center.
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conferences and seminars in the 1970s and 1980s meant that his teachings spread across
denominations and traditions within the evangelical milieu. Still, Gothard’s influence was
affected by a number of scandals, first in the 1980s and then again from 2009 to 2014.\(^{313}\)
In 1980 it was made public that Gothard’s brother, Steve, had been having sex with
female members of the ministry staff, some of whom were under age. Also, the Gothard
family had been using ministry resources for their own purposes, including vacations.
Although Steve was fired and the internal finances of the ministry revamped, for many
observers, Gothard remained highly suspect. Then, in 2013, a blog devoted to people who
have exited “Gothardism,” \textit{Recovering Grace}, reported the stories of 34 women who
claim to have been sexually harassed by Gothard since his ministry began, four of whom
also claim he sexually molested them.\(^{314}\) On February 27, 2014, the board of directors of
the IBLP placed Gothard on administrative leave while they investigated the allegations
and then on March 6, Gothard resigned effective immediately. Then, on June 17, 2014,
the IBLP board issued a statement in which they claim that an investigation conducted by
“outside legal counsel” uncovered no criminal activity by Gothard. Still, they say that

\(^{312}\) In Gothard’s list of “Christ’s Commands,” Number 29 is “Despite not little ones.” In practice,
this means welcoming all children as gifts of God and not seeking to limit God’s gifts. Gothard’s website
includes an article by Lance and Cris Riste, “Receiving Precious Gifts: Learning to Rejoice in God’s Gift

\(^{313}\) From a \textit{Religion News Service} article on Gothard’s resignation: “The allegations against
Gothard dovetail with financial woes. In recent years, IBLP’s net revenue has dropped significantly, and
the ministry is losing money. Between 2009 and 2012, it lost $8.6 million. Its net assets dropped from $92
million in 2010 to $81 million in 2012. It held 504 seminars in 2010, but that number dropped to fewer than
50 in 2012” (Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “Conservative leader Bill Gothard resigns following abuse allegations,”

\(^{314}\) The \textit{Recovering Grace} story that broke the accusations of harassment and molestation was
Gothard had acted in an “inappropriate manner” and, therefore, “is not permitted to serve
in any counseling, leadership, or Board role within the IBLP ministry.”

The publication of Gothard’s misdeeds on blogs like Recovering Grace has
magnified the impact of this most recent scandal and Quiverfull blogs are in a furor over
how to respond. Many have sought to distance themselves from Gothard, while others
have remained convinced that he couldn’t possibly be guilty of such abuses. Meanwhile,
even as Gothard and ATI are less and less significant among Quiverfull families, the
approach Gothard takes to Scripture (literal interpretations) and his “basic life principles”
(emphasis on gender hierarchy and submission to authority) remain central to the
Quiverfull subculture. This is not to say that all Quiverfull practitioners are aware of
Gothard or his teachings, only that his influence remains despite his waning public
image.

Mary Pride was also discussed in the previous chapter, but her significance bears
repeating here. Pride has a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering and a master’s
degree in computer systems engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Pride
married and converted to evangelical Christianity shortly after finishing her education.
She went on to become a mother of nine, all of whom she homeschooled through high
school, and an enterprising promoter of stay-at-home motherhood, large families, and
homeschooling. Pride is the author of countless books and published the periodicals

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315 Pulliam Bailey, “Conservative leader Bill Gothard resigns.” Also, Institute in Basic Life
transition.

316 What follows is a selection of Pride’s publications: The Way Home (Wheaton, IL: Crossway,
1985), The Big Book of Home Learning (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1986), The Next Big Book of Home
Learning (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1987), The New Big Book of Home Learning (Wheaton, IL: Crossway,
1988), All the Way Home (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1989), Schoolproof (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988),
The Big Book of Home Learning: Getting Started, Preschool & Elementary, Junior High Through College,
HELP for Growing Families (now defunct) and Practical Homeschooling (ongoing).

Early in the Christian homeschooling movement, Pride was a key figure for many mothers who looked to Pride for guidance on the practical matters of homeschooling a growing family. It is for this reason that she became known as the “queen of the homeschooling movement.” Pride’s periodicals provided invaluable critical reviews of homeschooling curriculum, which multiplied exponentially in the 1980s. Her stamp of approval became an important achievement for publishers targeting the Christian homeschooling market. Pride’s trustworthiness as an expert on homeschooling also provided a platform for her outspoken denunciation of family planning. Although, like Gothard, Pride’s influence is currently waning among Christian homeschoolers, her leadership and publications were crucial to the beginning of Quiverfull subculture. And, she remains one of the most public faces of Christian homeschooling today.

Nancy Campbell is a pastor’s wife, homeschooling mother of nine, and the founder of Above Rubies, a thirty-five year-old non-profit organization. Above Rubies takes its name from Proverbs 31:10 and is devoted to “encouraging women in their high calling as wives, mothers, and homemakers.” The principle work of Above Rubies is the publication of Above Rubies Magazine, a free print magazine that reports an international circulation of 160,000 with readership estimated at half a million. Above Rubies also has a very popular website, which provides a quarterly newsletter, numerous online discussion forums on a variety of topics (e.g., motherhood, fertility, homemaking), a


Pride has taken issue with some of the teachings and practices of other Quiverfull teachers. For example, in the Afterword of the 25th Anniversary edition of her book, The Way Home, Pride denounces the over-emphasis on father-daughter relationships in the teachings of Douglas Phillips, as well as the idea that one must have as many children as possible. She differentiates herself from these approaches without denying the underlying gender hierarchy and pronatalism.
“Daily Encouragement” blog for women and men, a daily “devotional” delivered by email, plus an archive of articles on countless topics. Above Rubies began in New Zealand and Australia, but has since spread to the United States, Canada, South Africa, and the UK. Campbell and her husband now reside in Franklin, Tennessee where he pastors and she manages the magazine, website, and other aspects of the ministry. In addition to speaking at women’s events nationwide, Campbell has also authored a number of books including *The Power of Motherhood* (1996) and *The Family Meal Table* (1999). Campbell’s most popular book, *Be Fruitful and Multiply: What the Bible Says about Having Children* (2003), was published by Vision Forum Ministries with a Foreword written by Douglas Phillips.

Although well into her seventies, Campbell remains an important influence in the Quiverfull subculture if for no other reason than the sheer number of products she disseminates. In Campbell, we see what results when Quiverfull discourse is combined with evangelical activism and skilful use of the Internet and other forms of mass communication. Campbell even promotes the use of her magazine as kind of evangelism tool, suggesting that readers distribute the magazine to friends, neighbors, and strangers in doctors’ offices, daycare centers, hospitals, and more. In Campbell’s words, “[O]ur vision is to get the magazine out to the people who do not know they need it and are deceived, hurting and confused. We believe that family life can be restored across this nation as we work together to take God’s truth out into the nation.”

Campbell, like Pride, sees the “biblical family” as key to the Christian religion and seeks to promote

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wifely submission, stay-at-home motherhood, homeschooling, and prolific childbearing as key to the survival of both Christianity and Western civilization.

Douglas Phillips is the son of Constitution Party leader and former Republican Party activist, Howard Phillips. He is a trained attorney, as well as a pastor, speaker, and writer. Phillips was deeply influenced by the writing and mentorship of R. J. Rushdoony (mentioned in chapter 1). Phillips served in the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) during the early years of the Christian homeschooling movement and went on to found Vision Forum Ministries and Vision Forum, Inc. Through his many connections within the homeschooling movement, Phillips has exercised significant influence within Christian homeschooling networks and until recently was seen as a key leader and proponent of the Quiverfull subculture. Phillips’ organizations, Vision Forum Ministries and Vision Forum, Inc., were both founded in 1998, but folded in 2013 following the revelation that Phillips had been carrying on a decade long extramarital affair.\footnote{The details of Phillips affair will become more relevant to Chapter 6, so I postpone further discussion of the matter until then.} VF Ministries was a non-profit organization devoted to promoting Reformed theology, biblical patriarchy, homeschooling, large families, family integrated church, creationism, and dominionism. VF, Inc. was a for-profit company that offered a variety of products to homeschooling families, including books, films, and toys, through a print catalogue, website, and booths at homeschooling conferences nationwide. Through both organizations, Phillips became a regular speaker at conferences of various kinds, both regionally and nationally. Moreover, Phillips tapped a number of figures to produce books and speak at events sponsored by his ministry. These writers and speakers include Nancy Campbell, Geoffrey Botkin, Anna Sofia and Elizabeth Botkin (Geoffrey Botkin’s
daughters), Jennie Chancey, Stacey MacDonald, and Voddie Baucham. Phillips also helped to found the National Center for Family Integrated Churches with Scott Brown and the Independent Christian Film Festival. Although Phillips has been publicly disgraced and his organizations dissolved, his stamp on the Quiverfull subculture remains and the subjects that served as the focus of his life’s work continue to be addressed by his friends and colleagues.

Scott Brown is one such friend of Doug Phillips with whom he founded the National Center for Family-Integrated Churches (NCFIC). Brown is a father of four children and has a B.A. in history from California State University and a M.Div. from Talbot School of Theology. He is the president and director of NCFIC and an elder of Hope Baptist Church in Wake Forest, NC. NCFIC was founded on the heels of a meeting of about thirty American church leaders with Vision Forum Ministries for a “Summit on Uniting Church and Family” in San Antonio, TX. Put simply, “family-integrated churches” are local Protestant congregations, often within the Reformed tradition, that do not segregate by age (i.e., age-segregated Sunday School classes or Bible studies), do not offer programming specifically for children, and intentionally include children within the worship of the church. Practices and emphases vary from church to church, of course, but the major point is that the integrity of the family must be maintained in the worship life of the church such that parents continue exercise the teaching responsibility for their own children.

According to its mission statement, NCFIC is “dedicated to the restoration of the Christian family” and “the reformation of the Christian church.” To this end, NCFIC “provides a host of supportive resources including challenging articles, inspiring
testimonies, national and regional conferences, instructive audiotapes, recommended books, pastoral training and a growing database of family-integrated churches near you.” For example, in 2014 the NCFIC put on a six-part live webinar for husbands called, “Husbands Love Your Wives,” a three day conference on “Church and Family” for pastors and families, and a variety of regional “Church Leaders Meetings” for “fellowship, prayer, and instruction” with teaching provided by Brown or other NCFIC affiliated teachers. The searchable database of NCFIC currently has 2,074 families, 810 churches, and 51 pastors registered in the United States. The database allows families committed to “family-integrated church” to connect with one another, as well as with likeminded pastors and churches. Both through NCFIC and his speaking in churches and homeschooling conventions. Although he is no longer associated with his discredited friend, Doug Phillips, Brown remains an active elite producer of Quiverfull subculture.

Geoffrey Botkin is another friend of Doug Phillips. Until the closure of Vision Forum and Vision Forum Ministries, Botkin and his family played a major role in the

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321 The Church and Family conference was held in Asheville, NC and promoted as follows: “At this conference we will continue the work of rebuilding the most powerful of God’s earthly discipleship and evangelism engines – The Church and the Family. How is this possible? It is possible when church and family life are joyfully watered from the wells of salvation, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation,” (Isaiah 12:3). This text identifies the thread that we will pull throughout this gathering... God has uniquely positioned the church and the family as the primary institutions for discipleship. Each of them play a distinctive role for the glory of God. These two institutions are designed by God to function in harmony. For example, it is very difficult to have a strong and biblically ordered family without the church, and it is equally difficult to have a strong church without a well ordered family... We will focus significant time speaking of the inward heart and soul of family life. And, we will also explain the practical details of the duties and functions of family life” (NCFIC, “Church and Family,” undated, accessed March 17, 2014, https://ncfic.org/events/view/church-family-2014).

322 These meetings were held in Washington, DC, Lake Geneva, WI, Austin, TX, and Spartanburg, SC. The meeting in Spartanburg was coordinated with the Teach Them Diligently conference, which is intended to promote Christian homeschooling. The theme for 2014 was “Christian Homeschooling, Discipleship, and Parenting.” The Teach Them Diligently website is as follows: https://teachthemdiligently.net/.
organization, writing for their website, speaking at their conferences, and overseeing the publication of his daughters’ book with their backing. Now, Botkin is the head of the Western Conservatory of Arts and Sciences, a non-profit organization whose mission is “to provide the resources and tools to help families and individuals gain the skills they need to become the leaders they wished existed in the arts and the sciences, politics, law, economics, local and international missions, and most of all, their own families, communities and churches.” The entire Botkin family is involved in this organization and they produce materials for purchase, including DVDs, books, CDs, historical timelines, and more, all from their particular ideological perspective. It seems that with the folding of Vision Forum and Vision Forum Ministries, Botkin is seeking to pick up where Doug Phillips left off in terms of leadership and cultural production.

Botkin is also important for the intentional way that he has offered his own family as paradigmatic for Christian families. Under his orchestration, the Botkin family functions as an example to emulate, a resource of wisdom for Christian living, and even a product to be consumed. His daughters, Anna Sofia and Elizabeth, have had a special role in the creation and maintenance of the “stay at home daughter” ideal, a vision for daughterhood that includes remaining “under the protection” of one’s father until given in marriage to a husband. This submission to fatherly authority requires daughters to remain

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323 A number of people have spoken of Botkin’s appearance in the fold of Vision Forum as mysterious. Botkin’s academic training is unknown and he has revealed very little of his background prior to his cooperation with Vision Forum. According to the research of a number of bloggers, Botkin and his wife were members of a cultic group called Great Commission Ministries centered in Norman, OK. They were close to the leadership of the organization and spent some time with them in New Zealand seeking to run a Christian newspaper and television station. When the endeavor failed, the family returned to the United States and took up work with Doug Phillips, Vision Forum Ministries, and Boerne Christian Assembly (Phillips’ former church). This is, however, a description of Botkin’s background that he has not verified. (See, “Who is Geoffrey Botkin?” Under Much Grace, February 2, 2013, accessed March 17, 2014, http://undermuchgrace.blogspot.com/2008/12/who-is-geoffrey-botkin-vision-forum.html.

at home and focused upon learning the skills of homemaking, motherhood, and home education, in preparation for their eventual marriage. Anna Sofia and Elizabeth first promoted this idea in their book *So Much More: The Remarkable Influence of Visionary Daughters on the Kingdom of God* (published by Vision Forum Ministries in 2005) and documentary film “The Return of the Daughters” (2007), which is a series of profiles of “stay at home daughters.” Today, they maintain this point of view on their blog “Visionary Daughters,” and promote it through public appearances. Although the “stay at home daughter” phenomenon remains decidedly small, even compared to Quiverfull families, there is no doubt that the visibility of such families is growing through their use of the Internet, especially blogs.

Voddie Baucham is the preaching pastor of Grace Family Baptist Church, head of Voddie Baucham Ministries, homeschooling father of nine children, and considered “one of the architects of the Family Integrated Church movement.” Baucham is a Southern Baptist minister with a B.A. from Houston Baptist University, M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and D.Min. from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He also completed post-graduate studies at the University of Oxford, England (Regent’s Park College). Baucham is the author of numerous books, including *Family Driven Faith: Doing What it Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God* (Crossway, 2007), *Family Shepherds: Calling and Equipping Men to Lead Their Homes* (Crossway, 2011), and *What He Must Be... if He Wants to Marry My Daughter*

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325 Another book published by the Botkin sisters is *It’s (Not That) Complicated: How to Relate to Guys in a Healthy, Sane, and Biblical Way* (Western Conservatory, 2011).

326 Interestingly, the Botkin sisters wrote their book, *So Much More*, when they were 15 and 17 years old. They are now 25 and 27, respectively, and still living at home, working for their father’s organization. One wonders why their advocacy of stay-at-home daughterhood as preparation for wifehood and motherhood has not translated into their pursuit of those vocations.

327 From the back cover of Baucham’s book, *What He Must Be... if He Wants to Marry My Daughter* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), which is billed as an “apologetic of biblical manhood.”
(Crossway, 2009). One sees in Baucham’s publications the connections between hierarchical notions of gender, homeschooling, pronatalism, and family-integrated church within the Quiverfull subculture. In addition to his individual speaking engagements across the country, which are numerous, he has shared the stage with and attended events convened by both Douglas Phillips and Scott Brown, mentioned above. Baucham’s daughter, Jasmine, has her own book that follows the same train of thought as Anna Sofia and Elizabeth Botkin: *Joyfully at Home: A Book for Young Ladies on Vision and Hope*, also published by Vision Forum Ministries (2010). Although she does not argue that every young woman should remain at home as she does, Jasmine strongly suggests that model is the ideal scenario for unmarried women who still live under their father’s authority. Baucham is unique among the leaders considered thus far because of his location and activism within a denominational structure, the Southern Baptist Convention.

All of the above figures—Bill Gothard, Mary Pride, Nancy Campbell, Douglas Phillips, Geoffrey Botkin (and his daughters), Scott Brown, and Voddie Baucham—are elite proponents of Quiverfull subculture. Through their organizations, widespread speaking, numerous publications, and robust Internet presence, they have exerted a significant influence over the Christian homeschooling movement, in general, while also

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328 I could have included Michael Farris, Douglas Wilson, R.C. Sproul, Jr., and a number of others. But, Farris is the head of the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) and, even though he’s been associated with Quiverfull, is more accurately considered a homeschooling leader. Wilson and Sproul, Jr. are very much embedded in the Reformed or Neo-Reformed evangelicalism and do not necessarily have widespread appeal among all Quiverfull families. Also, even though Douglas Wilson endorses patriarchy, he approves of the use of birth control as a means to help you care for your current children and prefers a classical Christian school to homeschooling for its perceived ability to offer a better quality education. Moreover, I could have discussed Michael Provan (*The Bible and Birth Control* [Monongahela, PA: Zimmer Printing, 1989]) and Rick and Jan Hess (*A Full Quiver: Family Planning and the Lordship of Christ* [Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990]) all of whom contributed to the early spread of Quiverfull pronatalism through their books. While their ideas and arguments are important, they never had the public status possessed by the figures described above. Also, Joyce deals with the authors and their books in her volume, *Quiverfull.*
helping to foster a distinct Quiverfull subculture within it. The downfall of Bill Gothard and Doug Phillips provides a paradoxical confirmation of their importance. In response to the recent allegations against them, countless blog posts arose, from a variety of perspectives (Quiverfull, ex-Quiverfull, homeschoolers, atheists, and more). In the blogs emerging from Quiverfull sources, some debated the merits of the accusations (defending Phillips and Gothard against “gossip”), some quietly distanced themselves from the men, and some forcefully denounced them as morally bankrupt. Although not everyone within the Quiverfull subculture wanted to claim Gothard and Phillips as “one of them,” all of them saw the allegations against these men as serious, significant to their way of life, and worthy of response. The seriousness with which Quiverfull blogs took these scandals demonstrates even against their protestation, the consequence of these figures to their subculture.

We should also note the influence that these Quiverfull subcultural elites have had within American evangelicalism at large. Some, like Doug Phillips and Voddie Baucham, have provoked discussions of Quiverfull practice within denominations and denominational institutions. For example, for the past several years, Baucham and others have sought to pass a resolution at the national meetings of the Southern Baptist Convention to condemn public schooling as anti-Christian and exhort Christian parents to remove their children en masse from government schools. Also, Southern Baptist leaders


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like Albert Mohler and Dorothy Patterson have publicly questioned the use of birth control by Christians, eschewing the same ungodly avoidance of children that Mary Pride first denounced in 1985.\textsuperscript{330} Moreover, on the matter of gender, Quiverfull proponents already have much in common with evangelicalism. The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, led by Bruce Ware, Owen Strachen, and others, is actively promoting gender hierarchy as key to the Christian message. Although Quiverfull remains on the margins of American evangelical culture today, their discourse is quite close to that of conservative evangelicalism, which emphasizes stay-at-home motherhood, wifely submission, the importance of children, and the centrality of the family in Christian living. Moreover, the cultural production of Quiverfull elites, which has so much overlap with evangelical values already, has gradually made their discourse more palpable and marketable to the mainstream. In this way, Quiverfull subculture is beginning to “bleed” into the evangelical subculture in America, in a way that parallels, perhaps, the way the evangelical subculture has bled into American Catholicism.\textsuperscript{331}

\textbf{B. Lay Producers of Quiverfull Subculture}

Alongside the elite level is the lay level of the Quiverfull subculture, made up of the families, churches, co-operatives, local networks, newsletters, Internet forums, and blogs that promote the Quiverfull way of life. There are blogs, networks, and Internet forums specifically designated for Quiverfull families. These include \textit{The Quiverfull}...


Digest (an email newsletter and online discussion forum in operation since 1995), Arrow Collectors (a network for connecting Quiverfull families in operation since 2009), Christian Moms of Many Blessings (an online discussion forum for Quiverfull moms), and A Quiver Full of Information (a blog devoted to information about the Quiverfull subculture, both for and against). Apart from the Quiver Full of Information blog, each of these forums and networks requires an application process through which the administrators can verify the applicant’s adherence to Quiverfull principles. Apart from the Quiver Full of Information blog, each of these forums and networks requires an application process through which the administrators can verify the applicant’s adherence to Quiverfull principles. Presumably, this process is meant to protect both the privacy of Quiverfull families, ensuring that they are interacting with truly sympathetic Quiverfull faithful and not curious or even malicious outsiders.

Aside from these Internet based institutions specifically designated for Quiverfull families, most of the lay level elements of the Quiverfull subculture are also interconnected with the Christian homeschooling movement in America. For example, within local homeschooling co-operatives one might find a number of families who do not limit their family size alongside Christian families who do. Even though not explicitly labeled Quiverfull, the homeschooling co-op serves as an institution of the Quiverfull subculture for the way that it connects and reproduces their discourse. The same is true of churches in which Quiverfull families are prevalent. For example, the Baptist church I attended for the Family Driven Faith conference in Cincinnati does not officially advertise itself as a “Quiverfull” church, but the church leadership promotes the three-

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332 It is for this reason that I did not gain access to any of the top three Quiverfull discussion forums or networks. Only Quiverfull parents can gain access to these sites by submitting detailed information about their families, practices, and beliefs. It would have been unethical for me to attempt to pass myself off as a Quiverfull mother when I am not one.

333 The operators of these websites did not return my email requests for information regarding their application process.
part discourse of Quiverfull subculture through its preaching and teaching, the church’s radio ministry,\(^{334}\) and by hosting events and distributing pro-Quiverfull materials. The church is almost entirely made up of Quiverfull families, all of whom practice gender hierarchy, homeschooling, and pronatalism. Although the church itself may not identify itself as a promoter of the Quiverfull discourse, it functions in practice as a lay level institution of Quiverfull subculture. It is primarily through sympathetic churches and homeschooling co-operatives that Quiverfull families find one another and foster relationships of mutual edification and support.

Homeschooling co-operatives and churches are crucial for many Quiverfull families, but the cultivation of Quiverfull as a discernible subculture would not be possible without the Internet and blogs in particular. Not only do all of the above elites have very popular websites through which they produce and disseminate their teachings, but there are also countless members of the Quiverfull laity, especially mothers and daughters, who operate widely read and influential personal blogs, as well. A blog (originally known as a “weblog”) can be loosely defined as “a frequently updated webpage with dated entries, new ones placed on top.”\(^{335}\) Through these blogs, in the words of Greg Myers, bloggers create a “social world,”\(^{336}\) one that is oriented around and constantly engaged with the Quiverfull discourse.\(^{337}\) Some of these “mommyblogs”

\(^{334}\) Their radio ministry is called the Baptist Bible Hour and is led by the church’s senior pastor. Their website offers live streaming and archived broadcasts: http://www.cincinnatipbc.org/radio-broadcast/ (accessed January 9, 2015).
\(^{337}\) Myers suggests that “sphericules” (a word he borrows from Todd Gitlin, “Public Sphere or Public Sphericules,” in *Media, Ritual, and Identity*, eds. James Curran and Tamar Liebes [London: Routledge, 1998], 168-174) is a better description of the social worlds created through blogs. He defines “sphericules” as “multiple publics that pursue their own discussions without reference to a single unified
simply re-work and re-distribute the rhetoric provided on elite level websites and blogs, but most are doing the work of interpreting, modifying, and even critiquing the products of Quiverfull elites. In fact, elite producers of Quiverfull subculture have, on occasion, specifically referenced the blogs of lay mothers as a threat to the perceived purity of the Quiverfull way of life. For example, Doug Phillips, speaking to a “summit” of homeschooling fathers in 2009, said the following of Quiverfull mommyblogs:

We will lose this movement and this work of God, men, if we do not govern our households. And that means lovingly shepherding our wives. The less you love your wife and the less you shepherd your wife, the more you create an open door for the female sin of the Internet. The male sin of the Internet is pornography. The female sin of the Internet is gossip-mongering. … We don’t live in the type of communities where our wives tend to go from house to house gossiping. They tend to go from blog to blog gossiping. And they spend their day going from blog to blog gossiping. And some of you are letting them.

Here, Doug Phillips, an elite producer and advocate for Quiverfull subculture, expresses his anxiety about the cultural power present in the Quiverfull blogosphere. He seems all too aware of the fact that blogging women within the subculture can wield significant power and, through their criticism and dissent, even change the course of the “movement.” Phillips’ warning now seems prescient. Both he and Bill Gothard saw the demise of their ministries and cultural power due to revelations published by and spread

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national or global ‘public.’” Myers explains that “the blogosphere inherently tends to break up this way; while a television news broadcast or newspaper articles seems to address anyone…the successful blogger writes, not for the world at large, but for people just like him or her, wherever they may be. There usually turn out to be a lot of those people, however narrow the group may be, and then turn out to be linked in complex ways” (Myers, *The Discourse of Blogs and Wikis*, 24-25). I think Myers is right, but the language of “sphericules” is prohibitively specialized, in my view, for the present conversation.


through blogs run largely by women. At the same time, lay level mommyblogs also allow for an ongoing give-and-take relationship between the elite and lay level of the subculture. Quiverfull mommybloggers can use their Internet platform to express disagreement with the teachings of elites and challenge particular ways of embodying Quiverfull discourse.

Still, the Quiverfull blogosphere doesn’t always or even often function in a subversive way. One blog, Visionary Womanhood, run by Quiverfull mother of nine Natalie Klejwa, has enough readers to finance the production of a self-published book: *Three Decades of Fertility: Ten Ordinary Women Surrender to the Creator and Embrace Life* (Visionary Womanhood, 2013).³⁴⁰ *Three Decades of Fertility* promotes the Quiverfull way of life, particularly pronatalism, through the testimonies of ten women who have devoted their childbearing years (typically around three decades) to having as many children as God gives them (in addition to homeschooling all of them). Each of the contributing authors has five or more children and seek to persuade their readers to embrace a life devoted principally to having babies. This volume is by no means a bestseller, but it is available in paperback and on Kindle, promoted on many Quiverfull blogs, and currently has 43 reviews on Amazon (32 of which rate it with five stars).³⁴¹ Thus, even as Phillips fears the subversive potential of Quiverfull mommyblogs, many blogs like Klejwa’s are enthusiastic supporters of Quiverfull discourse, even promoting it beyond the confines of their online social world.


Through the Internet content created by elite websites and lay blogs, Quiverfull subculture is constantly emerging. As examples have shown, the blogosphere demonstrates well the dialogic nature of Quiverfull identity. There we see Quiverfull identity is constructed not through uniform agreement on all matters but through constant engagement with the issues key to Quiverfull subculture, including gender hierarchy, homeschooling, pronatalism, family integrated church, homesteading, and more. While opinions may vary from blog to blog and Quiverfull proponents may address these issues in a variety of ways, their constant engagement with these matters provides a discernible subcultural identity. It is dialogic, it is always in conflict, it is ever emerging, but it has identifiable focal points of engagement around which Quiverfull subculture coalesces.

Also important to the construction of Quiverfull subculture on the Internet is the presence of a large number of ex-Quiverfull blogs, the most famous of which are No Longer Quivering and Love Joy Feminism. Ex-Quiverfull blogs provide an outlet for the mothers and children of Quiverfull families who have “exited” the subculture to share their stories and speak about their experiences growing up in Quiverfull households. Ex-Quiverfull bloggers often follow and comment upon the ongoing work of Quiverfull elites, too. They will offer summaries and evaluations of Quiverfull works, as well as visit and comment on the speakers at homeschooling conventions and other events that attract such families. In this way, ex-Quiverfull blogs function in both a therapeutic and journalistic ways, serving the needs of the writers, as well as the (often voyeuristic) interests of the readers. Moreover, ex-Quiverfull bloggers can be seen commenting on and engaging with the blogs of Quiverfull elites and laypersons, too. The cross-communication between pro-Quiverfull and ex-Quiverfull blogs further contributes to a
discernible Quiverfull subcultural identity. If one can “exit” Quiverfull and continue to identify oneself as ex-Quiverfull, then there must be something discernibly Quiverfull to begin with.

A final aspect of Quiverful subculture that is worth mentioning does not fit neatly into either the elite or lay level categorization followed thus far. Arguably, the most famous advocates of the Quiverfull way of life are Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar. The Duggars have a popular television show on the TLC network called 20 Kids and Counting which features excerpts from the daily experiences of their very large family. Despite the fact that their “quiver” is very full, even by Quiverfull standards, the Duggars have done much over the past several years to bring the Quiverfull way of life to public awareness. Even people who have never heard the term “Quiverfull” know who the Duggars are and what they believe about women, the family, contraception, and children. And the Duggars are widely admired for their apparently loving, well ordered, and functional family life.  

Due to their fame, the Duggars have produced a number of books on the subjects of managing large families, sibling relationships, the challenges faced by teenage girls, and more. Moreover, Jim Bob and Michelle, as well as a few of their older daughters, often feature as key speakers at numerous church events, homeschooling conventions, and other conferences. In this way, despite being lay people themselves (neither Jim Bob nor Michelle claim for themselves any kind of teaching authority or presume to lead

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342 The Duggars’ reputation has been significantly tarnished in recent months due to a number of scandals involving their oldest son, Joshua. I will briefly discuss these scandals in Chapter 6. But, due to the sensationalism and media attention surrounding these events, I am going to reserve detailed discussion for another time.

anything other than their families), the Duggars have a level of respect and admiration from lay people that puts them in more of an elite location in terms of their cultural influence. One blogger has even called the Duggars “Quiverfull royalty.” The Duggars have developed a symbolic valence that sets them apart from everyone else. In their number of children, in their financial success, in their frugal, homesteading style of life, in their apparent “normalcy,” health, and happiness, the Duggars have come to represent the Quiverfull subcultural ideal.

C. The Interaction of Elite and Lay Levels within the Quiverfull Subculture

As I have said, Quiverfull subcultural institutions can be divided into two basic levels: elite and lay. By elite, I mean to the Quiverfull teachers, authors, organizations, and publications that have national name recognition, a substantial base of financial support, and disproportionate influence over the narrative, materials, and other items from which Quiverfull identity is constructed. By lay, I mean the Quiverfull families at the grass roots, as well as their local homeschooling networks, newsletters, and personal blogs. Lay level cultural production receives much less publicity and tends to be focused on the local context. The cultural production of the elite is targeted to the laity and the laity consume, employ, and distribute elite products.

As we have seen, however, the laity does not engage with elite cultural producers in an uncritical way. Indeed, they feel the freedom to pick and choose from the work of Quiverfull leaders, employing some things while rejecting others. An extended excerpt

from one of my interviews with Deborah Olson is helpful at this point. When asked about what kinds of things she reads and distributes, Deborah offered a long, meandering reply that illustrates well the sifting and negotiating at work at the lay level:

We’ve read a lot of like John Piper stuff about marriage and family. We’ve read things from the Family Life people, Dennis and Barbara Rainey. We’ve read some [James] Dobson, although it’s not my favorite. Dobson stuff, I don’t know, I don’t hate it but I don’t get super excited about it. We’ve read really radical people like the Pearls. I’m not being recorded am I? [Laughter.] We love the Duggars. We’ve read Chapman and… Oh goodness. I feel like I’ve mentioned Voddie Baucham... Baucham stood out to us because we used his book almost like a manual. [Tedd] Tripp’s [Shepherding a Child’s Heart]. We’ve read… I just get nervous about some stuff. I would recommend Baucham. I would recommend David Platt’s books. But, when it comes to Christian home and parenting, I get so nervous about that stuff because… Well… There was this one family… They were really major huge into the Ezzos’ Growing Kids God’s Way. So, I ordered it and read it and I was like, “Oh my goodness!” And then I realized that they don’t do everything they say. And we don’t do everything Baucham says, either. I mean… I get nervous because there are some things that are good and some that aren’t. We read the Pearls and we thought, “OK some of this is good and some of this is uhhhhh… not good.” I mean we are supposed to use our brain and think about it ourselves. My brother and sister-in-law read the Pearls and started spanking their kids like crazy people! We read a lot of articles. I am on Facebook, so I read articles and blogs. I do most of the reading and then if it’s really good, I can talk him into [reading] it… But, I don’t follow one person or one way. I read Above Rubies sometimes. But sometimes I’m like, “For the love of God, give me a break!” Because, just like any other thing, I can read it and be like, “Oh no, I’m not like that.” I don’t know… I don’t think you can be good at this by just doing what someone else says. It has to be in your heart and you have to discern what’s good for your family and what isn’t… It’s just so easy to get caught up in the way others are doing it. But, I don’t think there’s just one way.

Here, Deborah shows that she is engaging critically with what is produced by Quiverfull and other evangelical elites. In effect, she picks and chooses what corresponds to her own sensibilities regarding childrearing, marriage, and other subjects. And, as we shall see in the following chapters, this picking and choosing leads to a laity that, in some cases, subverts or even reverses the ideology found elite materials.
D. Five Characteristics of the Quiverfull Subculture

Thus far, this overview of Quiverfull subculture has focused on people and their products, but more remains to be said. From the variety of subcultural institutions and figures described above, a number of notable sensibilities or characteristics of Quiverfull subculture emerge as key to the lived religion of Quiverfull families. Five characteristics in particular are worth expounding upon in more detail: 1) bibliocentrism combined with a literal approach to biblical interpretation; 2) a family focused approach to religion; 3) a prioritization of history, especially American history; 4) a Reformed theological orientation; 5) gender dualism. These five things are to be distinguished from the three-part discourse of homeschooling, pronatalism, gender hierarchy because they are general sensibilities or ways of thinking. Certainly, each of the following characteristics will become embodied through particular practices in the lives of Quiverfull families. But, the implementation of these sensibilities is so varied from family to family that I will refrain from making generalizations. What matters is that each of these characteristics is manifested in some way within Quiverfull families and the subculture in which they participate. In the following section, I will describe each of these sensibilities in turn.

i. Bibliocentrism and Biblical Literalism

The Bible is central to the Quiverfull way of life. The vast majority of Quiverfull families persist in their practice of “family unplanning” because they are convinced that the Bible speaks clearly and directly on the matter of children and forbids any attempt to control conception. When one desperate mother of six wrote into the online forum Quiverfull Digest looking for a reason besides the Bible why one should “be

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Quiverfull,” one couple responded succinctly: “If you don’t invoke God’s word, there’s really no reason. Kids are great and all that, but in reality, it’s all about the Bible.” So, what lies behind the affirmation that the Quiverfull way of life is “all about the Bible”? Although there are a number of labels one could use for the Quiverfull approach to Scripture, I think the descriptor “biblical literalism” is suitable for our purposes. Put simply, Quiverfull teachers believe the Bible is literally God’s word to humankind and, as a divinely authored document, contains a straightforward, propositional account of God’s will for all areas of life. Thus, the precepts found in the Bible are literally true for all people in all times and places.

Based upon their view of Scripture, the majority of Quiverfull proponents utilize a way of interpreting the Bible that seeks the “plain meaning” of the text and an immediate application of the text to the present day. In this method of interpretation, one usually finds a number of things working together. First, Scripture is read as a unified document with God as the author. Even though they would not deny that God used human authors to write sacred Scripture, they so emphasize God’s sovereignty in the process of inspiration that the human author is superfluous. Because the Bible is viewed as a unified document with a single divine voice, equal weight is given to the Old Testament as to the

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346 Quoted by Joyce, *Quiverfull*, 169.

347 The biblical literalism of the Quiverfull subculture is grounded in a theological concept often called “verbal plenary inspiration.” This view of biblical inspiration is based upon 2 Tim. 3:16-17, which asserts: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” The Greek word in 2 Tim 3:16 that describes “all Scripture” is *theopneustos*, often translated “inspired” (where the doctrine of biblical “inspiration” is principally derived). But, *theopneustos* literally means “God-breathed” (“breathed out by God” in the ESV) and this leads Quiverfull proponents, along with most evangelicals, to assert that God is the author of every single word of sacred scripture. Moreover, the rest of 2 Tim. 3:16-17 gives the impression that the “man of God” is fully prepared “for every good work” through the training in Scripture alone. In this way, 2 Tim. 3:16-17 becomes the source both of the Quiverfull commitment to biblical literalism and their prioritizing of biblical teaching far above that of any other knowledge acquired through other disciplines.
New Testament because the same voice is understood to speak from both testaments.\textsuperscript{348} Therefore, any seeming tension or contradiction between the testaments must be harmonized. Finally, because God is viewed as the author of Scripture, there is skepticism regarding interpretations that would seek to emphasize the social and cultural context of a biblical passage. Such a move implies that God’s commands are somehow dependent upon and changeable according to the shifting patterns of human culture. Thus, in almost all cases, preference is given to the most simplified and immediately applicable interpretation of a given biblical text. And, in cases where the presumed plain meaning of sacred scripture is contradicted by the findings of any other discipline (i.e., science, history, archeology, etc.), the Bible is upheld as true and the outside evidence is either downplayed or dismissed.\textsuperscript{349}

\textsuperscript{348} The presupposition that the voice of God is unchangeable in the Old and New Testaments is, of course, grounded in the theological presupposition of an immutable or unchangeable God. More often than not, Quiverfull writers and many other fundamentalists root the immutability of God in Heb. 13:8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

\textsuperscript{349} The abovementioned emphasis on the “plain meaning” of the biblical text is important. As historian George Marsden has noted, since its earliest days Protestant fundamentalism has emphasized the unified nature of “God’s truth” revealed in the Bible and the capability of all persons with “common sense” to know the truth. In fact, these emphases had been at work within Protestantism since the time of the Reformation. But, it was the philosophers associated with Scottish Common Sense Realism that expounded the consequences of these presuppositions between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Put simply, Common Sense Realism relies on the inductive scientific method of Francis Bacon to give solid metaphysical content to common sense premises—those things that are known through careful, objective observation. The leading formulator of Common Sense Realism was Thomas Reid, who advocated that, “The common sense of mankind, whether of the man behind the plow or the man behind the desk, was the surest guide to truth.” Thus, the external world is in fact just as it appears to be and there exists an objective, empirical basis for Truth. Very often, the perspicuity of nature was correlated with the perspicuity of the Bible and both were supposed to be approached with scientific objectivity. Just as nature was presumed to cohere through divinely established natural laws that have yet to be discovered, so also the Bible was presumed to cohere through divinely established propositions that need only be extracted and codified (George Marsden, \textit{Fundamentalism and American Culture}, New Edition [New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006], 14-16). By the time Protestant fundamentalism became self-aware in the controversies over modernism and Darwinism in the 1920s, Common Sense Realism had been the predominant American philosophy for over a century and it made up the unquestioned philosophical foundation for most fundamentalists. Moreover, the emphasis on careful observation, the classification of facts, and the “common sense of mankind,” altogether has led to the dominance of biblical literalism among the descendents of Protestant fundamentalists like the Quiverfull movement. Thus, in the pursuit of truth, fundamentalists from the 1920s to the present day have tended to approach to Bible looking for objective, common sense propositions and principles, which are then applied uniformly to the present day.
Still, a caveat is needed. Many evangelical Protestants in the United States could be classified as biblical literalists in the way I have described above. The vast majority of evangelicals hold to some version of verbal plenary inspiration, along with its corollary belief in biblical inerrancy, and would hold up the “plain meaning” of the biblical text as the primary goal of interpretation. Most American evangelicals, therefore, would say with the Quiverfull couple cited above that it’s “all about the Bible.” Even so, among the majority of evangelicals, the closest proximate neighbors to the Quiverfull subculture, one will not find birth control forbidden. In fact, one will often see it defended, even as they oppose abortion with tenacity.

Before moving on, there is a final aspect to the biblical literalism of the Quiverfull subculture that should be mentioned. As stated in Chapter 1, the influence of R. J. Rushdoony within a significant portion of Quiverfull literature cannot be doubted. Rushdoony’s influence can be seen in their practice of biblical literalism in two major ways. First, Rushdoony asserts that the Bible is the essential framework for making sense

And, the measure of one’s faithfulness to Scripture is dependent upon one’s willingness to accept and live by the principles extracted from the sacred text.


If Quiverfull proponents and evangelical Protestants both are influenced by Common Sense Realism, believe essentially the same things about the Bible, and often utilize similar methods of biblical interpretation, then where does the divergence in regard to birth control come from? The most direct answer is that both groups share the unacknowledged tendency to “pick and choose” those aspects of the Bible to interpret and apply literally. Even though Quiverfull families and evangelical Protestants affirm a commitment to biblical inspiration and biblical literalism, both groups are inevitably inconsistent in the way these commitments work out in biblical interpretation. For example, neither group advocates that it is necessary to avoid shellfish, or to leave a man’s sideburns uncut, or to avoid clothes made of two kinds of fabric (Lev. 11:10; 19:19, 27). And yet, many evangelical Protestants and Quiverfull proponents reject tattoos and body piercing as ungodly (Lev. 19:28). This indicates a selective use of the Bible in their construction of Christian ethical norms. In the matter of contraception and family planning, Quiverfull adherents take literally and apply universally passages of Scripture that the wider evangelical population does not. (The relevant passages of Scripture will be discussed in more detail later.) Thus, many evangelical Protestants accuse Quiverfull advocates of being “legalists” (making law out of something that is not binding on Christians), while Quiverfull advocates accuse evangelical Protestants of being inconsistent in their interpretation and application of Scripture.

Of course, this does not mean that average Quiverfull families are aware of Rushdoony or the Reconstructionist theology that has arisen from his work.
of reality. That is to say, a coherent and accurate understanding of reality (and, therefore, the True and the Good) is impossible without Scripture as the presupposed foundation of all knowledge. Rushdoony says, “Without the Bible, every fact from atoms to man is unrelated to all others.” Apart from the Bible, “there is no knowledge at all—only chance and universal death.” Quiverfull adherents share this conviction, asserting that the Bible is the only appropriate basis for knowledge and that it contains a unified, coherent picture of divine truth.

Second, Rushdoony and his students claim that Scripture is a unified blueprint for all aspects of human life. From the operations of the family, to the education of children, to the machinations of national government, the Bible as a whole is understood to contain God’s direct orders for how everything should be carried out. For Rushdoony and his followers, this approach to the Bible results in an ethical system often called theonomy, in which “[e]very single stroke of the law must be seen by the Christian as applicable to this very age between the advents of Christ.” For theonomists, this leads to the contention that Christians should seek to exercise dominion over all spheres of human life and govern based upon the biblical blueprint found in both the Old and New Testaments.

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355 The theonomic vision leads Reconstructionists to what is perhaps their most controversial assertion: when Christians govern, the Old Testament laws prescribing capital punishment for homosexuals, incorrigible children, adulterers, blasphemers, astrologers, and others must be carried out (Clapp, *The Reconstructionists*, 7).
Now, it must be said that most Quiverfull proponents would deny Rushdoony’s complete theonomic vision. Still, they inherit from him and his later interpreters the tendency to see all of Scripture as equally revelatory of God’s will and sufficient in itself for the right ordering of every aspect of life. Douglas Phillips is probably the most eloquent Quiverfull teacher in this regard, saying,

Christians are not to look to popular wisdom, the opinions of secular authorities, or personal emotions to resolve ethical issues, because the Bible is a complete and sufficient guide for all of faith and practice… the Holy Scripture is a unity which reflects the unchanging righteousness of God and communicates His unchanging character and the perfect harmony of those principles which undergird His law as expressed in both the Old and New Testament dispensations.

Thus, the biblical literalism of the Quiverfull subculture includes a presupposition that all of Scripture, regardless of genre or cultural context, speaks with unified and equally binding authority on all matters of human life.

ii. Family Focused Religion

In addition to their bibliocentrism and literalist approach to biblical interpretation, Quiverfull subculture is profoundly family-focused. That is to say, the family functions as the primary interpretive motif for their theology and practice. By “family,” they mean the nuclear family composed of mother, father, and their children (both biological and adoptive). The family is headed by the father, assisted by the mother, and populated by their children. This vision of the family is necessarily constructed in opposition to the other versions of the family in the American context today, but especially families led by single mothers and gay or lesbian families (all of whom are defying God’s revealed order

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for the family). Quiverfull proponents will point to their understanding of the family as
preceding the church in God’s creative plan, as well as serving a key role in the Christian
account of salvation history. God started with a family in the Garden of Eden, God saved
a family from the Flood, God called Abram and his family out of Ur, God made
covenants with families at Sinai, and God brought forth the Savior through a family. (Of
course, they will not address the various ways “the family” is instantiated and
complicated in each of these stories. The family of Abram, for example, is most certainly
not the nuclear family.) Still, by foregrounding families, the Quiverfull subculture finds
affirmation for their pronatalism and homeschooling, both of which, in practice, look
toward the production of godly offspring as the primary goal of the family.

iii. Prioritization of American History

The third quality of Quiverfull subculture that bears mentioning is the
prioritization of history, especially American history. Often called a “providentialist”
reading of history, Quiverfull proponents at the elite and lay levels tend to read history
as a straightforward account of God’s direct work in the world. What has happened in
history is understood to be the result of God’s will (something that arises from their
Reformed theological perspective, to be discussed in more detail below). This applies
especially to the founding of the United States and the first one hundred years of the
republic’s history. This Christian vision of U.S. history is not unique to Quiverfull

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358 Ever since the demise of “the consensus school,” Christian historians have been inquiring how
and to what extent their faith should inform their historical work. The doctrine of God’s providence, or
God’s governance of creation toward a particular end, has been one topic of discussion. Participants in this
conversation have come to a number of conclusions. Nevertheless, what all Christian historians agree upon,
even the ones who claim to do providentialist history, is the rejection of over-confident providential
interpretations of history that see “the finger of God” unambiguously revealed in past events.
Unfortunately, it is precisely this un-nuanced reading of history that is at work in the literature of the
Quiverfull movement.
proponents, of course, but is shared with many evangelical Christians, especially those active in the Religious Right. Most evangelicals have a vague sense that America used to be a “Christian nation,” at some point fell from that exalted state, and would be better off if it could somehow “return” to the Christian faith of their forefathers. Still, Quiverfull elites are different in that they explicitly call Christians to “return” to the faithfulness that was present in the earlier periods of American history through the practices of gender hierarchy, pronatalism, and homeschooling.

While the material culture of the Victorian period gets a lot of attention, especially from women, most Quiverfull cultural producers romanticize post-revolutionary and antebellum America. For example, Geoffrey Botkin tells the history of America in a familiar declension narrative: God blessed America for the first 100 years due to its “comprehensively Christian design,” but all that was lost through the laxity of “unfaithful Christian families.” Now, America is in a situation of “accelerating divine judgment,” where the success or failure of the American project depends on the renewed faithfulness of Christian families. Of course, in Botkin’s reading Christian faithfulness is, in short, the Quiverfull way of life. If Christians will “return” to male headship, intentionally large families, and homeschooling, they will bring about the restoration of American greatness in the next few hundred years.

iv. Reformed Theological Perspective

The fourth quality that emerges from the Quiverfull subculture is a Reformed theological perspective. With a few exceptions, including Mary Pride and Michael and

Debi Pearl, the Quiverfull subculture assumes a worldview that is Reformed in orientation. Broadly speaking, Reformed theology descends primarily from the thought of John Calvin and his later interpreters (Reformed theology is often characterized as “Calvinist”). One cannot possibly encompass all of Reformed theology in a few paragraphs, so I will focus on a few aspects of Reformed thought that are the most consequential for Quiverfull subculture. First, Reformed theology is characterized by an emphasis on God’s transcendent sovereignty over all things. Sovereignty is the traditional theological term that refers to God’s governance of creation. While other theological traditions understand God’s sovereignty in a variety of different ways, within Reformed theology God is understood to govern the world through “meticulous providence.” This means that everything, from the smallest particles to the largest heavenly bodies, moves according to God’s foreknown and preordained plan. In practice, this view of God’s sovereignty means understanding that nothing happens outside of God’s predetermined purposes and the primary goal of Christian living is to surrender more and more of oneself to God’s control. The importance of God’s sovereignty in Quiverfull subculture arises in a number of places (as we shall see below), but it is central in regard to their stance against birth control. The choice to limit conception in a Christian marriage is understood to be a sinful human attempt to take control of something over

There has been, on occasion, some internal fighting over theological points of view. Doug Phillips and others have criticized Mary Pride for being too Arminian in her theological assumptions. And, for his part, Phillips has been criticized for being too Calvinist. But overall, the perspective of most Quiverfull families can be accurately described as Reformed.

I am indebted to Roger Olson, for the terminology “meticulous providence,” which was introduced to me while I was his student at George W. Truett Theological Seminary.

For a detailed explanation of this theological point of view, see Paul Helm, The Providence of God (Contours of Christian Theology; Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 1994).
which God has ultimate sovereignty. Moreover, since God has a preordained plan for everyone, the Christian duty is to completely surrender to God’s perfect plan in the matter of conception.

A second important aspect to Reformed theology is the idea that the entire created order is the stage of God’s activity and all things working to glorify God. Unlike more sectarian Protestant traditions, which tend to approach the world through a sacred-secular dualism, Reformed theology understands the created order and human culture within it as inherently good, even if marred by sin. Reformed theologians emphasize the all-encompassing nature of God’s salvation, so that all of creation is being redeemed through Christ and not simply individual souls. All of creation and all aspects of human culture (from art to mathematics to government) are able to bring glory to God when they are rightly ordered according to God’s good design. The all-encompassing nature of God’s redemption and the ultimate end of God’s glory manifests itself in Quiverfull subculture especially in regard to their emphasis on dominion, which will be considered in more detail below. A second way that this Reformed emphasis comes to bear on Quiverfull teaching is in their contention that all aspects of human life fall under God’s rule. All things are sacred within the redemptive activity of God. Thus, the work of Christians in the home is as important and glorifying to God as the work of Christians in business or education.

Out of the contention that the created order is the stage of God’s activity, always working for God’s glory, arises the Reformed emphasis on God’s mandate to humankind

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363 Mary Pride has the following to say about God’s sovereignty: “Spacing [through birth control] is an attempt to usurp God’s sovereignty by self-crafting one’s family” (The Way Home, 77).

to “have dominion” over the earth (Gen. 1:28). In Reformed perspective, human beings are God’s vice regents on earth, tasked with the work of reproducing, caring for creation, and using human ingenuity to create culture. Thus, Reformed theologians teach that Christians are called to participate in all aspects of human culture and in every way seek to bring that discipline, art form, practice, or institution into line with God’s proper design (evidenced through nature and Scripture). Again, unlike more sectarian Protestants, who tend to see the Church as holy and the world as corrupt, Reformed Protestants understand humankind to be called to bring about God’s rule over everything. Quiverfull adherents often use the term “dominion” for this perspective and envision that the many children they are bearing and rearing will work to fulfill God’s dominion mandate for humankind.  

v. Gender Dualism

The fifth and final characteristic of Quiverfull subculture is gender dualism. Even as gender hierarchy is a key practice of the Quiverfull subculture, it is important to recognize that the logic of hierarchy holds because of its harmony with the gender dualism of their subculture (and the evangelical subculture with which they are intimately related). Gender dualism is distinct from gender hierarchy in that it refers to more than just a divinely ordained ordering of the male-female relationship, but a fundamental dichotomy between male and female, masculine and feminine. As people, men and women are fundamentally different in every way: mentally, emotionally, biologically, and spiritually. We can see this sharp divide expressed in the language of some families,

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365 One key element of Reformed theology that is strikingly absent in the literature of Quiverfull leaders is “reformed and always reforming,” which indicates the necessity of constant reform. This point was brought to my attention by Mary McClintock Fulkerson.
like Deborah who calls men and women “very different creatures,” as well as the language of their sex and marriage manuals.\textsuperscript{366} Gender dualism is supported by the cultural institutions of evangelicalism, everything from the arrangement of evangelical bookstores (with designated men’s and women’s sections) to the organization of church programs (with sex-specific events, classes, and conferences).\textsuperscript{367} These essential differences are also understood to undergird a dualism of spheres. Men have their own primary sphere of activity (work and society) within public spaces, while women have theirs (home and family) within private spaces. Men and women who transgress these distinct spheres are viewed as anomalous and working against the essential differences between the sexes. Ultimately, it is a perversion of nature and God’s design. Thus, gender dualism is a key part of the “sacred canopy” of the Quiverfull movement, impacting how they view God, human beings, and the world.\textsuperscript{368}

In this section I have suggested that the Quiverfull subculture is characterized by five major sensibilities. Although instantiated in varying ways from family to family, each of these characteristics present themselves in both the discourse and subculture of Quiverfull. First, Quiverfull practitioners utilize an approach to Scripture best described as biblical literalism. This method of hermeneutics views Scripture as a univocal whole, emphasizes the “plain meaning” of the text, downplays cultural and historical context,

\textsuperscript{366} See, for example, Emerson Eggerichs, \textit{Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires, the Respect He Desperately Needs} (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004); and Tim and Beverly LaHaye, \textit{The Act of Marriage} (Revised Ed; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998). This point is confirmed in the work of Amy DeRogatis in \textit{Saving Sex: Sexuality and Salvation in American Evangelicalism} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), who notes that evangelical sex manuals are predicated upon gender dualism.\textsuperscript{367} This is a point raised by Ingersoll in \textit{Evangelical Christian Women} and Brenda Brasher in \textit{Godly Women}.

and seeks to apply the Bible in uniform way to all peoples at all times. Second, Quiverfull subculture is decidedly family-focused, which leads to a reading of scripture and salvation that prioritizes the nuclear family as the instrument of God’s work in the world. Third, Quiverfull subculture places a significant emphasis on history, especially American history, as the evidence of God’s providential work in the world. Much like the Religious Right, American history is read as a declension narrative, beginning with a Christian nation and descending into secularism and godlessness. Within this narrative, Quiverfull lived religion is the pursuit of a particular vision of the family that they imagine once existed in the American past. Fourth, Quiverfull subculture is identified by a decidedly Reformed theological orientation. Although not all Quiverfull families would use the term “Reformed,” most Quiverfull families evidence an emphasis on God’s transcendent sovereignty, the all-encompassing nature of God’s redemptive activity, and the divine mandate that humans “be fruitful and multiply” and “have dominion” over the earth. Finally, Quiverfull subculture presents a dualistic vision of humanity such that male and female, manhood and womanhood, are sharply delineated categories with distinct spheres of activity. While their evangelical neighbors may share in some of these characteristics, the Quiverfull subculture evidences all of these characteristics and embodies them within the three-part discourse of homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and pronatalism.

V. Conclusion

As we bring this chapter to a close, a summary is in order. We began by clarifying the meaning of the terms “Quiverfull” and “movement” as I am using them in this project. “Quiverfull,” a term that has been used by insiders and outsiders, refers to people
and families who practice homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and pronatalism, regardless of whether they call themselves Quiverfull. And, even though Quiverfull families do not constitute a movement in the strict sociological sense of the term, there is some benefit to using the term, not just because it has become ubiquitous in the secondary literature, but also due to the broader social and cultural goals of some Quiverfull families. After clarifying what “Quiverfull movement” means, we looked at three analytical tools, including Quiverfull as a three-part discourse, a special purpose group, and a subculture. First, Quiverfull can be understood as a discourse ordered by three major practices: homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and pronatalism. As a discourse, Quiverfull is more than simply a way of thinking (i.e., beliefs or convictions), but also a life of bodily activities, rituals, materials, and the places where these things come together. The practices of homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and pronatalism might look different from family to family, but in every case, they are vital reference points for their lived religion. Also, in Robert Wuthnow’s terms, Quiverfull is a special purpose group. This means that Quiverfull practitioners are united by their common convictions and practices, which transcends and even takes precedence over their loyalty and cooperation with either denominations or local churches. Finally, Quiverfull is a subculture of American evangelicalism that emerged within the networks of the Christian homeschooling movement. In this sense, Quiverfull practitioners are participants in a group that has a collective identity—an “us” untied against a perceived “them”—that is sustained through a variety of institutions and products, including books, websites, blogs, conferences, conventions, and more. The Quiverfull subculture can be analyzed in terms of its elite and lay members, who I described in some (but not exhaustive) detail above. Both the
elite and lay levels of the Quiverfull subculture are constantly producing “Quiverfull” through negotiation and conflict, both with each other and the surrounding culture. The Quiverfull subculture produced by this ongoing conflict demonstrates five key qualities: 1) bibliocentrism and biblical literalism; 2) family focused religion; 3) prioritization of American history; 4) Reformed theological perspective; and 5) gender dualism. Although emphases vary and the practical outworking of these characteristics varies from family to family, all five are present in one way or another among Quiverfull families and the subculture in which they participate.

Now that this conceptual and analytic foundation has been laid, we turn our attention to the women of my ethnography. Our shift to the stories of Quiverfull women does not leave behind what has been said so far, but builds on the content of Chapters 1 and 2. Both chapters provide critically important historical background and cultural context for the women we are about to hear from. The Quiverfull mothers featured in Chapter 3 did not choose to become Quiverfull “out of thin air,” but were working from within a particular historical narrative and a particular set of cultural “tools” to construct their lives and the lives of their families in contemporary America. 369 This does not mean that we should deny their agency, however. If nothing else is clear in the following stories it is that the women of Quiverfull are intelligent, creative—even powerful—agents, not the brainwashed automatons that some have wrongly suggested. These women are willing participants in the three-part discourse of Quiverfull, but they also negotiate with, modify, and subvert their subculture’s status quo through their way of life. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly for theologians, the women of Quiverfull are

practical theologians, working out their theologies in the daily work of breastfeeding, meal preparation, and kitchen table lessons. By paying close attention to their embodied theology, we can see more clearly the challenges of contemporary theologies of the family in the American context.
CHAPTER 3
STORIES FROM THE FULL QUIVER

I. Introduction

Chapters 1 and 2 provided us with a historical context for a cultural analysis of the Quiverfull movement. We have seen that despite their apparent peculiarity, they are very much a part of the story of evangelicals in America, drawing upon sensibilities regarding gender and the family that have been extant in our cultural imagination since at least the Victorian period. Moreover, the Quiverfull movement can be helpfully understood through three interpretive lenses: threefold discourse, a subculture, and a transdenominational special purpose group. As a discourse, the practices of gender hierarchy, homeschooling, and pronatalism are particularly central. As a subculture, Quiverfull has elite and lay level practitioners, all of whom participate in the construction of the subculture through constant negotiation and debate, much of which now takes place online. And, as a special purpose group, Quiverfull crosses denominational boundaries, acquiring the loyalty of its practitioners in a way that often undermines allegiance to both denominations and local churches.

With this broader context established, it is now time to hear from some of the Quiverfull practitioners themselves. Chapter 3 will provide an introduction to the lives of Quiverfull mothers, through sustained attention to their stories as they tell them in their
own words.\footnote{All of the names used in this chapter and in the chapters to follow, along with some of the details of their biography, have been changed to protect the anonymity of my informants and their families.} As I explained in the Introduction, I do not claim that what follows is a full ethnography as such. But, I have carefully utilized ethnographic methods in order to gather on the ground data about the experiences of Quiverfull mothers.\footnote{Thus, despite its modest scope, I view my ethnographic research as a small part of the bigger trend toward ethnography in the study of lived religion today.} (For more information about my methods and the limits of my research, I refer the reader to the Introduction.) The following chapter will consider the testimonies of three women currently living as Quiverfull mothers in the United States.\footnote{These are not the only members of the movement that I had the privilege of interviewing, but they are the ones with whom I had the most sustained interaction over the course of two years.} Each of them occupies a different position on the spectrums of age and socio-economic status, offering a slightly different (sometimes very different) perspective on their way of life. Of course, we cannot assume that these women’s stories are representative Quiverfull women as a whole. They cannot tell the whole story of Quiverfull families in America. But, I am confident that the major elements of their stories—especially their language, theological and symbolic themes, and personal struggles—are sufficiently widespread in the movement to merit being representative enough for the present project.\footnote{This is especially the case given the challenges involved with studying families who value their privacy and tend to be suspicious of academics. It is difficult to find Quiverfull families with both the time and inclination to speak to outsiders about their lives, so finding voices that are representative enough may be the best that any researcher can do. I discuss this problem in more detail in the Introduction.}

In what follows, I offer a brief narrative of each woman’s life as a Quiverfull mother, through a combination of summation and direct quotation. The purpose of this chapter is to give the women of the Quiverfull movement the opening word on the subject of their families and chosen way of life, albeit in an admittedly limited and necessarily mediated way. For that reason, I seek to be as faithful as possible to each woman’s own words and phrasing, altering only in the case of grammatical errors (which
were few in number). In some cases, I quote at length from our conversations in order to allow the woman’s testimony to speak for itself. All of the following information was gathered in one of the following ways: 1) recorded during an in-person interview on a digital recorder and later transcribed by hand or 2) transcribed by hand during an interview over the phone. After each story, I present a brief analysis, pointing out places within the woman’s experience that are of particular interest to a project focused on the theology of the family. Since the subsequent chapters will take up the themes of motherhood, children, and the nuclear family, my analysis will gesture toward issues to be raised in those chapters.

II. Renee’s Story

When Mary Pride called women to abandon feminism and head “back home,” she offered a vision of homemaking that included more than pot roasts and pristine floors by treating motherhood as a divinely ordained profession invested with eschatological meaning. The hand that rocks the cradle would allow Jesus to rule the world. Just as Sheryl Sandberg urged working women to “lean in” to their careers in 2013, Mary Pride was urging Christian moms in the 1980s to “lean in” to stay-at-home motherhood—not just for their own happiness but also for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. In the first generation of the homeschooling movement, Renee Tanner was one of many women who embraced this home-centered, “full quiver” vision for Christian motherhood.

Renee and her husband Gary are in their mid-50s and live in a mid-sized town in the Southwest. Renee is tall with long brown hair. She comes across as confident, outgoing, and smart, with a quick wit and easy laugh. But, she also speaks with care about things that she knows are controversial demonstrating genuine sensitivity to the
feelings of others. Renee married young and from early on was captivated by Pride’s vision for motherhood. She describes her acceptance of this way of life in the following way:

I did not expect to marry young and have lots of children. I wanted to do something amazing and exciting. I met Gary at 17 and married him at 18… I wasn’t completely living righteously, but as soon as I was married and in a more structured life I began to do everything one hundred percent. I’m a very literal person and I listened in church and believed we should do exactly what the Bible said. … [The Quiverfull way of life] gave me something big and exciting and a purpose and something to do. It gave me a purpose to the male-female roles. It gave me something to do with my brains and talent. Mary Pride writes about that and her story of journeying from feminism to a Christian, she made a really good case for the traditional [1950s homemaker] role being wimpy. But if women would really do what they can do for the Kingdom it wouldn’t be wimpy but necessary and powerful.

The “big and exciting” vision of motherhood that Renee and other women like her embraced came to be called “Quiverfull” because of the women’s willingness to give birth to a “full quiver” of children. But, as we have already discussed, the Quiverfull discourse includes not only pronatalism, but also homeschooling and gender hierarchy. The practices involved in this discourse lead to a performance of motherhood that is rather extraordinary in its scope. Renee welcomed the pronatalist approach to pregnancy as a way of ensuring that their family was within the will of God and working for God’s glory:

It seems that since we can’t cause conception, that if it was consistent with God’s character, word, and will that children were a blessing directly from him, then this is one area that, if left to him, would go according to his perfect plan. Everything after that would be us living out what he directly gave us to do. I hoped to gain his will for my life and be a part of transforming a generation for his glory and building up the church with disciples.

Over the course of 20 years, Renee gave birth to 11 children. Today, they range in age from five to 25. In her words, “[H]aving many children means that you never really
stop having babies and it’s just a way of life. It was just normal to me to have a baby on my hip or in my arms.” She admits that this task was incredibly difficult, particularly “the physical labor involved when no one in the family or church or the culture agrees with you or helps you.” Still, Renee has no regrets. When asked about the rewards that come from her way of life, she said: “The great thing [God] has done—it is so much more than I ever could have imagined my life to be. There is an unparalleled richness to being surrounded and loved by your own flesh and blood and to see them walking in the truth.”

But, Renee has developed some perspective on her pronatalism over the past 20 years. For example, she offered the following observation about the “fundamentalist” roots of her pronatalist commitment:

I’m not saying that I haven’t developed my own ideas about the choices that God gives us because we all keep changing and modifying and learning. I was raised very fundamentalist in terms of theological views. Inerrancy of scripture, literal interpretation… So that was very easy for me to turn to. A black and white view that if God is in control and he’s sovereign then a pregnancy is only going to happen if God wants it to. God literally opens and closes the womb. I don’t know that I have changed my mind about that. I haven’t thought about it anymore because I didn’t have to. I certainly don’t go around thinking that if you disagree that you’re wrong. I don’t think everyone else is wrong… It’s not black and white for every person.

In addition to welcoming all pregnancies as a gift of God, Renee also embraced the work of homeschooling all of her children from preschool through high school. In the process, she had to make many adjustments for special needs, developmental disabilities, sicknesses, and the births of each new child. Their initial reasons for homeschooling were as follows:

We wanted to avoid the adverse exposure to worldliness in small children and the fact that they would not spend much time with us from age five. We decided homeschooling was cheaper than private education and learned over time that kids in private school usually have the same peer-related character issues as those
in public school, as do home schooled children who are allowed to spend a lot of unsupervised time with other home schooled children.

Renee had several goals in her work of homeschooling: “[For my children] to know God and his word. To have a strong foundation in reading, writing, and math. To have the freedom to learn about other things they were interested in throughout childhood. To understand history and philosophical ideas. To pursue higher education.”

We should note that she lists the most important priority first: “To know God and his word.” It’s no exaggeration to say that her daily life was consumed with the task of giving her children a Christian education. In her words, “You live and breathe discipling your kids.” “Discipling” is her way of describing an education that not only imparts information but also helps to train and form the child into a follower of Christ. When I asked Renee about the relationship between her work as a homeschooling mother and the culture wars, she responded curtly: “We aren’t called to fight culture wars. We were called to make disciples. Raising children in the Lord is making disciples.”

Now that she has some perspective on her many years as a homeschooling mom, Renee recognizes that the amount of work expected of her was extraordinary, particularly for the women in the first generation:

[W]hat I’ve come to see with first generation homeschoolers is that you’re expecting one woman to do the work of two or three full time jobs. If you have your little kids and they went to school and you kept your house and cooked and all that—that’s a full time job. Then you add in that you’re responsible for their education. If you’re a teacher for one grade level and then you’re continuing adding more and more [every year]. We do 4-H and club management and college applications and all that… I mean, we took it all in stride. We said, “We’re pioneers. We’re figuring it out and covering new ground.”
Despite the fact that Gary owns his own business, which allows some flexibility in his work schedule, almost all of the responsibility for the education of the children fell upon her, even when she had eleven young ones in the home. In her words:

Most all of it fell on my shoulders. Yes, all of it. … A lot of men take on teaching responsibilities with their kids but most of the men in my generation didn’t do anything. In our situation and with our personalities, I’m the one who does all of it. I was the only one thinking about it and working on it.

Renee coped with this in a number of ways, but the most important were learning to delegate responsibilities to the older children (i.e., meal preparation and chores) and limiting the family’s activities beyond the home. Despite these attempts to limit her burden, Renee says that when her children were young she often felt overwhelmed by her responsibilities:

I didn’t have a life. But, that was my fault. I thought that was the way I was supposed to do it. I don’t regret that. I don’t know if I could’ve done it differently. I could look back and my marriage and say if he were different, if he weren’t passive... I wasn’t doing so much because I was made to do those things but because that was the level of requirement for myself. I burdened myself. I said to myself, no I want to do it perfect. I felt pretty overwhelmed most of the time. I didn’t act like it but mentally I was exhausted… All of my standards are just too high. I mean I had eleven kids and somehow they’re all spoiled in some way. [Laughter.] I was so determined to treat them as individuals and pay them each attention. Not that I succeeded at that. There were plenty of times when I failed, but I always expected too much of myself and of them.

A recurring theme in Renee’s story is the constant need for friendship and support. Early on, the Tanner’s Quiverfull commitment was the cause of conflict in their home church. When they asked permission to start an age-integrated Sunday School class with another family, the pastors and other church leaders were skeptical of what they might teach about birth control. They “wanted to be sure that [the teachers] wouldn’t push their way of life on the church.” The Tanners were taken aback by the suspicion and feeling of persecution. Eventually, the insult was too much to bear and they left. For a
time the Tanners held church services in their home with a couple other likeminded families but later found a small church where they felt welcomed and appreciated. Although they have since been able to return to their home church, Renee notes that the early experience of rejection “was a deep hurt” in her husband’s “spiritual development.”

But, Renee also suffered from the lack of community and scarcity of likeminded friends. She remembers the times when other Quiverfull moms lived close as times of strength and encouragement. Two mothers in particular were of help to her in the early years as a homeschooling mom. Renee relates that when she and one of those friends would struggle, they would remind themselves of their priorities: “One of our self-talks was that the first reason we homeschool is to teach them to follow God. If we accomplish discipling them, then that’s more important than any schoolwork. That was our coping mechanism because you can’t do it all, all the time.” Now that she is helping younger mothers who are homeschooling their children, she warns them against the hazard of “doing it all” and advises them to get as much support as they can. In her words:

You need to get others to help so you have a break. Whether it’s hiring older kids or grandkids. I think it’s very overwhelming and exhausting. I’ve done all of it. I don’t mean that pridefully. I mean, I got help right after a birth or when I really needed it. But, [Gary] doesn’t even help like a normal dad would for a kid in public school. It’s not like that for all moms, but for me, I did it all.

Finally, as she coped with the challenges of homeschooling many children, Renee kept before her the belief that her mothering work carries great eschatological weight:

From the basic biological creation of my body by God, to the physical, spiritual, and intellectual influence and mentoring of the lives I’m blessed to give birth to, I have the greatest possible chance to raise “world changers” and contributors to society. I am only one person…but my ability to multiply my faith directly in partnership with God himself (He creates and gives grace to the offspring to believe and obey) is exponential. I also believe that the children raised up in the homes of faith, covenant homes, Kingdom homes (whatever your focus is) who continue in the faith are miles ahead in applied theology and discipline than their
converted counterparts. I think these are possibly those that were destined to be spiritual leaders and teachers in the church. I think of it kind of as the Classical education method: you memorize first in the early years when your brain is a sponge and your heart is soft, then it is gradually explained to you to full understanding as you mature and master more difficult information. If our kids continue in faith and humility, they begin to quickly understand in young adulthood all the things we taught them and understand the principles behind the obedience more fully as they experience life. I think having this increased access to their hearts and minds from homeschooling and being committed to their development above all else helps us raise people who have an easier time disassociating with worldliness and materialism to focus on relationships, love, and the Kingdom. And… “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.”

Hopefully.

In addition to pronatalism and homeschooling, Renee, like other Quiverfull mothers, ascribes to a doctrine of biblical patriarchy—or, at least she used to. As she tells it, Renee embraced patriarchy early on in her marriage, but discovered through time and experience that it simply didn’t work in her situation. The ideal did not work itself out in practice. Renee says,

I started out thinking that patriarchy was the way to go. You know the verse about turning the hearts of children to their fathers and fathers to their children. But, the men I see in my age group in the homeschooling movement aren’t involved and aren’t close to their children… My husband didn’t want to be that leader. “Why should I do that? Why is all that my responsibility?” I probably would have been into patriarchy but my husband wasn’t one of those men. He just didn’t do any of those things that patriarchs were supposed to do. … I mean, what woman doesn’t want an amazing man who is godly, kind, strong, has all the answers, and leads the family? Anybody could stay pregnant and serve at home, heck, even serve him, willingly. But, that didn’t work out for me so well… Men that I know roughly over 40 just understand the authority part of patriarchy, not the service and leadership required.

When I pressed further for how her views on gender have changed over the years, she offered the following observations:

I don’t agree with the patriarchal assumption that men are given more wisdom from God about the family leadership or have the deciding “vote” or in any way are above the women in authority. I believe the Kingdom teaching that we are all to submit to one another, that there is neither male or female (just like neither slave nor free), that we are each to try to please the other (Paul writes about being
bound in marriage meaning a man has to be concerned about how he should please his wife as well as the woman concerned about how she can please her husband), and that the passages about complete submission and obedience of women were as pertinent to the Jewish and Greek culture at the time as the passages about slavery, and as unnecessary to ours. (I say all this cautiously, as I was raised that this kind of talk is watering down the Bible and saying it was for them and not us is heresy.) I believe the spirit of all those instructions was humility and deference, and we should all have that attitude toward one another, which kind of makes patriarchy obsolete.

It is at the point of gender hierarchy that Renee recognizes her divergence from the Quiverfull norm, led by her personal experience and supported by a new understanding of scripture. There is no doubt that the literature of the Quiverfull elites has no room for “passive” fathers like Renee’s husband. They speak with great emphasis upon the leadership of fathers (the “family shepherd”) and the significance of the father’s god-fearing in the instruction of children. But, according to her testimony, Renee’s situation isn’t unique within the homeschooling movement as a whole. She observes: “From the reading I’ve done, I don’t think it’s uncommon nationwide for women to be more passionate and the men to just go along with it.” In Renee’s experience, the women were the active, passionate leaders of the first generation of the Quiverfull movement, while the men were more or less along for the ride.

Now that the majority of Renee’s children have grown and moved away from home, she has begun to work on her bachelor’s degree at a local community college. She does so in-between her youngest children’s homeschool lessons and extracurricular activities, which are more extensive now that she doesn’t have eleven children at home. Just this year, Renee’s oldest son and his wife welcomed their first child and Renee has enjoyed being able to offer help and support. Although time, experience, and study has caused Renee to rethink some of the things that she endorsed so stridently when she was
young, on the matter of forgoing birth control and homeschooling, she has no substantive regrets. It was all part of God’s plan for her life and she feels immensely blessed by her children and experience as their mom.

III. Analysis of Renee’s Story

Above all, Renee’s story brings into sharp relief the way that the discourse of the Quiverfull movement places a heavy burden on the shoulders of its mothers. Although not pursuing careers beyond the home, they are taking up the task of educating their many children at their various stages in life while also bearing and nursing babies along the way. For Renee, as for all of the women I interviewed, the Quiverfull way of life was something they chose. My research suggests that more often than not it was the wife leading the husband into the Quiverfull discourse, not vice versa.\(^\text{374}\) Renee found the prospect of birthing and educating a large family to be a “big and exciting” purpose in life and a task she eagerly upon herself.\(^\text{375}\)

Still, the theme of being burdened and overwhelmed looms large. According to her testimony, not only was Renee “overwhelmed most of the time,” but also she blames herself and her own high expectations for her exhaustion. She admits that the work she was trying to do was the equivalent of multiple full-time jobs. Moreover, rearing and homeschooling a large family meant that she experienced many of her struggles in

\(^{374}\) One adult daughter of a Quiverfull family had the following to say: “I’ve seen a pattern where a husband who tends to be more passive, but their wives really like [the Quiverfull] model. I don’t really know why, I think maybe they want their husbands to ‘man up’ or something.”

\(^{375}\) Of course, the choice exercised by the daughters of Quiverfull families is another question, entirely. It is one thing for a woman not raised within the movement to opt in, so to speak. It is quite another thing for young women, who have never known anything else, to choose to stay. To what extent can we really say these women have “chosen” to be Quiverfull? The subject of choice amongst second generation Quiverfull women is fraught with difficulty and remains outside the purview of the present project.
isolation. Not only were likeminded families hard to come by in her rural town, but she also dealt with alienation from her church community.

Renee shoulders most of the blame for her exhaustion despite the fact that Gary’s “passive” approach to fathering left her with most of the household and childrearing responsibility. Although she “expected too much” of herself and her children, there is no doubt that her husband’s lack of involvement played a major role in her fatigue. Unfortunately, the patriarchal ideology of the movement gave her little to work with in regard to the lack of support. Gary was supposed to be a leading, shepherding, teaching patriarch, but he wasn’t: “my husband wasn’t one of those men.” Thus, Renee made a way on her own with the occasional help of likeminded friends. Although she wishes things had gone differently, her experience has led her to seriously question the strident gender hierarchy of Quiverfull elites and even to reinterpret the Bible in light of her experience.

Despite her rejection of Quiverful gender hierarchy, Renee still understands women, by virtue of their biological function as mothers, as having “the greatest possible chance to raise ‘world changers.’” Because women give birth and nurse children, Renee thinks they are usually better suited for the work of childrearing. Moreover, the work of homeschooling allows mothers to have “increased access to their [children’s] hearts and minds.” And, if mothers are totally focused on “their [children’s] development above all else” they will be more likely to raise adults who “have an easier time disassociating with worldliness and materialism to focus on relationships, love, and the Kingdom.” Whether this expectation works out in reality, of course, remains to be seen. But, it seems clear that Renee persevered in her practice of motherhood in large part because of her focus on
the perceived long-term gains for her children. Despite the ways that the experience of motherhood has caused her to question some aspects of Quiverfull discourse, Renee continues to believe that a mother has the greatest influence on the world through her children, provided that she commits to “make disciples” of them.

IV. Carley’s Story

Carley and David Miller are in their mid-30s, which makes them about 20 years younger than Renee and Gary Tanner. They met at a private Christian college in the Midwest and married before graduation. While David finished his degree and went on to a career in pharmaceuticals, Carley never finished her degree in education. They were both raised within the Baptist tradition, but neither self-identify as Baptist today. Her family had a big influence on her desire to have many children. She describes that in the following way:

I came from a larger family. There were five biological children and at two different times my parents took in children, too. So, that sacrifice that my parents made a big impression on me. Not just taking in other kids but what they did to provide for us. My dad often told us that you don’t have to be rich in money, we were rich in family and very blessed… My husband grew up on the opposite end of the spectrum with one brother… David’s family was very different. So, I vocalized a lot about that—that was something I would like to continue if we got married. And we prayed a lot about letting the Lord lead our family. So, when we got married we decided we wouldn’t use any form of birth control. That’s something we felt very convicted about at the beginning. We struggled with a little bit of infertility, too. It was kind of heartbreaking to let the Lord lead our family in that way and have no control over it.

Carley also attributes her pronatalist perspective to the influence of the book *A Full Quiver*, by Rick and Jan Hess, which she read when they were first married. She says that book “maybe hammered in a nail for us.” While she was already predisposed to having a large family, the book (which is well known in Quiverfull circles) solidified
their commitment. Another factor that contributed toward Carley’s commitment to the Quiverfull way of life is that she thinks it was “typical” at one time in America’s past. She says,

I think that back then you didn’t have to describe [a big family] at all. That was just a way of life. It wasn’t something new or some subculture thing. That was the norm, I guess. If you talk to my grandma, I think there were 11 or 12 children in their family. It was rare that you’d only have one child. I don’t feel like when I’d talk to her that she’d call it anything. It’s just the norm. It’s typical.

Carley doesn’t think she is as conservative or strict as other families in the Quiverfull movement. She cites her willingness to wear pants and cut her hair as a humorous example of the difference. But, Carley does consider herself part of a discernible subculture. Still, she thinks her status as “Quiverfull” has little connection to the fact that she has seven kids. She thinks that “being Quiverfull” is more about “the direction of the Lord or the conviction that he’s placed on our hearts.” For Carley, one can have only a few children and still be “Quiverfull.” What matters is the disposition of one’s heart toward children: being open to receiving them as gifts and prioritizing their training as Christians.

After the births of their first two children, the Millers had difficulty conceiving again so they decided to pursue adoption. Following the adoption of their third child, Carley was able to conceive and eventually gave birth to four more children. Today, her children range in age from two to 13 years. By her own account, the past couple of pregnancies have been hard on Carley’s body and the recovery time has been longer than she would like. She also deals with an autoimmune condition that requires her to be careful about her diet and need for rest. Despite the challenges of raising seven
children—physical, mental, emotional, and financial—Carley regrets nothing. Reflecting on what she has gained from her pronatalist lifestyle, Carley says,

“It makes me feel complete. Like I can’t even imagine… Just from the short time that I did work with kids, I was never satisfied. But this is what I’m called to do. This is what I’m designed for… I mean, there are days that I could really use a shower! [Laughter.] Like on Saturday morning when I’m in the shower and they’re asking me for milk instead of asking dad. [Laughter.] But, there are days when I’m going to bed and I get emotional just thinking about what would have happened if we did choose to use some kind of birth control and wouldn’t have had this child or that child and how different our life would have been in a negative way.

Still, Carley shies away from dogmatism regarding their commitment to pronatalism, which is often linked to other elements of the Quiverfull subculture. In her words,

“I wouldn’t have any condemnation for anyone who has a small family. “Oh you only have four kids? You can’t say you’re following the Lord!” We kind of get that sense from Vision Forum [and other groups]… We probably aren’t as conservative on the modesty thing as others. We think modesty is important but not like others. I wear jeans and I have short hair. I don’t have a head covering and I listen to secular music. [Laughter.] … When I read some of these [Quiverfull books] it makes me want to vomit because they’re creating a routine to follow rather than a relationship to follow. I think large family materials often err on the side of religion. And I think large families get a bad rap because of that.

Carley sees the Christian faith as a relationship in contrast to a religion. In this point of view, “religion” is necessarily negative because it entails a set of rules to follow without reference to one’s “personal relationship with Jesus.” When she says “relationship to follow,” Carley is condemning the “religion” approach to Christian life as lifeless and rigid, without proper emphasis on God’s grace, personal emotions, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. So, when she accuses some Quiverfull books and families of “creating a routine to follow rather than a relationship,” she is denouncing their rigidity as counter to the genuineness of a vibrant “relationship” with Christ.
Even so, despite their large family and pronatalist convictions, Carley and David have not fulfilled the Quiverfull “ideal” of never using birth control. At various times throughout their marriage they have used various forms of contraception primarily in order to space their children. And, following a particularly difficult birth experience that threatened Carley’s life, they briefly considered David getting a vasectomy. But, in the end they couldn’t bring themselves to cut off completely any possibility of life. Thankfully, the pregnancies that followed went smoothly and the labors proved uncomplicated. Although Carley thinks that they may be reaching the end of her fertility, Carley and David remain open to more children.

The Millers enrolled their oldest children in public school when they first reached the proper age. But, that “experiment,” as she calls it, lasted less than a semester before Carley pulled them out and began schooling them at home. She was especially concerned about how one of her children with learning disabilities was being treated. Although she acknowledges that it is difficult to teach many kids at many different developmental stages, she expresses joy and contentment about their choice. She says,

I really enjoy teaching my kids and seeing the cracks that I’m filling that were there from brick and mortar schools. We probably do more Waldorf or unschooling or Montessori type education. Charlotte Mason is probably [a better way to describe it]. We do a lot of free play, eclectic stuff… That is important to me and I see the benefits in general and with my kids in particular.

Another important factor in the Millers’ choice for homeschooling was Voddie Baucham’s book, *Family-Driven Faith*, which was briefly introduced in Chapter 2. Baucham strongly advocates homeschooling and a family-centered lifestyle as the best means for “raising sons and daughters who walk with God.”\(^{376}\) The Millers found this

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\(^{376}\) We will discuss Baucham’s writings in more detail in subsequent chapters.
vision compelling and Carley is convinced that schooling their children at home provides the best opportunity for inculcating their children with a love for God and God’s word.

Carley’s husband, David, has a corporate job that requires a long commute every day. Despite his willingness to help out with what’s needed around the house, he is often physically absent from the home for 12 hours at a time. Carley says that he would prefer to work from home, but his employer won’t allow it. David’s absence from the home means that all of the children’s schooling, along with most of the housework, falls on Carley’s shoulders. Although she finds the combination of homeschooling and homemaking difficult, Carley keeps her expectations low:

We haven’t put a whole lot of expectations on life, I guess. The way we do things. It’s just nice to have a bunch of little kids at home. I know that things are going to hit chaos in a couple years. We’ll have several teenagers. And I’ve always thought it’s not going to get easier, but harder. There’s a lot of stuff that goes on, but for now I enjoy it.

Carley describes herself as “very laidback” and speaks with amusement of her struggles to keep a neat house: “I don’t know how to run a house that great. There are loads and loads of laundry on the couch right now. I’m not the greatest at planning ahead… I mean it’s like 5pm and I’m like, ‘Oh no what are we going to have for dinner?’ This isn’t good! [Laughter.]” Although she admits that a firmer schedule would probably help with all of the tasks she juggles daily, Carley doesn’t think that works for her: “I’ve tried to schedule but it doesn’t work. I don’t know. I just like letting God lead our day.”

In her mind, “You don’t have to micromanage every single detail of motherhood.”

Regarding the struggles she faces as a homeschooling mom, Carley points to the tendency to compare her life to the lives of other mothers as a major problem and source of heartache:
The comparison thing is huge. For me, that’s such a… horrible thing. That’s the big one. Such a horrible sin and… It can rob so much. You just see the surface level of everyone, you know? I should be grateful and content with where I am. To covet what someone else has without knowing what they’ve gone through. It’s silly to want what someone else has.

When asked if this is something she deals with every day, Carley says,

Yes, I think that’s because of technology with social media. It’s even more in your face what others have. Sometimes I have to take a step back and pull away from that. And it simmers things down a bit because I don’t have to see it. I still want some of those things, though. I still want a bathroom break to myself. But, I don’t need someone’s new Jetta when I’m driving a passenger van! [Laughter.] It’s funny that these are my struggles.

The temptation to compare her life to that of others is closely connected to her concerns about finances. Like Deborah, money is always “the biggest thing” that Carley worries about. Even though she confesses that, “God has proven himself over and over,” and she thinks that it’s wrong that “our society especially puts so much emphasis on that,” still she says that money “makes me worry.”

Another daily struggle that Carley shares with Renee is what she calls “imbalance.” She describes that in the following way:

This fall we will have five kids in school. My husband hasn’t been too involved other than paying for things. So trying to balance how to teach that many kids and nurse a baby and make sure all the needs are taken care of in the home. And I need to be taken care of. What does that mean? I don’t know for sure yet. But, it’s important not to be lost in the shuffle. And [mom] is often the first person who is.

When pressed to say more about what it would mean to “be taken care of,” Carley points primarily to the need to rest.

I’ve tried to realize that it’s OK to take a nap. I’m up in the night nursing a bazillion times so it’s OK to take a nap. This probably comes from growing up in a large family, but it doesn’t feel right to me to be alone. I never lived on my own by choice because I didn’t like that feeling of being alone. There’s always been someone there… So, I’m learning the importance of time alone. It’s healthy to be able to sit in silence for a while, I think. And I think it’s really challenging to do that.
Now that she has five children in school, Carley’s daily responsibilities can be quite heavy. But, she has two remedies for the really tough days: junk food and prayer. She explains:

I usually make Colby walk to the gas station to get me a Coke and a Milky Way. [Laughter.] I really do and it really does help! [Laughter.] Also, my prayer pattern. Where other people may talk to themselves, I pray constantly throughout the day. I’m totally dependent upon [God] and his mercies really are new every morning. Tomorrow is another day and we can try better tomorrow. No matter what it is. Whether it’s me dealing with my selfishness or theirs. But, Coke really does help, too. [Laughter.]

Unlike Renee, Carley is a firm believer in gender hierarchy. She describes her point of view in the following way:

I think [men and women] are the same in that God created both of us after his image. But, I definitely would say that he has put man in a leadership role to be head over his wife. I think that men process things differently than women. Not all, but I think as a general, overall rule. Sometimes men are a little bit… They don’t get hints… Communication can be a bit off. [Laughter.] I would say women tend to be more tenderhearted versus men.

She points to the Bible and her experience with her peers as the evidence for these gender differences, along with what she saw in her family growing up. She describes male headship as follows: “Like a shepherd. That they lead gently. I wouldn’t really put controlling in there at all. Like a gentle shepherd that follows the Lord but knows when there’s danger to be aware of things before they’re happening.” Despite her sense of gender essentialism, Carley describes her marriage as a partnership that, at times, defies the traditional prescribed gender roles. She says,

[David] does lead our house. We try really hard to bounce ideas off [of each other]. I don’t feel like he’s the only one who makes the decisions, but I think we know that there’s an underlying [expectation] that if he needed to put his foot down that I respect that. I think with the amount of children we have, some of the things that some people say men can’t do—like do dishes and wash clothes and wash hair—those go by the wayside. We need both of us to make our house
function. I’ve had a bout recently with a [chronic condition] and in survival mode David has done way more dishes than I have over the past yet. And we know several families and it’s not just a special case for us. We have good friends who when you walk in the house you know that he is pulling as much weight as she is and vice versa. It looks more like a… It’s unspoken. There is no, “Honey, can you help me?” It just gets done.

Carley seems to balance her sense of gender hierarchy with a pragmatic approach to work in the home, particularly because a large family requires so much housework.

What matters is that things get done, not so much who is the one to do them. Carley also moderates male headship with the concept of mutual accountability to Christ: “I think if a woman is married that the husband should be the head and the wife should be submissive, but I also think that each of us is an individual and accountable to Christ.” Regarding how her perspective on gender works out in the practice of parenting, Carley explains it this way:

I think it would be similar to what I said before that we know David is the leader of the house. He studies the Bible and the kids know that. They know his love for the Lord. And so there’s that underlying notion that he’s the head of the house without anyone having to say it or forcefully make it happen. But… we have to be constantly on guard, correcting, training, and teaching. Sometimes when he’s at work it looks different because it’s just me. I think that for them I’m the one who comforts them and is their nurse and aid and who serves them and they see David as serving a different role. That’s how it seems to have worked out here. There has to be something underlying about that that they’ve learned. But, it’s never been anything that we’ve drawn in the sand: you do this and I’ll do that.

Rather than find male headship problematic, Carley thinks that it makes her and David more unified as a couple. She says, “I really think that we are happier. I know that probably sounds silly but I think we’re more of a team because we know our roles and how to work together instead of working against each other.”

Even so, Carley and David have run into conflict about gender roles with fellow church members in the past. In Carley’s words,
We had a situation when we were in a house church and we were getting ready to multiply. … My husband and another member were going to lead one and we were with an organization that had lots of house churches that met for corporate worship together. I had posted on Facebook and I was inviting people to come to our house church on Sunday. And one of the original leaders invited my husband to a coffee shop to correct him for what I did. I felt like I didn’t need to be corrected. And if he had a problem with me and something I did that he should come to me. I would have felt very comfortable if he had invited both of us, but the fact that he invited my husband only—that bothered me. He ended up telling some people that my husband couldn’t control me.

The original house church leader thought that it was inappropriate for Carley, a woman, to be seen as taking the initiative to invite people to their house church. The concern was that Carley would be viewed as exercising leadership in a way that was improper for a woman. Eventually, the Millers left the church in question and their house church folded. Although the conflict over gender roles wasn’t the primary impetus for this change, it certainly contributed something to the breach. Carley calls this kind of hard approach to male headship “legalism” and cautions that it must not become “a religion.”

Another example of Carley negotiating with gender role ideology is in the matter of clothing. While it is common for those in the Quiverfull movement to promote feminine, modest clothing, typified by long skirts and high collars, Carley takes issue with that approach. Speaking of the wise woman who appears in Proverbs 31, she says,

I think when it says that she was clothed in nice things that it means she obviously took care of herself. She wasn’t frumpy. I mean I sometimes think that this modesty movement puts this picture in your head that you need floral puffy sleeves and a lace collar. And I don’t think that’s what it means. I think we can be in the world—and look like we’re in the world—and not be of it.

Despite the fact that the Millers are committed to gender hierarchy, their interpretation of that doctrine is not always in line with that of their peers. They feel the freedom to negotiate with the concept of male headship and put it into practice in their
daily lives in a way that works for them. The gender hierarchy of the Millers is more about pragmatism than attaining a theological ideal for marriage. With the principle of male headship in place, they are free to work out the particulars in daily life as they see fit.

We have seen that Carley is a little different from her Quiverfull peers in her education methodology and goals, her appearance, and her interpretation of gender hierarchy, but she is also different in her preference for organic food, natural or holistic medicine, and natural birth. According to Carley, their family seeks to “let our food be our medicine,” eating healthy so that “we don’t have to use anything other than food” for healing. All members of the family regularly receive care from a chiropractor and, she says, “When one of the kids is sick we go to the chiropractor first.” She sees the use of essential oils and natural remedies as something the Bible supports, questioning why someone would use “synthetic medicine” when “God gave us [remedies found in nature] to nourish our bodies and help us.” This doubt about the necessity of “synthetic medicine,” along with the writing of Dr. Sears and others, has led her to choose not to vaccinate their children, either. Also, Carley is an advocate for natural birth and has become a certified birth doula. All of this is part of one aspect of Carley’s life where she doesn’t compare herself to others. She confesses, “It just makes the most sense to me. Why would we do it any different?”

V. Analysis of Carley’s Story

Although she identifies with the Quiverfull movement, Carley makes it clear that she does so rather loosely. Part of this looseness may be the result of generational difference. Unlike Renee, Carley is a second-generation Quiverfull and homeschooling
mother. By the time Carley began to take part in the Quiverfull subculture, it was developed enough to allow for participants to identify with it while also negotiating and debating it. The experience with her house church brings this fact into sharp relief, showing that the outworking of the doctrine of male headship remains a contested matter within such circles. She also distinguishes herself from other Quiverfull families in the way she dresses, wears her hair, and what kind of music she listens to. And she is a proponent of natural birth and natural medicine. Rather than seeing Quiverfull as a strict system of rules and patterns of behavior, Carley focuses on the disposition of the heart: “the direction of the Lord or the conviction that he’s placed on our hearts.” In her words, “I’ve always kind of gone against the grain.”

Although she is very much committed to homeschooling, Carley does not speak of separation from worldliness as a primary concern. Instead, she is concerned about each of her children receiving the education that is best suited to their needs and a family life that is focused on learning to love God. The educational philosophies she draws upon—Montessori, Waldorf, unschooling, Charlotte Mason—are typically associated with more left-leaning families, which sets her apart from mainstream Quiverfull families who rely on more structured, explicitly Christian curricula. These methods seem well suited to Carley’s laidback personality and preference for unscheduled days. In this way, she seems like something of a contrast to Renee, who found structure and scheduling a key part of maintaining her sanity. But, what Carley and Renee share is a genuine love for being with and around their children. There are times when Carley expresses frustration with their dependence, but on the whole she sincerely enjoys her children and their
domestic orientation. Among the three women described in this chapter, Carley seems the least stressed and overwhelmed by her daily responsibilities.

Another way in which Carley is a contrast to Renee is how she envisions and experiences the gender roles in her marriage. While Renee started out committed to male headship, she felt compelled to give up the doctrine after many years with a husband she describes as “passive” and disconnected. Carley, on the other hand, is very much committed to the doctrine of male headship, believing it to be an important contributor to their happy marriage. Interestingly, though, Carley describes a performance of male headship that prioritizes service, sacrifice, and love. She describes a marriage where domestic chores are shared without acrimony and both spouses pitching in to help out around the house is a matter of course. (Renee did not benefit from that kind of support.) The only mention of leadership in a traditional sense is in the matter of family worship: David leads the family in prayer and Bible study. Thus, the doctrine of male headship in the Miller household is rhetorically emphasized but performatively understated. In Carley’s words, “[T]here’s that underlying notion that he’s the head of the house without anyone having to say it or forcefully make it happen.”

By far, Carley was the most surprising informant that I interviewed. More than any other mother in my research, Carley defies the Quiverfull stereotype, which is perhaps best illustrated by Michelle Duggar’s long hair, long skirts, minimal makeup, and quiet demeanor. In fact, Carley seems to relish being a bit of a rebel who pushes the boundaries and defies stereotypes. Whether it’s her penchant for secular music or her preference for natural birth and natural remedies, Carley is a woman who goes her own way. A few days after our second interview, she sent me a text message that said: “I
forgot to tell you two things: 1) I am about halfway done with my birth doula certification. 2) I got my nose pierced.” When I responded positively to both pieces of news, she replied, “Thanks and thanks. The nose ring was actually a barter for doula services. The dad is a body piercer. Life may get a little more exciting. ;)

VI. Deborah’s Story

As we’ve already learned from Chapter 2, Deborah and Dan Olson are in the their mid-30s and have six children, ranging in age from two to 11 years. They live in the suburbs of a mid-sized Midwestern town where Dan works for the city government. While Deborah has a degree in education, she only used it for three years before leaving the teaching profession to stay at home with their children. Deborah is tall with long brown hair and almost always wears long skirts. She is very friendly and talkative, always willing to offer a story from her personal experience with no subject off limits. And while she speaks with passion and conviction, she also laughs easily and shares with Renee and Carley a sense of humility about the limits of her knowledge and experience.

Deborah wanted a large family from early on. She says, “I think I’ve always wanted a large family. I can remember being pretty young and wanting lots of children.” While they used birth control early in their marriage, the Olsons chose to abandon it entirely after having difficulty conceiving. And, by her testimony, their marriage has grown stronger because of that decision. She regrets ever using birth control to begin with. Deborah says:

I guess I feel like [children] are blessings from God. Dan and I struggled relationship-wise early on before children. We started out knowing that we wanted a large family but we didn’t start out not controlling it. We used birth control early on. But, our relationship has flourished since we stopped controlling it. For us, with every child we get closer and stronger. For us, God wants us to
have children as blessings, as refinement, as an extension of his love and our love. A house full of siblings communicates more love, acceptance, goodness. And God created that process. So, I would say we kind of happened upon it. We did a five-year thing of birth control and I regret it deeply. I think about it and think that could’ve been two more babies. For me, I felt like it was somewhat like time wasted. It wouldn’t be true for everyone but just for us, I would’ve rather let the Lord bless us with children from the beginning.

Even though money is always a significant struggle for the Olsons, Deborah would gladly welcome another pregnancy. For her, the monetary and physical burdens of another child are quite small in comparison to the joy of receiving another blessing from God. She calls the prospect of having another child “thrilling.”

Although she was once a public school teacher, when it came time for her oldest children to attend school, Deborah couldn’t bring herself to send them. While she knew very few people around her who were homeschooling, she began to look into it and pray that God would show her what to do. She explains the process as follows:

I remember thinking why in the world would I send my child away right now? I just had no interest in that. Why would I send him away to Kindergarten? [The feeling] just grew. I started the same conversation with Dan and he was miraculously on the same page. So then he and I together started to explore and put the word out and then I started seeing homeschoolers everywhere. I saw it in action and that kind of solidified the decision. Once we started homeschooling was when it became a serious spiritual issue for us. Nowadays we would say that our choice is first and foremost spiritual, because you’re losing your grip on the persons you’re trying to train when they are not under your training for seven hours a day. I mean you can’t—children need to be close to you in proximity for you to have influence over them. A college age student you can influence far away because cognitively you can do that but with younger children you just can’t. So now it’s first spiritual and secondly that we want to be with our children. We want to be together while it is still appropriate for us to be together. It seems unnatural to us that there would be such separation between parents and children for such a long period of time every day. I definitely know that homeschooling isn’t for everyone, in my brain, but I just can’t imagine sending my kids away for seven hours a day.

More than any other factor, Deborah couldn’t imagine sending her children to school because they would be under the training of someone else for several hours a day,
five days a week. The implication is that the teacher or teachers providing that training might do so in a manner that Deborah and Dan disagree with. Their primary concern in homeschooling is the ability to maintain “influence” over their children, especially while they are young. They assume that they are the best influencers of their children and Deborah their best educator. Even though she acknowledges that not everyone can or should homeschool, she goes so far as to say that sending your children away for a long period every day seems “unnatural” and beyond the bounds of her comprehension.

Deborah has relatively modest goals for her children’s education, hoping that each of them will be well prepared for whatever they want to do in life. She says,

I want them to be independent learners and skilled enough to do whatever it is in life they want to do. I want the boys and the girls to have some way to make a living for their families. Whatever type of education is required for that, I want them to be able to do it well. And that’s different for everybody. If somebody wants their doctorate, that’s a different level than someone driving a forklift. I want them to make a good contribution to society. I want them to be literate and organized and aware, educated on what’s going on around them.

Deborah is clear that higher education isn’t a foregone conclusion in their household. She and Dan both regret the debt they carry as a result of their college degrees and that makes her less enthusiastic about higher education. She says,

My goal isn’t that they all attend a prestigious college or that even they all get a college degree. Dan and I won’t insist that they all do that. That’s partly because we both have college degrees and a lot of debt that we can’t figure out how to pay off. Personally, I wish I could take [my degree] back. If they all want to go to college that’s fine, but our prayer is that they would stay near home and do that first in a more cost effective way. I would like for them to have something they can do other than waiting for a degree. I would like for them to learn trades or skills of some sort that they could earn money with.

Deborah is favorably inclined toward trade schools and apprenticeships, which she sees as routes to a more stable and less debt-incurring ways of making a living. She also believes that a trade or small business is something that her boys (the expected
breedwinners of their future families) could pass along to their children. She relates that Dan wishes he had a home-based business that would allow him to be more physically present, especially for his boys.

When asked about how she copes with the hard days of homeschooling, Deborah was self-deprecating and honest about her failings:

Sometimes I do a poor job [of coping]. Sometimes I just whine and complain and get self-pitying. I’ve done that this week actually. “It’s just too hard! I’m all alone! My husband doesn’t love me! Wah wah wah wah wah!” [Laughter.] I feel like I’m pretty good at reminding myself that I’m doing what I’m doing to honor the Lord and nobody else. So, if I feel out of check, I need to be in check with him more so than anyone else. My source of joy and strength needs to come from him and not from my husband or my friends or clearly not my children. If I feel like I’m spiraling downward, I can’t claim that it’s my first response because my first response is kind of to cry and whine. But, typically I can pull myself out of it pretty good by focusing on [the Lord]. Sometimes that means less gets done that day. There will be praise and worship music playing or there will be more Bible reading and more praying. I’ll ask my husband to pray for me and he will. Obviously in our flesh we just want to “Waaaaaah!” but I try.

Deborah can identify with Carley’s tendency to compare her life to that of other mothers and to want what they have. She says,

The other thing that gets hard in homeschooling is just being in the home and not having all the resources we wish we had. All the things, you know? That’s probably more of an issue than anything else. We compare ourselves. We compare our husbands, our children, our home schools. So it’s really hard to be content with where we are because of our problem in our society with having too much. So, when I get that way I try to turn inward and focus on what we do have and focus on what we do have compared with what our parents didn’t have. And I try to focus on the fact that compared to most of the world I have way more than what they do. I try to think about the fact that it’s hard for a rich man to really know his need for the Lord. You know? I mean I hate to make it all about money, but I think sometimes our down-ness stems from things that we see in our culture and our culture is so about things and having things and doing things a certain way and making everything seem like Pinterest.

“[J]ust being in the home” is a major challenge for Deborah, particularly because their financial limitations mean that they do not have access to the educational resources
that she wishes they had. “All the things, you know?” In this sense, Deborah sees herself at odds with the values of the surrounding culture. The love of “things,” “money,” and “making everything seem like Pinterest” is always threatening to pull her down. To combat this mindset she calls to mind what they do have and how fortunate they are in comparison with their parents and most of the rest of the world. And she devotes more time to worship music, Bible reading, and prayer.

While Renee credits both her own high standards and her lack of time for herself (“I didn’t have a life”) as the reason for her mental exhaustion, in Deborah’s experience, the sense of being overwhelmed comes mostly when she tries to do things outside the home. She described one busy week in the following way:

This week I got the opportunity do a couple nice things for people… We went to the nurse practitioner. We went to see her on Tuesday and she just was not her normal perky self and it troubled me deeply. She walked into the appointment 35 minutes late and it looked like she had been bawling. And it just bugged me. It was totally out of character. She’s the nurse practitioner we’ve seen since Garrett was a baby. She’s always kind always perky and it really bugged me. Anyway… I had left Garrett home with a couple of the kids. I just took [the two youngest]. So I took the time that day because I wasn’t babysitting and they had already started school… I was just free to do something that I’d love to do every day. I went to the florist and picked out a plant, flowers and a card and wrote a little note and took it back to the office and dropped it off for her. It took 20 minutes and, you know, I rarely feel like I have 20 minutes. And anyway… It just felt so good. And a few hours later she called me bawling. “You have no idea, you have no idea,” she said. I still to this day don’t know what was wrong.

And then the next day I got to cook a meal for someone. I love to cook and I love to cook for people. And then the next day I taught AWANA and I got to do this fun creative lesson. And then this morning I got to teach [an art class]…

So my life this week has just been filled with those things. And I think, “Oh this feels good!” But then… I am so stressed! [Laughter.] I have not slept! [Laughter.] Of course, I have also felt awful because I’m eating sugar. I have had headaches. I’ve not slept well. I’ve felt jittery. But, my point is, to reel myself back into reality. My time really has to be spent—I mean, to be successful at what I’ve made a commitment to do, my life can’t be filled with that kind of stuff every day. It’s hard. It’s hard. Because I do have passions for things that have to be kind of
put off to the side in order to be… Every mom is like that. Every mom is like that. But…

In contrast to Renee’s experience, Deborah has the most trouble when she attempts to “have a life.” When she has a week where she serves people outside the home, whether through a gift, a meal, or a lesson taught (things she has “passion” for), she experiences stress, evidenced by poor sleep, jitters, and headaches. She takes this experience as an indication that she needs to be focused on the home and educating her children. In order to “be successful at what [she’s] made a commitment to do,” her daily life cannot be filled with her passions. They have to be “put off to the side.” She acknowledges this but, she says, “It’s hard. It’s hard.”

Still, Deborah speaks of the multigenerational faithfulness as a comforting source of hope when life is difficult:

So, what do we do [when we get discouraged]? We just say we’re just thinking forward. And that’s the one thing about Voddie Baucham’s book that got me emotionally is that we have stopped in past generations raising multigenerational Christians, multigenerational anything. We can’t take back the past, what we did or didn’t do, but we can keep looking to the future.

But, multigenerational faithfulness means more than just producing professing and practicing adult Christians. Deborah wants her children to avoid the common “crisis of faith” that she and her siblings went through in the teen and young adult years. In her words, her goal for her children is that “they don’t leave my home until they’re prepared to fly spiritually.” She explains,

So they aren’t grasping for answers—strong in doctrine and strong in faith. Not just good moral kids who go to church but actually knowing it and strong enough to defend it even if you are surrounded by no one else who does. I think kids who grow up in Christian homes tend to lose it because they haven’t been given a strong background to let them defend their faith. So it doesn’t mean that I definitely think they have to grow up and have five kids a piece and homeschool. I would love for them to do that, but that may not happen. I just think there’s
something about being able to verbally defend their faith. And I felt very weak at that as a young adult even though I was a pastor’s daughter.

Even as Deborah speaks of the heavy burden she bears, she reiterates the faith that she is doing God’s work:

I want to protect my mind from negativity because this [way of life] is a blessing. But still, they are with me. All. The. Time. … It’s all me. I’m the sole provider of all that stuff. Everything. And it can be a really, really heavy burden. But, at the same time [it’s] a huge joy because I feel like I’m doing the things the Lord has equipped me to do for my children.

When I asked Deborah what it was like to try to educate her older children while nursing babies, she laughed boisterously and said,

Right… Right… It’s pretty awful! [Laughter.] … It’s a challenge and you worry. Are they getting enough creative fun things? Are they getting enough one on one? Sometimes I think maybe Drew could have read a year sooner if I had been spending less time chasing toddlers. You’re always feeling pulled and it’s a challenge. It’s hard, hard, hard, hard.

Deborah shares Carley’s more laidback personality and awareness of her limitations, but she locates most of her shortcomings in her inability to manage herself:

My discipline—that’s where I’m bad. My self-discipline. I feel like if I had more discipline myself I would struggle less. If I could eat right and exercise I would have so much more energy. I know things would be better. I don’t why I don’t do it. If I could pray and read my Bible every morning I know that the day would go better. But it’s easier to lay in bed for an extra 15 minutes. So, things that require self-discipline I struggle with.

Like Carley, Deborah is committed to the doctrine of male headship. That works itself out in a firm conception of gender essentialism. She says,

[Men and women are] the same in the fact that we are made in the image of God. We have a mind, body, soul, and obviously we co-exist and do a lot of the same physical things. But, men are different. They’re made differently with different thoughts and wants and desires. And women, vice versa. Women do things differently, have different thoughts, wants, and desires. Obviously, there are physical differences between men and women. And I believe their roles are different. What God created them to be is different.
The bodily differences between men and women are a major factor in Deborah’s understanding of men and women’s roles, but the narratives of Genesis 1-3 are also important. For Deborah, the differences between men and women are so stark that she calls them “very different creatures.” She explains,

Clearly, there’s a reason why God made a woman able to carry children and have children. Men desire physical things from women in a different way than women do men. That’s just normal, common, for everyone. The story of creation is obviously important to reflect on. God made Adam to do all these things. Adam was given the responsibility to take care of the earth, naming the animals, all this stuff. But, he felt like he needed a helper. The story of creation makes it clear that the Lord expected woman to be an aid to the husband. I read this book, *Captivating*, that talks about this notion of the man’s desire for a woman—clearly God created it. Women can use it manipulatively or the way God designed it, as a motivator to the man. There’s something about that as something that draws man to woman. But that’s not the same way women are drawn to men. They’re drawn to men for the leadership or emotional support or spiritual support, you know. So, it seems pretty clear to me that God made [men and women] a puzzle to fit together. Of course, that makes it challenging to deal with. We’re very different creatures.

Deborah thinks that it is key to the stability and unity of families for the husband to be the provider for and leader of his family. She explains that conviction in the following way:

I do believe it is the man’s responsibility or heart or central push to be the provider for the family financially and spiritually. Because of the struggles we’ve experienced I feel like I would guide my children in that direction, but I would never want my daughters to think it’s atrocious for them to have a job. There are times I wish I could go get a job to help out… But, it’s ultimately the husband’s role to do that. Spiritually they are focused on the family’s worship and discipling the children. I feel like if the father isn’t leading in devotions and spiritual training that it sends a focus to people that it’s just a woman thing to be spiritual. I believe that when the man’s role in the spiritual training of the family became stagnant, that’s the major source of disintegration of families. I believe that man is placed as leader of the home whether we want him to be or not. He’s still the leader and the family will fall short regardless. Dan and I have struggled in the past and I have said that to him, “You’re the leader whether you want to be or not.” God has placed me in [the role of mother]. It’s not up to me to decide that. It’s not that the man should be in charge of all of it. I’m the teacher in my home. I’m just naturally gifted and it’s easier for me to communicate and teach. I think a lot of
women are gifted that way and we’re emotionally connected in ways that men aren’t. When I say, “Men should take the lead,” I mean they’re ultimately responsible for it all happening and encouraging the wife where necessary.

Because of her view of gender hierarchy, Deborah thinks that teaching for boys and girls will necessarily have different goals. Although she wants all of her children to read and write proficiently, she expects them to be moving toward different ends in life.

In her words,

I have the same goals for them to an extent. I can’t expect these girls to live in this house and see these roles of doing life and not think they’re going to have babies and be stay-at-home moms. Obviously, I would love to see my girls to be stay-at-home moms and homeschool their kids. I would also love for one of them to be a missionary. But, at the end of the day if we’re parents for life and love our kids unconditionally then what happens if one of my children decides to have two kids and put them in daycare and become a hairdresser? I hope I’m spunky enough to be their babysitter! I don’t want to quench their spirit either. So, if there’s something that they can do that would also let them have a family then I would encourage that. And if you look at the boys, I can’t help but think that they’ll have the pressure of being the sole provider for their family. Ultimately, for the roles in our family, we want the women to be skilled in homemaking and the men to be very driven in being providers for the home. I would encourage any of my kids to do anything that allows more family time and more flexibility in their profession. Because that’s definitely what’s best for the family, in our opinion.

…

I think that as they grow the girls need to narrow in on training from older women and the boys need to narrow in on training from older men. I think it gives them opportunities to see God at work in older men and gives them the opportunity to build strong relationships with their fathers and lots of opportunities for conversations and spiritual discipleship from the father instead of the mom. Because I think there comes a point when that’s desperately need for teenage boys. And that gets lost a lot. Public school kids, obviously, there’s no times for dads to spend with them. But, it happens for homeschooling families too because dad’s working and moms do the majority of hands on training. So, somehow making the conscious effort to channel that into the father becoming the mentor in life. Spiritually, specifically, but also how to be a husband and be a man and all the things you’re supposed to do.

Deborah notes that while she thinks it is vital for men to train boys and women to train girls, within the homeschooling family that is difficult to work out in practice because “moms do the majority of hands on training.” Thus, even though she sees the
boys and girls headed in different vocational directions (ideally, boys toward being breadwinning fathers and girls toward being stay-at-home mothers), Deborah is the one on whom the majority of the day-to-day responsibility rests to prepare them for those different roles.

Although she has firm convictions about gender roles and male headship when speaking in theory, when Deborah describes the inner-workings of her marriage the clear gender divisions become muddled. For example, Dan has struggled throughout their marriage to control his temper. His anger is often expressed in loud outbursts and yelling, something he learned from his family. She confesses that “it was very hurtful for me and I was crushed at first.” They tried a few forms of counseling to work on it, but eventually she made it clear to him that such behavior was simply “unacceptable.” She relates that turning point in the following way:

[A]t the end of the day I was just kind of snide about it because my Bible says the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. “Sink yourself deeper into his word and into his Spirit and if you are there then there is no way you’ll be screaming at your wife and children.” I think he was like, “Oh goodness, I’ve got a hard one now.” [Laughter.] And I wasn’t willing to make excuses for him. But now I think he’s thankful that I was persistent in that mindset.

When I suggest to Deborah that her account of that struggle seems at odds with the doctrine of wifely submission, she laughs knowingly and replies:

Submission is such a hard subject because you know everything you know about me. I’m passionate and intense and very opinionated and very bold and very wordy. My husband is not. He’s a quiet guy… [E]arly in marriage submission was very difficult for me because I felt like I had a husband who hadn’t arrived yet at adulthood. I felt like he hadn’t even arrived yet as a Christian. I really wanted a God-centered marriage and he just wanted me. [Laughter.] We just had to grow into a pattern that ultimately became more pleasing to the Lord. Me learning where and when to tone it down and praying that the Lord would convict his heart because I could not be his Holy Spirit. Even though I wanted to be his Holy Spirit. [Laughter.] It’s amazing the interaction between he and I now compared to then. It will be 15 years this August. There are a lot of areas where I
don’t say anything and he just chooses and does it. It took a lot of pruning on my part and growing on his part.

It’s clear that Deborah sees gender roles as fixed patterns of behavior and activities that are the same for all people regardless of personality. So, even though she is “passionate and intense and very opinionated and very bold and very wordy,” she had to go through “a lot of pruning” in order to tone that down and learn to defer to Dan’s leadership. Their growth in their prescribed roles allowed their marriage to become “more pleasing to the Lord.” But, if Deborah’s forceful handling of Dan’s anger problem doesn’t seem like submission, she disagrees.

[I]n no way would I define submission as a person without an opinion or a person led by a leash. I believe it has to do with me respecting the authority that the Lord gave Dan as the head of our home. He’s the head of our home whether he realizes it or does the right thing. Which is why when he’s doing the wrong thing we will suffer for it. If you’re not doing the things the Lord wants you to do, then we’ll be suffering because of it. There was a time in our marriage that he never would have gotten up on his own on Saturday morning for Bible study. But, he’s up as 7am to go to Bible study even though I want to stay in bed. And he takes initiative in church that he never would have done 15 years ago. It’s been a learning process of figuring out our roles. I think a lot of women think they need to not have opinions or be out spoken to be submissive. I think a lot of people can’t be vulnerable about that because in Christian circles people might think [the wives] aren’t in their place. There’s definitely an issue in our culture of men becoming more passive and women becoming more assertive. There have been changes in our culture that aren’t good. But, I don’t think the Lord would have given Adam a helpmeet that couldn’t help him.

Deborah is very much still “in the thick of it” as Quiverfull mom. She is still in her fertile years and has multiple school age children at home. She has faced numerous challenges with a special needs child whose chronic illness requires numerous doctor visits and a special diet. Still, Deborah presses on with their way of life, confident that she is doing what God wants her to do. In fact, just as I was putting the finishing touches on this project, Deborah gave birth to another child.
VII. Analysis of Deborah’s Story

Like Renee, Deborah’s story reveals a Quiverfull mother shouldering a seemingly endless list of responsibilities. But, unlike Renee, Deborah is still in the midst of the hardest years when she has six small children still at home. She is often overwhelmed by the challenges that surround her: caring for a child with a recurring illness, juggling the bills and debts that their family has incurred, carrying out the daily work of running a home, and educating her school-age children. She speaks of her way of life as a “privilege” and couldn’t imagine living any other way, but the weight of the burden remains.

Also, one gets the sense from Deborah’s testimony that their family is one disaster away from financial ruin. And, despite a few friends and a church where they regularly attend, it seems that they remain largely isolated, lacking a social safety net to help catch them if such an event were to occur. The economic and social vulnerability of the Olsons is clear.

We also see in Deborah’s story the common perception that mothers are incrementally less capable as mothers the more they have going on outside the home. On a week when she gets to pursue her “passions,” which she speaks about in exhilarated and joyful terms, she still perceives herself as stressed and neglecting her number one priority: the home. Of course, fathers do not face the same expectations because they are tasked with the responsibility of being the breadwinners. While Quiverfull literature, particularly the materials written by men, often emphasize the father’s duty to lead and “shepherd” his family, the ideal can look very different in daily practice. Often, what the fathers do by financing the work of the home is enough while the rest falls on the
mother’s shoulders. Deborah describes it this way: “The mom (or whoever is overseeing the children) tends to be the dominant one in the way the house flows. So, [Dan] respects the fact that it’s my ship. He owns the ship but I’m the chief operator. The um… Director of Operations.” This illustration is telling. The owner can live at a considerable distance from the day-to-day activities of the ship. His name is on the deed and he can have as much or as little to do with the ship’s operation as he wants. But, if Deborah is the “Director of Operations,” then she really does “do it all.”

Deborah’s story also reveals again the tensions within the Quiverfull discourse of gender hierarchy. Among the three women in this chapter, she is the most verbose and passionate about proper gender roles. And yet, Deborah also seems to exercise significant leadership within her family, particularly in the area of setting expectations for behavior and correcting offenses. She frames it in terms of being a good “helpmeet”: “I don’t think the Lord would have given Adam a helpmeet that couldn’t help him.” Even her counsel to Dan regarding his headship is somewhat calculating: “He’s the head of our home whether he realizes it or does the right thing. Which is why when he’s doing the wrong thing we will suffer for it. If you’re not doing the things the Lord wants you to do, then we’ll be suffering because of it.” This puts the onus to do “the things the Lord wants you to do” squarely on the man’s shoulders through the threat that his family will suffer if he is disobedient. While Deborah takes this approach because she believes it conforms to God’s will for the Christian marriage, there is no doubt that she also abides by it because she thinks it works for her. By her testimony, Dan has grown a lot in their many years of marriage, which is evidenced by his participation in church activities and treating her and the children with greater care. She admits that he still fails, but when he does he
apologizes to her and to their children and seeks to make it right. Thus, in the case of the Olsons, rather than resulting in a more authoritarian husband, the doctrine of male headship seems to have led to a more humble and loving husband.

VIII. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a glimpse inside the Quiverfull movement through the stories of three Quiverfull mothers. Although these accounts are by no means exhaustive (there is much that I had to leave out), I think they provide the reader with a sufficient introduction to the complexities and tensions of Quiverfull lived religion as expressed by three different women in three different contexts. As I said in the introduction to this chapter, we cannot assume that these women are representative of the movement as a whole. The “sample” is too small and my time with them too limited to make any substantive generalizations. Just by virtue of being willing to talk to me, the women I have encountered may occupy a more moderate position (if that characterization is even appropriate) within the movement.

Still, their stories and the themes they raise are representative enough for my project, which seeks to better understand the movement and reflect on what theologians might learn from their way of life. The remaining chapters will take up themes raised by Renee, Carley, and Deborah, including the challenges of Quiverfull’s construction of motherhood, their vision of children and childhood, and their private construction of the nuclear family. In pursuit of each topic, I will draw upon both Quiverfull elite materials and the stories of Quiverfull mothers in order to show the differences of opinion and approach between the two. Along the way, we will learn more about the lives of Deborah, Carley, and Renee and consider in more detail what they might have to teach us about the
family. My hope is that this method will allow for a more nuanced picture of the Quiverfull movement than we have seen thus far and provide opportunity for fruitful theological reflection.
CHAPTER 4
MOTHERHOOD IN THE FULL QUIVER

I. Introduction

Deborah Olson, who we met in the previous chapter, has six children, ages ten to two years. One child has severe allergies and an autoimmune disease that calls for major dietary restrictions, frequent doctor visits, and lots of worry. Deborah freely admits that she and Dan struggle financially. She would say that it is a constant problem. Occasional car or house repairs are serious hurdles for the Olsons, sometimes causing them to incur more debt. Yet, Deborah says, “I would welcome another baby.” In fact, she finds the prospect “thrilling.” She is not worried about whether she can handle the change to the household, or the financial strain, or whether her marriage can handle the stress. And, she’s not worried about the day and night care that a baby requires: “I would not dread getting up with a baby again or nursing a baby again.” When I asked her what, if anything, scared her about having another baby, she responded:

That I would have some sort of complication. That I wouldn’t be here for my children. That I would be forced to have some kind of major surgery when I’m not in control of scheduling it. Or, that you know, mostly something that would compromise my ability to keep taking care of everybody. That’s it. If it wasn’t for any of that, maybe it would just be constant! Yeah… That’s just it. To be me, to be healthy and be able to keep doing my job.

Despite the family’s financial burdens, Deborah Olson doesn’t fear the added responsibilities of another child. In fact, she welcomes them. But, her pregnancies and
births have gotten increasingly more complicated over the years. So, her major concern is that her body might fail her. Interestingly, though, it is not because she is afraid of pain or possible surgery, but because she doesn’t want to be kept from “doing [her] job.” More than anything else, Deborah doesn’t want to go through something “that would compromise [her] ability to keep taking care of everybody.” Even though it is her body that would be compromised she is thinking mostly of her ability to care for everyone else.

What we hear from Deborah Olson is that she is pushed to her limit, concerned about the consequences of another pregnancy, yet desirous of more children. And she’s not alone. In her book, *Quiverfull*, Kathryn Joyce describes the screen names of many Quiverfull mothers in the Internet chat rooms she explored as part of her research. Many called themselves “Praying for More” or something similar. This moniker is illuminating, not just because it describes well the Quiverfull mother’s constant openness to more children, but also because I think it accurately describes the Quiverfull approach to motherhood, in general. When I see the screen name, “Praying for More,” I think of Deborah, not just her willingness to embrace another life as an unqualified blessing, but also because she wants, above all, to be able to carry on with the gargantuan task that she simply calls “my job.”

The work of motherhood is challenging, to say the least. Whether one is a working mom or a stay-at-home mom, the task of American motherhood is filled with significant emotional and symbolic weight, along with a seemingly never-ending list of daily care-related tasks. But, the threefold discourse of the Quiverfull movement—homeschooling, pronatalism, and gender hierarchy—means that Quiverfull mothers often

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bear and nurse children well into their 40s, all the while serving as their children’s primary educator from preschool through high school (and sometimes beyond). As a result, the Quiverfull mother often serves as a nurse, caregiver, household administrator, cook, maid, and teacher for much longer than even the average stay-at-home mom.

Thus, the Quiverfull mother is, in a sense, always “praying for more.” They are not only praying for more children, if that is God’s will, but also more responsibilities. They know that every child they birth will be under their primary tutelage, schooled at home until they enter adulthood. And they are primarily in charge of managing the household while teaching multiple children of various ages, while also nursing a baby or chasing a toddler (or both). Still, Quiverfull mothers often willingly pray for more and, in the process, rely upon the grace of God for survival. In the words of Deborah,

[Having more children than most] has humbled me to rely on the strength of God to do my job as a mother rather than relying on myself to keep everything in perfect order. … And when I am weak he is strong. I need to be in a position of weakness in order for him to be strong. When I get a compliment about my mothering I say, ‘Well the Lord is doing it.’ I mean, my husband has seen me broken many times. It is definitely the Lord doing it.

In Chapter 3, we heard the stories of three Quiverfull mothers and analyzed briefly how they embody the Quiverfull discourse. In this chapter, we will attempt to think theologically alongside of them about motherhood in America. This theological endeavor will begin with description: What does it look like to be a Quiverfull mother? Drawing on my ethnographic research, I will describe in broad strokes what Quiverfull motherhood looks like on the ground. Then, I will engage in some theological reflection on their practice in two major movements: 1) an examination of the tension between the Quiverfull practice of motherhood and their rhetoric of gender hierarchy; 2) an examination of the tension between the Quiverfull ideal of maternal omnipotence and the
experience of maternal vulnerability. While these two are by no means the only theological matters one might consider, I believe they are the most obvious and timely. But, before we undertake analysis of and theological engagement with Quiverfull motherhood, I will clarify the definition of motherhood that is operative in this project.

II. Motherhood: A Definition for This Project

What do I mean when I speak of motherhood? First, for this chapter I am speaking primarily of biological motherhood. There are other forms of motherhood (adoptive motherhood, foster motherhood, etc.) and these forms of motherhood have much overlap with the experience of biological motherhood. But, due to the pronatalist focus of the Quiverfull movement, I will focus exclusively on biological motherhood for this project. Second, I affirm that motherhood is a broad concept that is deeply rooted in pregnancy and birth. While one does not need to become pregnant and give birth in order to mother, no one can mother a child unless that child has been conceived and birthed by someone. Moreover, the experience of motherhood for Quiverfull women is very much rooted in pregnancy and birth, which they undergo repeatedly, often in close intervals. Apart from this biological given, however, conceptions of motherhood vary widely across space and time.

Swedish theologian Cristina Grenholm offers a more specific definition of motherhood. In her book *Motherhood and Love: Beyond the Gendered Stereotypes of Theology*, Grenholm defines motherhood as a process of creation that is active and

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378 Although most Quiverfull teachers are very much in favor of adoption, the emphasis in all of their texts and Internet resources is on biological motherhood. Adoption is viewed as the exception to the rule of biological reproduction. Moreover, only one of the families under consideration in my project had a child through adoption.
passive, as well as ongoing.\textsuperscript{379} Motherhood as a process of creation means that it continues beyond pregnancy and the point of birth, including ongoing care: “the coming into being of human beings in communion with others.”\textsuperscript{380} Like God’s work of creation, the creative process of motherhood is continuous and involves both “active” and “passive” work. Pregnancy can be considered a mostly passive participation in the creative process—the development of the growing child remains, in large part, beyond her control. Still, there is no doubt that “the mother’s care for the growing life within her makes her an active caregiver long before the child is born.”\textsuperscript{381} The social interaction of mother with child and the ongoing care she provides for the child following birth is the more “active” aspect of motherhood.\textsuperscript{382} Of course, many people beside mothers can participate in care for children. And, the work of caring for children is by no means dependent upon having birthed said children. But, because of the nature of the Quiverfull movement, what is under consideration in this project is the combination of pregnancy, birth, and ongoing childcare.

In addition to the idea of motherhood as a process of creation, I want to bring to the foreground an idea that is implicit in Grenholm’s definition: motherhood is also work. In \textit{Laborem Exercens}, John Paul II argues that work is “a fundamental dimension of [human] existence on earth” and something a person does “to realize [her] humanity, to fulfill [her] calling to be a person.” Through work, human beings share in the work of


\textsuperscript{380} Grenholm, \textit{Motherhood and Love}, 31.

\textsuperscript{381} Ibid., 32.

\textsuperscript{382} There is a particular branch of feminist ethics called the ethics of care, which is largely based upon the work of the following authors: Carol Gilligan, \textit{In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Nel Noddings, \textit{Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education} (Berkley: University of California Press, 1984); and Mary Jeanne Larrabee, \textit{An Ethic of Care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives} (London: Routledge, 1993).
God the Creator of all. Later, in *Mulieris Dignitatum*, John Paul II affirmed the work of women within families as work with real social import due to the fact that the love and nurture of children is vital to society. To understand motherhood as work is to highlight in the definition of motherhood the day-to-day labor of care, nurture, instruction, and more, in which mothers are constantly engaged. Moreover, it allows us to emphasize the active aspects of motherhood, referenced above. Mothers are more than simply women who find themselves pregnant and then giving birth, but also women who actively choose to care for their children. Finally, understanding motherhood as work allows us to say that by participating in the work of mothering one participates in a fundamental dimension of what it means to be human.

Finally, in our preliminary discussion of motherhood we should comment upon the distinction between motherhood as an experience and motherhood as an institution (social, cultural, and symbolic), which Adrienne Rich first popularized in her classic work, *Of Woman Born*. Despite its rhetorical usefulness, I think this distinction is somewhat misleading. All experiences of motherhood are always-already interpreted by

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385 Because motherhood is work it may also be appropriate to understand motherhood as a vocation. In *A Christian Theology of Marriage and Family* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), Julie Hanlon Rubio argues that Christian parenting is a vocation. She says that Christian parents have a dual vocation: one as parents in the home and one as workers (and disciples of Christ) in the world (101). But, an understanding of motherhood as a vocation should not lead one to suggest that it is a vocation in exclusion of other vocations.
386 There is an implication here about the work of mothering when it leads to the dehumanization of women. When mothering undercuts rather than builds up the humanity of women, there is something fundamentally wrong. Yet, because motherhood is often spoken of in terms of sacrifice (and often tied metaphorically to the sacrifice of Christ), determining healthy and unhealthy manifestations of motherhood as a vocation is often difficult. We will discuss motherhood as self-sacrifice in a limited way at the end of this chapter.
social, cultural, and symbolic conceptions of motherhood. For example, one cannot separate one’s experience of birth, on the one hand, and the cultural ideals associated with birth, on the other. When one is experiencing birth, one’s experience is always-already formed and shaped by one’s social, cultural, and symbolic imagination about birth. There is no “universal experience” of motherhood to which all women can relate that floats above the concrete experiences of particular women within particular cultures.

I have included some general elements in the working definition of motherhood for this chapter: motherhood is a process of creation that is active, passive, and ongoing, rightly described as work. Still, the particulars of motherhood and how those particulars are interpreted vary from situation to situation. In this sense, motherhood is something as much performed as conceived. That is to say, the institution and the experience are joined as mothers act out motherhood within their various contexts. Of course, this chapter will focus on the experiences of Quiverfull mothers and I will be thinking about motherhood from a Christian perspective.

Now that we have clarified what I mean when I speak of motherhood in this chapter, it is time to reflect theologically upon the issues raised by the Quiverfull experience of motherhood. But first, the following section will describe in broad strokes what motherhood looks like for Quiverfull women. Only after we have a basic description of Quiverfull motherhood on the ground can we reflect theologically on their practice.

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388 Grenholm says as much in *Motherhood and Love*, 38.
III. Quiverfull Motherhood on the Ground: Six Characteristics

What does it look like to be a Quiverfull mother? To answer this question, I offer six major characteristics. First, Quiverfull mothers are pregnant or nursing or both for up to three decades. Because they choose to forgo any kind of birth control to limit or space their children, Quiverfull mothers who are healthy and fertile can have children from their early twenties (when most of them are married) into their late forties. There is even a book titled, *Three Decades of Fertility: Ten Ordinary Women Surrender to the Creator and Embrace Life* (Visionary Womanhood, 2013). In this way of envisioning motherhood, women’s bodies are devoted to reproduction and infant care for up to thirty years. In the words of one mother: “[H]aving many children means that you never really stop having babies and it’s just a way of life. It was just normal to me to have a baby on my hip or in my arms.” (Of course, in the days before birth control and in parts of the world where birth control is unavailable, women would not call this way of life, “Quiverfull.” It’s simply life—and a life that many would change if given the option. But, in the American context, where birth control is relatively easy to obtain and family size is generally small, it can seem like a radical thing to forgo family planning entirely. In fact, in a society where birth control in the norm, one’s surrender of fertility to God can be seen as a kind of asceticism, making oneself especially holy and set apart.)

Of course, the consequences of the pronatalist commitment for women’s bodies are significant. The stories of the moms in *Three Decades of Fertility* contain lengthy explanations of the detrimental physical consequences that come with repeated childbearing: debilitating back pain, sciatica nerve pain, varicose veins, pubis-symphysis dysfunction (the movement or misalignment of the pelvis that can cause moderate to
severe pain), hernias, adrenal fatigue, hormone imbalances, multiple miscarriages, depression, anxiety, and more. In these stories, it is clear that the bodily work of repeated pregnancies can exact a heavy toll, even if it is one freely chosen and accepted in faith.

The second characteristic of Quiverfull motherhood is due, at least in part, to their devotion to reproduction: Quiverfull mothers approach motherhood as their only vocation. They do not see motherhood as something to which they can be called alongside some other form of work. Due to the financial strain of supporting a large family on the father’s salary, some mothers take on occasional jobs. For example, one of the mothers I interviewed cleans a home every week and another that I met teaches piano lessons on the side. But, even in these cases, motherhood is viewed as a full-time job requiring all of one’s attention and resources. When they are forced to work for pay in some other fashion, there is a general understanding that the more work they do, the less adequate they are as mothers. (The unstated implication, of course, is that fatherhood is not a full-time job in the same way. Fathers can work beyond the home all day and it does not affect their ability to be a father.) Thus, for Quiverfull mothers, the care for and education of children is their primary work for the majority of their adult lives.

The third characteristic is that motherhood is, to some extent, professionalized, due to the practice of homeschooling. Most of the women that I interviewed do not see themselves as “just” stay-at-home moms, but homeschooling moms, which is motherhood of a different sort. On the one hand, all mothers teach their children. It is usually mom who teaches children how to feed themselves, use the bathroom, dress themselves, tie their shoes, and use good manners at the table. On the other hand, homeschooling mothers take upon themselves the task of being the primary educator of
their children from preschool through high school (and sometimes beyond). Think of all
that this entails: reading, writing, literature, mathematics (from long division to calculus),
history (state, American, European, and world), geography, sciences (biology, anatomy
and physiology, chemistry, physics), government and economics, art and music. In
addition to the many subjects of study, there are also innumerable educational
philosophies and pedagogies: progressivist, Montessori, Waldorf, classical education,
unschooling, and more. Now, not all homeschooling mothers undertake all of these
subjects, nor do all mothers bother acquiring a philosophy of education. But, these things
are suggestive of the possible scope of the homeschooling mother’s work. And, we must
remember that, much like a one room schoolhouse, they are teaching multiple ages at
once. The Kindergartener learning to read is working alongside the junior high student
doing geometry. The mothers who approach this work with seriousness—and that’s most
of them—end up pursuing homeschooling as a quasi-professional vocation.

The fourth characteristic of the Quiverfull performance of motherhood is that due
to all of the above, the mother’s body and work is the de facto center of the household.
It’s not uncommon in American life for the mother to be central to the family. But, in the
Quiverfull family, I would argue that this centrality increases in intensity. The mother is
pregnant and nursing most of the time, requiring regular assistance from her husband and
older children. Also, she is responsible for everyone’s education. She orders their days,
determines their workload, delegates their assignments, and dispenses grades. Also, she is
the one to administer the housework, plan their voluntary church work, and order all
other activities beyond the home. And, even though Quiverfull families strongly endorse
the father as the “spiritual head of the family” it is usually the mother who is providing
regular religious education through Bible reading, prayers, and discipline of various kinds throughout the day. Thus, due to their pronatalism and homeschooling, the Quiverfull home is functionally mother-centered.

The fifth characteristic of Quiverfull motherhood is that because of the mother-centered nature of the household, the older children and father are regularly (though not always) called upon to assist in teaching and household responsibilities. This is particularly true of families with six or more children. In these situations, children are required to learn a certain degree of self-sufficiency from early on. Older children learn to cook and clean and help care for their younger siblings. Younger children learn to respect older siblings as authority figures, for good or ill. Also, fathers are often required to do more than they would normally do in either a two-income household or a “typical” stay-at-home mom situation. With the mother occupied most of the day with the education of children, the household work becomes something that requires sharing if it is to get done. One mother put it this way:

I think with the amount of children we have, some of the things that some people say men can’t do—like do dishes and wash clothes and wash hair—those go by the wayside. We need both of us to make our house function. I’ve had a bout recently with a [chronic illness] and in survival mode David has done way more dishes than I have over the past year. And we know several families like this—it’s not just a special case for us. We have good friends who when you walk in the house you know that he is pulling as much weight as she is… It’s unspoken. There is no, “Honey, can you help me?” It just gets done.

Certainly, not all Quiverfull fathers assist mothers in this way, but in my interviews all but one woman testify to their husband’s active involvement in household chores.

The final characteristic of Quiverfull motherhood is that it is, to a significant degree, a private endeavor. What I mean by this is that Quiverfull mothers typically lack
an extended community of support and lead somewhat isolated lives, especially while
their children are young. Sometimes this isolation is purposeful: an attempt to separate
themselves from people they consider to be a negative influence. Sometimes this
isolation is the result of their family’s unusual way of life. They simply can’t find other
families nearby that share their commitments and more “normal” families are skeptical of
their religious devotion. And sometimes this isolation is experienced even while involved
in a church or homeschool co-op. The sheer number of their children and the extent of
their daily responsibilities means they are sometimes prevented from cultivating
friendships and participating in communities that could provide them with support.

How does Quiverfull motherhood take shape in the daily lives of Quiverfull
families? This section has suggested six major characteristics. First, Quiverfull mothers
are pregnant or nursing or both for up to three decades (with sometimes detrimental
physical and mental consequences). Second, Quiverfull mothers approach motherhood as
their only vocation. Third, motherhood is professionalized, to some extent, due to the
daily practice of homeschooling. Fourth, due to their devotion to reproduction and
leadership in homeschooling, the Quiverfull mother’s body and work often becomes the
de facto center of the household. Fifth, the daily demands of Quiverfull mother often
require older children and fathers to assist in teaching and household responsibilities.
Finally, Quiverfull motherhood is very often a private endeavor, especially while their
children are very young.

Now that we have an overview of what Quiverfull motherhood looks like on the
ground, we turn to the theological concerns of this project. In the first movement, I will
examine the tension between the Quiverfull practice of motherhood and their rhetoric of
gender hierarchy. Then, in the second movement, I will examine the tension between the Quiverfull ideal of maternal omnipotence and their experience of maternal vulnerability.

IV. Quiverfull Motherhood and Gender Hierarchy in Tension

As we have seen, Quiverfull discourse centralizes and prioritizes women’s bodily work as a mother in significant ways. And yet, this particular practice of motherhood—centered on pronatalism and homeschooling—also leads to tension with the Quiverfull discourse of gender hierarchy and their resulting conception of womanhood. As we reflect theologically on the Quiverfull conception and instantiation of motherhood, the following section will seek to explain this dynamic in more detail. We will begin with a review of what Quiverfull materials (both print and Internet) say about womanhood and motherhood within the gender hierarchy. We will see that Quiverfull discourse at the elite level is stridently antifeminist and tends to collapse womanhood into motherhood such that the only real women are mothers. Then, we will compare this version of womanhood and motherhood with the way that Quiverfull is lived out on the ground. What we will find is that 1) the lay level practitioners of Quiverfull experience life in a way significantly different from the rhetoric of the elites and 2) the Quiverfull practice of motherhood often stands in tension with their purported notion of gender hierarchy. That is to say, the significance invested in Quiverfull motherhood overflows the bounds of their sense of gender hierarchy, leading to varying degrees of tension and incoherence. Where it doesn’t break down entirely, male headship is redefined in such a way as to conform to a practically matriarchal family structure. Thus, the performance of Quiverfull motherhood occurring in the daily lives of many families is far more
complicated than the picture painted by Quiverfull elites and cultural commentators who are observing from a distance.

A. Quiverfull Motherhood at the Elite Level

As stated in Chapter 2, the seminal work to which most Quiverfull families point to as the catalyst for the emergence of Quiverfull as a movement of sorts is Mary Pride’s *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality*. Pride is best known as a leader in the conservative Christian homeschooling movement, but *The Way Home* is one of the earliest volumes in conservative evangelical literature to denounce any kind of family planning. She has been enshrined, therefore, as a pioneer of sorts for Quiverfull families. Despite the fact that *The Way Home* is almost thirty years old, the vision of womanhood Pride sets forth continues to be foundational for the theology of Quiverfull. And, Pride’s book has set the course, so to speak, so that later Quiverfull elites have essentially followed in her footsteps.\(^{390}\) (Of course, it’s important to state that many of the themes found in Pride’s vision for womanhood are not new. As we saw in Chapter 1, much of what makes up the Quiverfull construction of womanhood is simply revised and updated versions of gender ideology extant in evangelical thought from at least the late 19th Century.) Because of Pride’s primacy, however, we will allow her book to lead the way in this section, selectively bringing in other voices along the way. What we will see is that the elite level of Quiverfull subculture constructs a notion of womanhood that is thoroughly antifeminist and completely bound up in motherhood. That is to say, womanhood is motherhood for elite Quiverfull proponents.

\(^{390}\) It is somewhat anachronistic to call what Pride advocates in *The Way Home* “Quiverfull,” because the movement did not yet have any perceivable unity or bear any particular name when she was writing in the 1980s. But, because Pride will become the symbolic standard bearer for most Quiverfull adherents in the years to follow, I will use the anachronistic language advisedly in reference to her book.
Pride’s conclusive rejection of feminism in any form is clear from the first pages of her introduction. Offering Titus 2:3-5, with its instructions about wifely homemaking, as the “most important text in the Bible on married women’s roles,” Pride then points to what she considers the single culprit for widespread ignorance and outright rejection of this biblical teaching: feminism. She says, “Christians have accepted feminists’ ‘moderate’ demands for family planning and careers while rejecting the ‘radical’ side of feminism—meaning lesbianism and abortion. What most do not see is that one demand leads to the other. Feminism is a totally self-consistent system aimed at rejecting God’s role for women.” Jennie Chancey and Stacy McDonald echo Pride in even more pointed terms in their book: “Quite simply, there is no such thing as ‘Christian feminism.’ We either embrace the biblical model and call it ‘very good’…or we reject it and plummet over the cliff with the rest of the passengers on the runaway railcar.” And, the Botkin sisters see feminism as fundamentally incapable of producing anything positive for women: “Any movement driven by rebellion against God and His order [read: distinct gender roles] can never bring anything good. A bad tree cannot produce good fruit. And no true good fruit can, or ever has, come from feminism.”

If feminism is the archenemy of Christian womanhood, then what do Pride and others understand feminism to entail? The first idea Pride associates with feminism is

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391 Titus 2:3-5 says: “Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God” (NIV, 2011).
392 Pride, The Way Home, xi-xii (emphasis in original). Throughout the book, Pride makes a number of connections between feminism and a variety of -isms, including socialism, fascism, Marxism, and liberalism. I am not going to address these other ideological claims.
393 Jennie Chancey and Stacy McDonald, Passionate Housewives Desperate for God (San Antonio, TX: Vision Forum, 2007), 145.
what she calls “role obliteration,” by which she means the nullification or rejection of the eternal differences between the sexes. This obliteration of gender roles results in the valorization of men’s roles to the detriment of women’s roles. Indeed, Pride says, “At every turn Christian women found that their biological, economic, and social roles were considered worthless.” Furthermore, she says that feminists are actually seeking to turn women into men. This is primarily exhibited through the feminist promotion of contraception and abortion. Pride’s logic is that feminism makes all marriages “homosexual,” by turning the woman into a “would-be man” who seeks to control her body in order to “keep it from betraying the fact that God made her female.” Thus, Pride sees feminism seeking to turn women into men because they view men (along with male roles and male pursuits) as fundamentally better. Feminists do so by obliterating any notion of female roles, especially those of wife and mother. This same theme of gender role obliteration plays itself out throughout the books of the Quiverfull movement.

Second, Pride faults feminism for excessive individualism, which she alternately characterizes as “careerism,” “self-indulgence,” and simply, “selfishness.” She sees in feminism an emphasis on female autonomy and freedom that is contrary to biblical teaching that Christians are ultimately “slaves to God.” Feminism seeks to loose women from the bondage of husband, home, and children, all in the name of individual gratification and self-fulfillment. Other Quiverfull writers implicate feminist individualism as selfishness, as well. DeMoss rejects the idea of women pursuing

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396 Ibid., 31.
397 See, for example, Botkin and Botkin, So Much More, 19-22; Chancey and McDonald, Passionate Housewives, 31-36; Nancy Leigh DeMoss, Lies Women Believe and the Truth that Sets Them Free (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2001), 142-145.
individualist “self-fulfillment” and fingers the feminist promotion of “working moms” as a major contributor to the decline of American culture. The Botkin sisters are the most forceful in their denunciation of women pursuing individual agendas: “The idea of women going out into the sphere of public industry to compete with men for jobs in the pursuit of ‘their true potential’…was pushed by God-hating Marxists who wanted to keep women out of her natural element, tear apart the family, and destroy Christianity.”

Once again, Quiverfull adherents see this quest for autonomy vividly illustrated in the practices of contraception and abortion. Pride asserts that not only do feminists want to be men, but they also do not want to have their autonomous freedom hindered by children: “the quest for autonomous female freedom leads to fear of babies.”

Moreover, contraception is the “mother of abortion,” because the contraception mindset, which seeks to limit children for the sake of “individualist” interests, provides the rationale and moral justification for abortion.

Third, the practices of contraception and abortion, already referenced above, are central to the Quiverfull construction of feminism and go to the heart of Quiverfull’s antifeminist theology of womanhood. If feminism is at fault for destroying the distinction between the sexes and calling women to lives of selfish individualism, then the choice either to contracept or abort one’s baby functions as the epitome of feminism’s evil

400 Botkin and Botkin, *So Much More*, 118-119. The quote continues: “If we really want to put an end to this, we should recognize that accepting and pursuing this mode of life perpetuates the feminist agenda and extends the curse on our society and economy even further. Christian women should be taking an active stand against this.” The Botkin sisters find Marxism as much to blame for contemporary views on womanhood as feminism. They share this emphasis with Pride, who accuses feminism of being inseparable from Marxist socialism.
402 Pride explains: “Family planning is the mother of abortion. A generation had to be indoctrinated in the ideal of planning children around personal convenience before abortion could become so popular… Once couples began to look upon children as creatures of their own making, who they could plan into their lives as they chose or not, all reverence for human life was lost” (*The Way Home*, 77, 75).
agenda. It is important to see that contraception and abortion are linked in the writings of every Quiverfull teacher. For Pride in particular, both contraception and abortion have at the center the desire to suppress natural, God-given female functions (to conceive, bear, and nurture children) and the pursuit of radical individual autonomy (against the divine plan that men and women procreate). The feminist desire for control of one’s body, especially one’s fertility, expressed in the language of “choice,” is fundamentally wrong therefore both contraception and abortion are condemned. 403

Because she was writing in 1985, it is perhaps no surprise that the three central tenets to Mary Pride’s construction of feminism correspond best to what has come to be called “second wave” feminism or, simply, the women’s liberation movement. 404 Although historians suggest that so-called “third wave” feminism emerged in the mid to late 1980s, Pride’s book offers no awareness of the changes taking place in the feminist movement at that time. Instead, her emphasis on gender role obliteration, autonomous female freedom, and reproductive choice through contraception and abortion is recognizable as a picture of the center of much liberal feminist activism from the 1960s to the 1990s. 405

As we have seen, however, even the Quiverfull teachers who follow Pride many years later continue to characterize feminism in the way described above. Repeatedly in the literature, the matters of gender role obliteration, individualism, and the so-called

403 Pride also understands feminism to be naturally wedded to what she considers socialist governmental practices, including public schooling. The second half of The Way Home contains a robust (and conspiracy theory prone) deconstruction of American public education, along with advocacy for Christian homeschooling as the proper responsibility of Christian mothers.

404 Historians typically mark the beginning of “second wave” feminism with the publication of Betty Friedan’s book The Feminine Mystique in 1963 and trace it until around the mid-1990s.

405 At this point, we are forgoing discussion of the perceived accuracy of Pride’s portrayal of feminism because I am chiefly concerned with her construction of feminism. In the theology of Quiverfull what matters is their perception of feminism as a system and not whether that perception corresponds to “reality.”
rejection of children (through birth control and abortion) are condemned and held up as proof of the evils of feminism. Moreover, there is little to no acknowledgement of the varieties of feminism that have developed since the 1980s and the corresponding changes to the ideological tenets within these differing feminisms. In the rare instances when such varieties of feminism are acknowledged, they are painted theologically with the same brush: all feminism ultimately destroys God’s design for the sexes.\textsuperscript{406} Even contemporary pro-life feminists are dismissed by Chancey: “[T]here are ‘different feminists’ out there, like the Independent Women’s Forum… And there are ‘pro-life feminists’ who try to make a case for being feminists and pro-natalist. But this is misguided at best and schizophrenic at worst.”\textsuperscript{407} For Quiverfull proponents, feminism is an ideology poisoned at its source and no amount of reformulation can change that. The words of Mary Pride, penned in the 1980s, remain true for the Quiverfull movement today: “Feminism is a totally self-consistent system aimed at rejecting God’s role for women.”\textsuperscript{408}

Thus far, I have described the way Quiverfull writers construct feminism as the “other” against which their theology of womanhood is formed. Even though the majority of their critiques of feminism are aimed at the tenets of liberal feminism, Quiverfull teachers are unwilling to accept the possibility of anything good arising from the feminist movement, including later instantiations of feminism that are both pro-life and pro-

\textsuperscript{406} For example, the Ladies Against Feminism blog published a “Feminism Q&A” for their readers (Jennie Chancey, November 30, 2010, accessed December 15, 2011, http://www.ladiesagainstfeminism.com/feminism-related-issues/feminism-qa/) and addressed the differences among feminists in this way: “I know feminism is a vast movement and not all of it can be tarred with the same brush. Some feminists accept the fact that men and women have different inclinations and capabilities in various fields… and claim their only goal is equal opportunities for people of equal capabilities… Some are egalitarians and deny that men and women have any inherent differences at all… Some are radicals… For the sake of the discussion, I’ll say that feminism is any movement that distracts a woman from her natural role as a wife, mother, nurturer, and guardian of the home,” (emphasis in original).

\textsuperscript{407} Chancey, “Feminism Q&A.”

\textsuperscript{408} Pride, The Way Home, xi-xii (emphasis in original).
family. This sets them apart from evangelicalism as a whole, in which even strident
defenders of conservative family values are able to acknowledge some benefit arising
from feminist activism.409 Moreover, Quiverfull proponents even go so far as to read
feminism into the Christian doctrine of original sin. For example, the Botkins assert, “We
are all sinners. We all tend to rebel… We rebel because it is our deep-rooted sin nature.
We direct our rebellion at God through our rebellion to men. This means that all women
are rebellious feminists at heart.”410 Chancey and McDonald agree: “As much as we hate
to admit it, as women, we all have feministic tendencies. It is part of our sin nature—the
flesh we battle on a daily basis… Feminism is as old as the Garden of Eden.”411 These
examples reveal that for Quiverfull proponents, feminism is not simply a dangerous
ideology or even an anti-Christian attack on marriage and family. Feminism is the unique
original sin for womankind and, as such, it constitutes a force of temptation and evil that
continues to have consequences today.

In contrast to the self-consistent and God-rejecting system of feminism, Pride was
the first voice to offer a defense of prolific childbirth and “homeworking” to Christian
wives as the whole-scale alternative to feminism. In this supposition, Pride’s claims are
potent and far-reaching:

Homeworking is the exact opposite of the modern careerist/institutional/Socialist
[read: feminist] movement. It is a way to take back control of education, health
care, agriculture, social welfare, business, housing, morality, and evangelism from
the faceless institutions to which we have surrendered them… Homeworking, like
feminism, is a total lifestyle. The difference is that homeworking produces stable
homes, growing churches, and children who are Christian leaders.412

409 For example, CBMW member, Russell Moore acknowledges some goods emerging from
feminism in his article, “Women, Stop Submitting to Men,” Relevant Magazine, December 15, 2011,
accessed December 16, 2013, which contains acknowledgement of feminist goods:
410 Botkin and Botkin, So Much More, 31 (emphasis in original).
411 Chancey and McDonald, Passionate Housewives, 132, 148.
412 Pride, The Way Home, xiii (emphasis mine).
There are two important things to observe in Pride’s statement. First, she understands the “biblical lifestyle” she advocates, focused on the practices of prolific childbirth, homeworking, and homeschooling (what will eventually come to be called “Quiverfull”), as a consistent alternative to the feminist way of life. This is particularly apparent in light of contraception and abortion. If feminism is about limiting or even eliminating births depending upon personal choice, then Quiverfull is about putting absolutely no limitations on pregnancies or births. Second, Pride envisions the “biblical lifestyle” of Christian women to be the means by which Christians can completely reform homes, churches, and society as a whole. Not only is the Quiverfull way of life the only consistent Christian choice against feminism, but also the method through which the world will be transformed.

In some ways, the resulting antifeminist gender ideology is fairly predictable given the criticisms of feminism detailed above. In place of “gender role obliteration,” antifeminist Quiverfull theology asserts gender dualism in the strongest possible terms, complete with separate spheres of dominion for men and women. In place of autonomous individualism, Quiverfull proponents offer total self-emptying as the means by which women fulfill their divinely ordained role as helpers to men. In place of contraception and abortion, Quiverfull teachers advocate absolutely no family planning whatsoever and openness to any and all children resulting from the coupling of husband and wife. Moreover, the rearing and schooling of the children from a fruitful Quiverfull marriage is the primary responsibility of the mother, in order to ensure their instruction and formation

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413 Most Quiverfull teachers denounce even Natural Family Planning (NFP), a method of family planning supported by the Roman Catholic Church, which involves planning children without the use of contraception. For Quiverfull adherents, any attempt to control conception is a violation of God’s sovereignty over the womb.
as future Christian leaders. Despite the apparent predictability, their antifeminist construction of womanhood is worth exploring in more detail. In the remainder of this section, therefore, I will sketch the Quiverfull antifeminist theology of womanhood using three issues of significant contention with feminism: woman as wife and mother, woman as a self, and woman as an agent.

The first and perhaps most obvious place of conflict with feminism is the role of women as wives and mothers. Whereas feminism, in the Quiverfull construction, perceives wifehood and motherhood as bondages from which women should be loosed, the teachers of Quiverfull assert the dual role of wife and mother (and they are, indeed, inseparable) as the fundamental definition of what it means to be a woman. Indeed, a woman is not understood apart from her biological capacity to bear and nurse children and her presumed natural function as helper of men and nurturer of children. Examples of this teaching abound in Quiverfull literature, but one succinct example comes from the Vision Forum statement on “The Tenets of Biblical Patriarchy”: “Since the woman was created as a helper to her husband, as the bearer of children, and as a ‘keeper at home,’ the God-ordained and proper sphere of dominion for a wife is the household and that which is connected with the home.”

Moreover, the peculiar emphases of Quiverfull elites ultimately collapse womanhood into motherhood. That is to say, they make motherhood wholly constitutive of womanhood. First, Quiverfull writers assert that from the creation of humanity God has commanded motherhood. They conclude that God’s command to the first humans, in Genesis 1:28, to “be fruitful and multiply” is applicable for all people and all times. Thus,

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married couples have fruitfulness as their God-given charge and, by default, women are commanded to become mothers. Moreover, the command to motherhood is assumed to be a command to prolific motherhood,\footnote{From the Botkins: “One of the ways God bestows blessings on women is through children. And not just 2.2 or 2.5 children, but many children… As Christian women, we should pray to have several children and not limit God in how He wants to bless” (\textit{So Much More}, 292).} as many children as God sees fit to bestow.\footnote{This is derived from the belief that God has complete control over the reproductive process. For example, Rick and Jan Hess say in their book \textit{A Full Quiver}, “The joyous fact is that God opens and closes the womb! He alone decides when and if anyone will have any (more) children. And not only does He decide, He then makes it happen” (\textit{A Full Quiver: Family Planning and the Lordship of Christ} [Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990], 23).} Although the physical inability to conceive is acknowledged as a reality for some women, the state of “barrenness” is unambiguously considered a “curse” of God.\footnote{For example, Nancy Campbell says in her book \textit{Be Fruitful and Multiply}, “In the Word of God, fruitfulness of the womb is always considered a blessing. Barrenness was considered a curse, a shame, and a disgrace” (\textit{Be Fruitful and Multiply: What the Bible Says about Having Children} [San Antonio, TX: Vision Forum, 2003], 45). For potential situations in which a woman is too physically ill to endure a pregnancy, the Hesses say simply, “If you’re too sick to have babies, you’re too sick to have sex” (\textit{A Full Quiver}, 102).} For many, the salvation of women is tied directly to their obedience to the command to motherhood. In the words of Nancy Campbell, “Women will be saved from getting into deception and from being lured away from their divine destiny, if they continue to walk in the role of motherhood which God planned for them.”\footnote{Campbell, \textit{Be Fruitful and Multiply}, 109.} Mary Pride says something similar: “Paul says that by persevering in our God-given role—childbearing—with a godly attitude, we will be saved…[H]aving babies and raising them is our role, and we show we belong to God by persevering in it.”\footnote{Pride, \textit{The Way Home}, 41, 42. DeMoss echoes both Campbell and Pride, saying, “[A] woman’s willingness to embrace, rather than shun, her God-given role and calling (“childbearing”) is a necessary fruit that will accompany genuine salvation—it is proof that she belongs to Him and follows His ways.” She tries to soften the force of this affirmation later, clarifying, “This is not to say that all women are called by God to marry and bear children, but simply that, generally speaking, this is the central role God has established for women” (\textit{Lies Women Believe}, 171).} So, in the end, the Quiverfull theology of womanhood cannot conceive of a Christian woman who does not fulfill the divine command to “be
fruitful and multiply.” A woman who will not or cannot be a mother is less than a woman.

Motherhood is not only divinely commanded, for Quiverfull theology of womanhood, but also a biological given. To be a woman is to be biologically designed for motherhood. Campbell writes, “Women have been physically created by God to mother. God gave them the gift of womb and breasts. These are the most distinguishing characteristics of woman... Medical books vary in their estimation of primordial egg cells at the time of birth from 250,000 to one to two million. A pretty good preparation for motherhood, don’t you think?” In Quiverfull notions of womanhood, biology really is destiny. The reasoning is that if women’s bodies were designed to mother, then “real” women are mothers. Pride says it simply: “Childbearing sums up all our special biological and domestic functions...Childbearing is woman’s ‘peculiar function.’” They acknowledge that not all women will be married and, therefore, not all women will exercise their biological capability to bear children. But, these are rare exceptions and “the exceptional circumstance (singleness) ought not to redefine the ordinary, God-ordained social roles of men and women as created.” Moreover, those women for whom wifehood and motherhood do not take place are to remain under the authority of their fathers, assist their mothers, and serve their families at home.

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420 Campbell, Be Fruitful and Multiply, 105.
421 Pride, The Way Home, 41, 42 (emphasis in original). She goes on to say, “Having babies is a Christian wife’s calling... Rejecting babies is rejecting ourselves” (43, 45).
423 Again, from “The Tenets of Biblical Patriarchy”: “Until she is given in marriage, a daughter continues under her father’s authority and protection.”
single women in Quiverfull theology manifest their womanhood in terms of mothering, even if without the biological experience of motherhood.424

Finally, in the Quiverfull elite construction of womanhood, motherhood is the primary means by which women participate in Christian dominion over the earth. Although divinely commanded and biologically determined, motherhood is, above everything else, the Christian woman’s “battle station” in the war against Satan and the debased American culture.425 Even the adopted descriptor “Quiverfull” is taken from a biblical military metaphor in which children are conceived as “arrows” in the hand of a warrior.426 Mothers give birth to, shape, and sharpen these “arrows” for spiritual combat.427 Writing on biblical womanhood for Quiverfull daughters, the Botkin sisters conclude their almost three hundred page volume with a stirring call to motherhood:

We will now unveil womanhood’s final secret weapon in the battle for progressive dominion: motherhood. Our posterity. The legacy we will pass on to our children. Woman’s hope and future is fulfilled through motherhood… Too

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424 The Botkin sisters do not know what to do with single women either, saying only, “Marriage is and always has been the norm, though there are the exceptional few who are given the gift of singleness. Marriage is central to the first part of the Dominion Mandate: to be fruitful and multiply. We do not mean to undervalue the gift of singleness to those young women who have truly been blessed with it, but we do want to emphasize that we young women should not ‘choose’ to take a gift which has not been offered.” Interestingly (and inconsistently), the Botkins dismiss Paul’s admonition in 1 Cor. 7:26ff., that Christians remain single as a culturally specific instruction due to persecution in the Roman Empire (So Much More, 219-220).

425 The term “battle station” is taken from a letter by Cathi Warren written to David Brooks in response to his New York Times piece that concluded that Quiverfull mothers were too busy parenting to wage a culture war. She argued that raising a large Christian family was itself her “battle station,” as part of the culture war for Christianity, even simply in terms of sheer demographics (quoted in Joyce, Quiverfull, 137).

426 The original Hebrew for Psalm 127:4-5 is actually speaking of “sons” as the “arrows” in the hands of a warrior. It is only contemporary translations of the Bible that render the word as the gender-neutral “children.” Even a very conservative, evangelical Bible translation, the New English Bible, insists on translating the word “sons,” because in ancient Israelite culture sons were the “arrows” that gave a man security in his old age, for they could defend the family interests at the city gate, where the legal and economic issues of the community were settled (NET Bible Online: http://net.bible.org/ [accessed January 2, 2011]). As biblical literalists on so many issues, it is curious that Quiverfull adherents have not been more attentive to this detail.

427 Campbell says it best: “Arrows do not just happen. It takes hours and hours of patience to straighten and sharpen an arrow that can effectively hit the mark… We are ‘arrow sharpeners,’ preparing arrows for God’s army. The more ‘straight arrows,’ we prepare, the more we help God fulfill His plans on earth” (Be Fruitful and Multiply, 81).
many women forget that the hand that rocks the cradle really does rule the world. As Christian women, we should pray to have several children and not limit God in how he wants to bless. We should study and prepare to raise them to be exemplary, effective Christian warriors. We should think ahead, not only to our children but to our grandchildren and great-grandchildren, aspiring to be a mother of thousands of millions, and aspiring to see our children possess the gates of their enemies for the glory of God. This is the vision of Victory through Virtuous Womanhood.428

Although Quiverfull writers sometimes speak of unmarried and childless women in the fulfillment of Christian dominion, it is difficult to see how any role for a Quiverfull woman could rival the “victory” through motherhood described above. If the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world, then the hand without a cradle is pitiable indeed. Thus, in the Quiverfull construction of womanhood from the elites, a woman is by definition a mother, because it is the ultimate “hope and future” God intends for Christian women.

The second area of conflict between Quiverfull womanhood and feminism is the understanding of the woman as a self—as a full and complete person. Although Quiverfull proponents do not deny the idea that women are fully human and God’s image-bearer in their own right, they quickly move from this kind of affirmation to the explanation that women were created by God primarily to be helpers of men.429 It is important to realize that they are not simply saying wives are helpers to their husbands, but that all women were created to help all men. Thus, women do not have selves apart from their relationship to men. This reasoning is based primarily upon their reading of Genesis 2. McDonald and Chancey write,

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428 Botkin and Botkin, So Much More, 292-293 (emphasis in original).
429 In the “Tenets of Biblical Patriarchy,” tenet number two says, “Both man and woman are made in God’s image…and they are both called to exercise dominion over the earth. They share an equal worth as persons before God in creation and redemption. The man is also the image and glory of God in terms of authority, while the woman is the glory of man.” Thus, even though both men and women are imago Dei, only the man images God in terms of God’s authority, while the woman is “the glory of man”—his subordinate helper.
God could have simply raised up a woman from the dust of the earth—an independent creature who could keep Adam company and even partner with him in subduing the earth by pursuing equal and separate ventures. Yet He instead cause Adam to fall into a deep sleep, and from man’s own rib God fashioned his glorious completer—woman… Eve was Adam’s perfect complement, his crowning glory.430

This reading of Genesis is not altogether unique, as affirmations of male-female complementarity abound in Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox theology. But, the conclusions Quiverfull teachers draw from male-female complementarity is significantly different. For example, McDonald and Chancey write: “In all of her tasks, [a woman] seeks to further [her husband] as a man. His work of dominion is her work; she embraces his vision as her own as she promotes and enhances his life pursuits.”431 The Botkin sisters make the point even more forcefully, pointing beyond the husband-wife relationship to the relationship of women and men, in general: “[A] woman’s life will always be tied into a man’s life, whether she is married or not. This is a basic feature of womanhood, and women are to be dependent upon men’s protection and leadership.”432 An unstated implication of these statements is that not only are women inherently complementary to men, but also inherently lacking a complete and independent self. It is within the created and God-ordained nature of women to enhance, strengthen, and help men, whether their husbands, fathers, brothers, or sons.

Because of the inherent nature of woman as man’s complement, Quiverfull elites conclude that women as a whole are excluded from the exercise of authority over men as a whole. Again, this is an assertion that distinguishes Quiverfull from that of their evangelical neighbors who, for the most part, would not apply the belief in male headship

430 Chancey and McDonald, Passionate Housewives, 32.
431 Ibid.
432 Botkin and Botkin, So Much More, 34.
beyond the home and church.\textsuperscript{433} Because “Adam’s headship over Eve was established at the beginning, before sin entered the world,” so also male leadership is understood to apply in the home, the church, and society. The Vision Forum declares, “A God-honoring society will likewise prefer male leadership in civil and other spheres as an application of and support for God’s order in the formative institutions of family and church.” Moreover, regarding the possibility of single women working beyond the home, they clarify, “[I]t is not the ordinary and fitting role of women to work alongside men as their functional equals in public spheres of dominion (industry, commerce, civil government, the military, etc.).” Thus, a necessary outworking of the assertion that women are, by nature, dependent upon and completed by men, is that women are barred from participation in “public spheres of dominion.” Because women were “created with a domestic calling,” the Quiverfull elite construction of womanhood affirms that all women everywhere are designed by God to work within the home.\textsuperscript{434}

The final area of conflict with feminism, from which Quiverfull teachers construct their view of womanhood, is that of the woman as an agent, a person who exercises choice. Although Quiverfull adherents would not necessarily deny that women have agency, they would contest the integrity of that agency when it comes to the God-ordained roles of wifehood, motherhood, and homeworking, as outlined above. That is to

\textsuperscript{433} Indeed, Quiverfull teachers have repeatedly criticized conservative evangelicals for their perceived unwillingness to carry the doctrine of male headship to its logical conclusion. For example, William Einwechter, criticizes evangelicals for supporting the vice presidential nomination of Christian wife and mother, Gov. Sarah Palin in his article, “Men and Women and the Creation Order,” published on Vision Forum’s website, http://www.visionforumministries.org/issues/family/men_and_women_and_the_creation.aspx (accessed December 16, 2011). Einwechter dismisses the possibility of a woman in this role because it violates God’s creation order, which places women in a subordinate position to men in all “spheres of dominion.”

\textsuperscript{434} Phillips, Sproul, Jr., and Lancaster, “The Tenets of Biblical Patriarchy.” Pride makes a similar argument: “We in the church are confusing the issue by debating whether wives should work… Scripture draws the line not at whether wives work, but where we work. The Bible says young wives should be trained to ‘love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands’” (The Way Home, 136; emphasis in original).
say, while women have agency in theory, in practice their biological design as women, with the corresponding calling to motherhood, is not a matter of choice. In the Quiverfull ideal, women remain under the authority of their fathers until such a time as their father sees fit to give them away in marriage. Then, their authority becomes their husband, to whom they are to look for their goals, aspirations, and overall vision for life.\textsuperscript{435} The Botkins offer a clear example of this way of envisioning a woman’s agency. Regarding a daughter’s submission to her father, the sisters declare, “You will love what he loves, you will hate what he hates, and you will even think his thoughts after him. This will help you know how to be his glory.”\textsuperscript{436} Although the Quiverfull vision of homeworking includes being the ruler of the home, that reign is subject to the husband who sets the agenda and priorities for his wife’s daily routine.\textsuperscript{437} This is not to say, of course, that in practice Quiverfull women do not exercise significant agency in their lives every day, something we will see in more detail below. But, the theoretical construction of womanhood advocated by Quiverfull elites is such that the exercise of choice is all but obliterated. In the place of agency, women are pictured as submissive servants, taking their cues from the vision set forth by their fathers (if single) or husbands (if married). Again, the words of Chancey and McDonald are unambiguous: “In all of her tasks, she [the wife] seeks to

\textsuperscript{435} For example, the Botkins speak of submission to their father’s authority as preparation for submission to their husbands: “It’s folly to think it will be easier to respect and submit to a husband than a father. We’re not ready to consider ourselves eligible for marriage until we’ve learned to trust an imperfect individual with our lives… To submit to an imperfect man’s ‘whims’ as well as his heavy requirements. To order our lives around another person. To accept the burdens a man places on us cheerfully. To esteem and reverence and adore a man whose faults we can see clearly every day,” (Botkin and Botkin, “Authoritative Parents, Adult Daughters, and Power Struggles,” Visionary Daughters, May 14, 2007, accessed December 29, 2010, http://visionarydaughters.com/2007/05/authoritative-parents-adult-daughters-and-power-struggles [emphasis in original]).

\textsuperscript{436} Kathryn Joyce recorded these words while attending a Vision Forum Father and Daughter Retreat (\textit{Quiverfull}, 226).

\textsuperscript{437} Pride says, “Wifeliness, then, has two components: long-term commitment and daily self-sacrifice… Autonomy is not what marriage is all about; partnership is. Autonomy means we determine our own goals on the basis of our own selfish interests. Partnership means God determines our goals and our roles…” (\textit{The Way Home}, 20-21; emphasis in original).
further him [the husband] as a man. His work of dominion is her work; she embraces his
vision as her own as she promotes and enhances his life pursuits.”

Even so, despite their marginalization of choice as a substantive facet of
womanhood, there is an odd tension within Quiverfull ideology on the matter of agency.
First, even as all of the Quiverfull authors considered above reject the language of
womanly autonomy, choice, and self-fulfillment as selfish, at the very same time they
offer women the Quiverfull construction of womanhood as the truly fulfilling and
liberating option for women today. The feminist women’s liberation movement, with its
focus on the pursuit of women’s flourishing, is unequivocally evil; but the pursuit of
women’s liberation through the Quiverfull way of life is unequivocally good. Pride
rejects the feminist pursuit of self-fulfillment, but then offers motherhood and
homeworking as the way to receive true fulfillment from God as “a reward the Lord
grants his sons and daughters for their unselfish service.” Chancey and McDonald
mock the idea of women pursuing their “precious personhood” into the workplace, but
they offer real freedom in the “good life” through God’s ordained plan of wifely
submission and motherhood: “Freedom doesn’t come from being enlightened. One
doesn’t shake loose the chains of bondage by ‘finding’ one’s self… Real life comes when
we learn to lose ours—for His sake.” It is counterintuitive for Quiverfull authors who
have rejected outright women’s pursuit of freedom and fulfillment to turn around and
offer the same thing to women on the basis of their own view of womanhood. Yet,
Quiverfull elites trade on the rhetoric of choice in their works even as they denounce it.

438 Chancey and McDonald, Passionate Housewives, 32.
439 Pride, The Way Home, 139.
440 Chancey and McDonald, Passionate Housewives, 134.
Furthermore, there is yet another tension in Quiverfull writings on the subject of woman’s agency. Even as Quiverfull elites reject a woman’s choice against children through contraception or abortion, there is no doubt that those choices must be available to contemporary women in order for Quiverfull proponents to posit their way of life as a viable and more fulfilling alternative. That is to say, without the enemies of feminism, contraception, and abortion, Quiverfull would not be able to posit their lifestyle as a “choice” at all, but merely the common lot of almost every married woman. To put it more strongly, it is, in fact, the rise of feminism and the women’s liberation movement, along with the proliferation of artificial forms of birth control, which provided the cultural scenario from which the antifeminist Quiverfull movement could emerge as a “counter-cultural” alternative.

A similar symbiotic relationship is apparent in the robust version of male headship offered by Quiverfull teachers. They seem to use the construction of another option (feminism) as a way of presenting gender hierarchy as a counter-cultural choice for women rather than simply “the way things are.” Douglas Phillips and his co-authors, R.C. Sproul, Jr. and Phil Lancaster affirm this symbiosis in their text “The Tenets of Biblical Patriarchy” (2009). In an editorial note, the authors claim: “We emphasize the importance of biblical patriarchy, not because it is greater than other doctrines, but because it is being actively attacked by unbeliever and professing Christians alike… In conscious opposition to feminism, egalitarianism, and the humanistic philosophies of the present time, the church should proclaim the Gospel centered doctrine of biblical patriarchy as an essential element of God’s ordained pattern for human relationships and
institutions. Thus, the specter of feminism provides the existential impetus needed for the spread of Quiverfull gender hierarchy.

All this is to say, there’s a sense in which Quiverfull elites are dependent upon feminism, contraception, and abortion for the construction of their identity. Their construction of womanhood/motherhood is not simply about interpreting and obeying the plain teaching of the Bible, but the construction of a thoroughly consistent antifeminist way of life. Moreover, this way of life is envisioned as the primary means by which the world will be transformed into the coming Kingdom of God. Thus, Quiverfull elites posit a construction of motherhood that is both antifeminist and dependent upon feminism for its dynamism and existential appeal. Within Quiverfull literature, there is no tension between motherhood as a sacred calling invested with eschatological worth and the rule of men over women. The gender roles constitute a harmonious antifeminist vision for men and women with godly women seeing motherhood as the highest good to which they can attain.

B. Quiverfull Motherhood at the Lay Level

If the above section described what the Quiverfull source materials say about womanhood and motherhood, then the present section will take up the task of observing how the Quiverfull construction of womanhood and motherhood work on the ground. In pursuit of that aim, I will offer one minor and one major theological observation. First, we will see that the Quiverfull performance of motherhood, like the works of their cultural elites, highlights and draws attention to the labor of mothering in an important way. Second, we will see that experiences of Quiverfull mothers on the ground often

reveal tensions between their practice of motherhood and the elite ideals of gender hierarchy explained in detail above.

Many scholars have noted the ways in which the labor of mothering is occluded in American society. Even though liberal feminism has expanded the cultural expectations for women such that women are expected to be educated, independent, and have a career, they remain disproportionately burdened for in childcare and housekeeping responsibilities. Moreover, the contemporary standards for being a “good mother” have also expanded. Today, the good mom provides individualized nurturing for each child’s unique personality and gifts, along with sustained attention to their physical and cognitive development, even to the neglect of all other priorities. Just as each woman is expected to be “her own person,” if she is mom she is also expected to be heroically sacrificial for her children’s wellbeing. Still, the extent and repercussions of women’s expanded responsibilities has been largely ignored.

Why is women’s work in mothering so often obscured and ignored? One important reason is that it is considered “natural” for women to perform the many tasks of motherhood. It is only when women don’t do that work, or make mistakes while doing it, that the work of motherhood is recognized for what it is: work. Men are applauded when they take up the active work of fatherhood because it is so unexpected and uncharacteristic of them to do so. The idea that motherhood is “natural” and not “real” work leads to a disregard of the work mothers do, even in more educated and supposedly enlightened circles. Yet, the Quiverfull movement, at both the lay and elite levels, spends a significant amount of time and energy providing recognition, support, and praise for their mothers. Thus, one of the benefits of Quiverfull motherhood is that it brings to the
foreground the real work involved in mothering. They invest a labor that is often unmentioned and unacknowledged with spiritual power and import, thereby giving women who mother in the Quiverfull way a tremendous amount of cultural capital.442

This cultural valuation of motherhood is a fact not lost on those who have studied the Christian homeschooling movement as a whole. In his groundbreaking work, *Kingdom of Children*, Mitchell Stevens notes the way that a robust ideology of motherhood fuels the Christian homeschooling movement. He notes that the non-religious wing of the homeschooling movement often failed to acknowledge the fact that mothers perform the majority of the work involved in home education. While talking a lot about children’s needs, the non-religious homeschooling mothers often had little by way of explanation for why they (and not their husbands) were shouldering the burden of their children’s education. In contrast, Stevens observed that the Christian wing of the homeschooling movement regularly recognized and affirmed the maternal labor involved in home education. For Stevens, it appears that the gender ideology of Christian homeschooling families gives them tools by which to explain and support the disproportionate labor of homeschooling moms and invest it with cultural significance. He observes, “If on the [non-religious] side of the movement mothers are marginal or

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442 Even so, the Quiverfull discourse accomplishes this largely by claiming motherhood as every woman’s highest calling (both natural and spiritual), which is problematic in its own way. To claim motherhood as woman’s highest natural and spiritual calling, they are reinscribing cultural limitations on women and cut women off from other forms of work and support beyond the family. If motherhood is “natural” for women, then why would they need a social safety net? If motherhood is “natural” for women, then why would they require equal pay for equal work? If motherhood is “natural” for women, then why would they need improved childcare and childcare regulations? Conceiving of motherhood as the natural and spiritual height of womanhood leads to consequences that undercut women’s work as mothers in a variety of ways. Only the mothers of means, who have husbands who can readily support them in their work as stay-at-home moms, can thrive in an environment where women do not have a social safety net, equal pay, or affordable, quality childcare. Mothers who are not financially stable suffer the consequences. And mothers who cannot live up to the ideal ultimately lose out.
in invisible, among the believers they are often at center stage.\textsuperscript{443} Not only do homeschooling families make motherhood central, but they also invest motherhood with eschatological significance. Pointing to the writings of Mary Pride, Stevens says,

For [Pride], home education is part of God’s directive that women be “homeworkers”—guardians of children, nurturers of husbands, and, ultimately, powerful agents of social change. “Homeworking will not usher in the Millennium, but it will change society,” she promises. “And if homeworkers don’t reconstruct society, the feminists will.” Godly womanhood and the home work for which it is designed are framed as components of a broader social and moral project for godly women.\textsuperscript{444}

Stevens’ conclusions regarding the Christian homeschooling movement apply equally well to the Quiverfull movement, which is appropriate given the close relationship between the two. Indeed, the narratives of Quiverfull mothers we heard in Chapter 3 reveal that their practice of motherhood does two things simultaneously: 1) it renders visible the hard work of mothering that is often concealed or overlooked in other households and 2) it invests the work of mothering with significant cultural capital and eschatological meaning. The explanations provided by Quiverfull mothers for their laborious investment in birthing, nursing, and educating a large number of children are deep and complex. All testify to motherhood as a specific calling of God, as well as something for which they are “naturally” equipped as women via divine design.\textsuperscript{445} Also, they are motivated in their practice of motherhood by Jesus’ command to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19), which begins for them in their own homes. They view the investment of their time and talents in the birth and education of many children as a long-

\textsuperscript{444} Stevens, \textit{Kingdom of Children}, 98.
\textsuperscript{445} As referenced in note 442 above, the claim that motherhood is “natural” for women has its own problems and consequences—and not only for Quiverfull mothers. If motherhood is “natural,” then mothers who find their work grueling and overwhelming are assumed to be unnatural or broken in some respect. The assumed natural-ness of motherhood is a double-edged sword.
term strategy for changing the world. If they are faithful to properly train their children in Christianity, they believe there is a better chance that the subsequent generations will be faithful practitioners of the Christian faith. The commitment to homeschooling as the primary way to make disciples of their children has led many Quiverfull women to view their home as a workplace, too. In the words of Colleen McDannell:

Being the sole provider for their children’s education not only increases a mother’s responsibility, it gives her a respectable career… Teaching becomes their profession. They no longer see themselves as simply housewives or mothers. They have found an occupation that is fully acceptable within their religious and cultural milieu… Through homeschooling the home becomes a workplace; a “school” where a “teacher” performs her professional duties.446

In addition, many are involved in local and regional homeschooling organizations, as well as advocacy (formal and informal) for homeschooling in their families and churches. Thus, many Quiverfull mothers have both a thick explanation for their laborious work in the home, as well as opportunities for leadership beyond the home and a firm defense for the eternal significance of their work.447

Still, the Quiverfull instantiation of motherhood reveals some significant tensions, as well. As we encountered in the stories of Quiverfull mothers describe above, the mother-centered nature of their lived religion often creates tension with the ideal of gender hierarchy promoted by their teachers and leaders.448 For some, like Deborah, the


447 The significance of the theological narrative for Quiverfull motherhood is highlighted by the recent publication of Three Decades of Fertility: Ten Women Surrender to Their Creator and Embrace Life (St. Paul, MN: Visionary Womanhood, 2013), edited by prominent Quierfull blogger, Natalie Klejwa. This book contains the stories of ten women who embraced the Quiverfull way of life, detailing their “conversion” to Quiverfull, as well as triumphs and heartbreaks along the way.

448 Stevens makes a similar observation in his book about the homeschooling movement: “[D]espite some poignant affinities between the words of ideologues like [Mary] Pride and [Michael] Farris and what many believers say and do, I did not find the kind of strident scripting of motherhood and fatherhood outlined in books like The Way Home and The Homeschooling Father. True enough, several believer women talked about God’s will in their decisions to stay home… I found that there was
tension goes largely unrecognized. She sees no contradiction between the affirmation of male headship and the largely mother-directed nature of their daily lives. Nor does she think correcting her husband’s moral failures as something unbecoming of a “submissive” wife. For others, like Carley, the tension is felt mostly in interaction with the expectations of those beyond their home, like the leaders of their former church. Although she affirms male headship, she frames it in terms of service, sacrifice, and taking the initiative in spiritual matters. Within her marriage, an interpretation of gender roles has developed that is pragmatic and still coherent. But, for some like Renee, the tension between the ideal of gender hierarchy and the reality of Quiverfull motherhood is too much to bear. Faced with the passivity and inactivity of her husband in the midst of her overwhelming burden of work and responsibility, Renee felt compelled to abandon entirely any notion of male headship or gender hierarchy. Although she was inclined to embrace that model of gender relations, Renee found the practical matriarchy of her daily life too much at odds with patriarchal rhetoric to sustain the relationship between the two. Although she still maintains the pronatalism and homeschooling discourse of the movement, Renee’s abandonment of gender hierarchy has impacted her so deeply that she is reinterpreting the Bible in light of her experience (something she acknowledges is tantamount to “heresy” according to her fundamentalist upbringing).

considerable distance between how the advocates talk about men and women and how the believers’ rank and file talk about themselves. Not contradiction, but distance—partial employment of language (God’s will) or practice (men leading devotions or playing administrative roles)—rather than wholesale embrace or dismissal of what the advocates have to say… In the end, I concluded that what is most remarkable about the believers’ talk about gender and family is not the degree of fit between talk and practice, but rather then sheer amount of talk,” (Stevens, Kingdom of Children, 101-102).

449 My colleague, Adam Sheridan, has suggested that Quiverfull adherents are part of an “androcentric matriarchy.” I think there may be something to this characterization. But it is sufficient at this point to highlight the way in which the motherhood of Quiverfull stands in tension with the gender hierarchy that they espouse.
Recent sociological studies of evangelicals and gender roles reveal that the
tension I perceive in Quiverfull homes is not altogether unique. A number of scholars
have found that most evangelicals hold fast to the concept of male headship and view it
as an important marker of cultural distinctiveness even as it is modified and reformed in
practice. The male headship of the Quiverfull families in my study is practiced mainly
through the father’s leadership of family worship (regular times of scripture reading and
prayer) and disciplinary backup of the mother’s role as teacher. Also, the doctrine of male
headship provides a sort of protective measure for the instances in which the husband
needs to assert himself in marital negotiations. It is common for Quiverfull mothers speak
of their husbands as the “tie-breaker” and “deciding vote” in major decisions. In the
instances where the couple is unable to reach consensus, male headships means that the
wife will acquiesce to the will of the husband. Thus, while the mother is the primary
worker and administrator in the home, even exercising a quasi-professional role in the
education of her children, the husband maintains his symbolic leadership of the family
through the rhetoric of male spiritual leadership and wifely submission.  

This dynamic is very similar to that observed by Christian Smith:

[M]any of the evangelicals we interviewed construed “headship” in ways that
explicitly undermined male domination and privilege. In fact, of the variety of
positions evangelicals took on the meaning of headship, the most common
interpretation emphasized not male authority and leadership, but the burdens of
responsibility for, accountability to, and sacrifice on behalf of others that headship
places on husbands. In this view, headship appears to function not so much to
privilege husbands, but to domesticate and regulate them and to extract energy
from them for the sake of their wives and children. 

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This regulation of men is most clearly seen in Deborah’s story, where she seems to use the doctrine of male headship to persuade Dan into doing what she thinks is the right thing (i.e., attend Bible study, lead their family in prayer, etc.). We see this domestication in a less overt way in the home of the Millers where gender role distinction has not led to a sharp division of domestic labor, but Carley and David carry out tasks as needed. David’s commitment to domestic work is couched in the language of shepherding and service, which are traits associated with Christ himself. Thus, theirs is a pragmatic, service-oriented approach to male headship that retains the spiritual symbolism, while eschewing authoritarianism. As Smith and his colleagues sought to make sense of the surprising ways that evangelicals modify and negotiate with the idea of male headship, they came to the following conclusion:

[Evangelicals] have largely integrated an older ideology of headship into newer egalitarian languages and practices. In sometimes amazing rhetorical couplings of gender equality and male headship, evangelicals manage to salvage the symbolic image of the husband as head, while simultaneously embracing and expression the more egalitarian values and practices of their own tradition and the broader culture—and all of this in the context of lived relationships that appear much more equal in practice than evangelical headship rhetoric would suggest.452

Smith’s analysis is sociological and Quiverfull notions of male headship are theological. Nevertheless, Smith’s findings are illuminating because they show that the gender negotiations taking place in some Quiverfull homes are mirrored by their evangelical neighbors. Even within a movement that promotes a very dualist and hierarchical vision of gender roles, it seems that, at times, the daily requirements of those same gender roles can serve to undermine the hierarchical vision. Thus, in many cases, the Quiverfull experience of motherhood, particularly as they lead their families in the

452 Smith, Christian America?, 190.
daily work of homeschooling, stands in tension with their ideology of gender hierarchy. Only a few recognize this tension, however, and the ones that do tend not to dwell on it. More than likely, there is simply too much to do in the daily life of a Quiverfull mother to spend time agonizing over their non-conformity to the elite conceptions of gender hierarchy.

Before leaving the subject of Quiverfull notions of womanhood and motherhood, it is important to state that not every Quiverfull family evidences the tension elaborated upon above. In fact, many women have experienced the Quiverfull construction of womanhood and motherhood as a thoroughly oppressive with detrimental consequences for themselves and their children. The negotiated gender dynamics on display in the lives of Renee, Carley, and Deborah occur within marriages that do not include patterns of manipulation, exploitation, or abuse. Moreover, neither partner suffers from mental illness. Still, there are a growing number of women, mostly in online communities and blogs, who are speaking out about their oppressive and abusive experiences within Quiverfull marriages. None of the women who participated in my research share this perspective, though each of them could think of one or more families they know who have unhealthy and even abusive home environments as a result of the doctrine of gender hierarchy. It is vital, therefore, not to gloss over the fact that while some Quiverfull marriages defy the rigid gender roles prescribed at the elite level, there are others that do seek after strict conformity and the results can be treacherous. We will discuss further this “dark side” of Quiverfull gender ideology in the concluding chapter of this project.

453 Chief among them is Vyckie Garrison who writes at No Longer Quivering (http://www.patheos.com/blogs/nolongerquivering/), a blog established primarily for supporting women who have left the Quiverfull movement and educating the public about its teachings.
V. Omnipotent Motherhood and Vulnerable Motherhood in Tension

The tension described above between the Quiverfull practice of motherhood and their conception of gender hierarchy is something particular to the movement. But, there is a theological matter raised by Quiverfull mothers that is also shared with American mothers in general, which this section will explore in more detail. On the one hand, Quiverfull mothers are imagined as omnipotent, both in what they can accomplish on a daily basis and what influence they can exercise over their children in the long term. They are seeking to “do it all” for their families, especially their children, and expected to be extraordinary mothers as a matter of course. On the other hand, Quiverfull mothers embody a life of vulnerability. Due to a number of factors, Quiverfull mothers are deeply vulnerable persons, in their bodies, minds, and emotions, as well as their finances and communities. It is at this point of their vulnerability that the Quiverfull practice of motherhood is open to exploitation and abuse. While they represent an extreme instance of both the ideal of maternal omnipotence and the experience of maternal vulnerability, the tension between the two is something they share with American mothers in general. The task of this section is to explain all of the above in some detail.

A. Omnipotent Motherhood

In Stephanie Coontz’s important book, The Way We Never Were, she attempts to dismantle what she calls “the myth of parental omnipotence.” Coontz is referring to the way in which American parents tend to overestimate both what they are able to do for

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their children and the long-term effect their parenting will have on their children. The result is an inordinate amount of anxiety and guilt about parenting, particularly the myriad perils of “bad” parenting. Based upon my research, it is clear that Quiverfull mothers are participating in this myth and applying it unilaterally to motherhood. As much as any woman in America, Quiverfull mothers are confronted with omnipotence as an internal and external ideal. It is something they put upon themselves and, as we encountered in the earlier survey of elite resources, something put upon them by others.

First, Quiverfull mothers are perceived as omnipotent in what they can accomplish within their homes. When one considers the daily schedule of a Quiverfull family, the amount of work to be done on any given day is overwhelming—even just for an observer. Not only do they shoulder the physical labor of bearing and nursing children, sometimes in rapid succession, but they also carry out the work of maintaining a home, carrying out the domestic chores of cooking and cleaning, all while providing an education for each of their children from pre-school through high school (and even beyond). And, we cannot forget the volunteer work in their local church or homeschool co-operative (or both), as well serving as a romantic companion to their husbands. As Renee pointed out above, though they are not employed in full-time paid work beyond the home, Quiverfull mothers are nonetheless doing the equivalent of two or three jobs. In a very real sense, Quiverfull mothers are seeking to “do it all,” and they sometimes do so with little tangible support from their spouses.

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455 Coontz writes, “As a historian, I suspect that the truly dysfunctional things about American parenting is that it is made out to be such a frighteningly pivotal, private, and exclusive job” (The Way We Never Were, 210).
Still, the maternal omnipotence of Quiverfull isn’t just about the number of children they have and the number of tasks they juggle on any given day. Quiverfull mothers also put significant emphasis on the effects they will have on their children in the future. Most of the women I spoke to described their mothering aspirations in terms of “multigenerational faithfulness.” We will discuss this concept, which has been popularized through the teaching of Voddie Baucham, in more detail in the subsequent chapter. For now, it will suffice to say that multigenerational faithfulness refers to the focus of Christian parenting on raising children who will continue on in their Christian faith and emulate the lives of their parents in the years to come. As one mother wrote in a collection of Quiverfull testimonies,

> We are praying and endeavoring to raise children who will raise children who will raise children who will stand for Christ in their generation. By God’s grace, we trust that our fruitfulness will continue in the coming generations through the multi-generational faithfulness of our family… It is our greatest hope and most fervent prayer that our children—who have been given many spiritual advantages which we did not have—will grow up to exceed us in both love for Christ and godliness.456

Homeschooling is central to this plan and the mother is typically the one shouldered with the majority of the responsibility to pursue this eschatological purpose. The point is for Christian mothers to cease thinking of their daily work in terms of one lifetime, but several lifetimes. With their eyes fixed on the long-term goal of producing multiple generations of Christians, Quiverfull mothers can come to view every day as a crux on which the future hangs because their work is vital to the production of the next generation of Christians. And, while they will inevitably claim that it is God’s grace that keeps their children Christians, it is clear that the majority of the responsibility for the daily work of passing on the faith falls on the mothers’ shoulders. And, the warnings of

456 Molly Evert, “God Changed My Heart,” in *Three Decades of Fertility*, 142.
Quiverfull teachers on this subject can be breathtakingly harsh. Mary Pride reads the words of Proverbs 22:6 as a promise to righteous parents who parent as they ought: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” From this she comments:

As for Christian couples you might know whose children have turned out badly, let me ask you this. If the parents are not to blame, who is? Society? God? Does God say children are a blessing and then give us children who are fuel for hell? Does he really refuse to give the tools necessary to fulfill his own promise that a child trained in the way he should go will not depart from it?457

Although Pride addresses the generic “parents” in this excerpt, *The Way Home* as a whole is addressed to mothers. And in her ideal vision the work of homeschooling is performed entirely by the “homeworking” mother. Thus, there is an unspoken message embedded in her warning: Mom, it’s all on you. If you don’t train your children properly, they will end up as “fuel for hell” and you’ll have no one to blame but yourself. Motherly omnipotence includes the present and extends into eternity.

Above all, what becomes clear from talking with Quiverfull mothers and reviewing Quiverfull resources is that they have tremendous confidence in the abilities of Christian mothers and the effects of their mothering. One reason for this confidence in motherly capability is the theological conviction that they are carrying out God’s ordained purpose for women. Indeed, a common factor for all the mothers I interviewed is the conviction that God is the one who has called them to their work. Their commitment to homeschooling, pronatalism, and gender hierarchy is the result of their belief that scripture teaches (and therefore God commands) these things. In fulfilling the tasks involved in the Quiverfull discourse, the Quiverfull mother is fulfilling God’s highest calling for a woman. They have extraordinarily high expectations for mothers.

because they believe God has the same expectations. Moreover, faithfully carrying out the tasks of motherhood is part of their faithful service God and, for some, proof of their salvation.458

Quiverfull mothers do not arrive at these conclusions independently, however. Their way of imagining and practicing the institution of motherhood is informed by evangelical Protestant readings of Scripture. Although there are a number of texts that are important, two emerge repeatedly in Quiverfull literature: Titus 2:3-5 and Proverbs 31:10-31. Titus is a Pauline epistle that contains, among other things, instructions from the author to Titus regarding the expectations for various members of the congregation. Verses 3-5 read as follows:

Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

Many Quiverfull mothers see this passage as a job description of sorts, particularly in the admonition to “love their husbands and children…to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands.” Mary Pride arranges her book, The Way Home, around these verses, using them to call women back to their God-given task of “being busy at home.” And, they understand the last phrase of the passage--“so that no one will malign the word of God”—as a warning that if they do not faithfully carry out their work as a homemaker, they will be responsible for the word of God being slandered.

458 Mary Pride argues that, “‘Childbearing’ sums up all our special biological and domestic functions.” Arguing from a peculiar verse in 1 Tim. 2:15 that says, “women will be saved through childbearing,” Pride says that “Timothy’s particular path to heavenly glory was his preaching and example. Ours is homeworking, all revolving around our role of childbearing…Childbearing is woman’s ‘peculiar function.’ It symbolizes our roles just as preaching symbolized Timothy’s role. Preaching was Timothy’s role, and persevering in his calling he would be saved. In just the same way, having babies and raising them is our role, and we show we belong to God by persevering in it” (The Way Home, 42).
in society. That is to say, the receptivity of the surrounding culture to Christianity is dependent upon their faithfulness as homemaking mothers. Thus, for some, the conformity of women to prescribed gender roles is an important aspect of Christian evangelization.

The so-called “Proverbs 31 woman” functions in a similar way for Quiverfull mothers, except that the passage contains more than simple instructions. Instead, the Hebrew acrostic poem offers a vivid description of the “ideal wife” in ancient near eastern terms. Proverbs 31 describes a woman who works from dawn till dusk and then long into the night (“her lamp does not go out at night”). She is a flurry of constant activity, “bringing food from afar,” weaving and sewing garments, buying a field, planting a vineyard, speaking wisdom and godly instruction, and still managing to give generously to the poor and needy. Quiverfull women, along with most evangelical women, view the Proverbs 31 woman as the ideal of wifely faithfulness. The author says, “Her husband has full confidence in her, and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.” Despite the fact that Proverbs 31 is a description of a wife from a very different time and place, her industriousness and fear of God are emphasized repeatedly in Quiverfull literature as an example to follow. The Proverbs 31 woman has made the home the center of her concern and all that she does, even beyond the bounds of the home, is for the purpose of blessing her husband and children.

An important underlying assumption to this ideal of motherhood is that motherhood is a full time job, an all-consuming enterprise, while fatherhood is not. In the book of Quiverfull testimonials, *Three Decades of Fertility*, one mother described her conversion to a focus on “full-time” motherhood in the following way:
During this “unplanned” pregnancy the Lord began a transformational work in both our hearts, giving us a vision for our young family, solidifying our commitment to home schooling, and changing our views regarding gender roles and marriage and a host of other issues. For the first time, I began to catch a vision for serving Christ through my family. I quit the church ministries had been in charge of which so often took me away from my children, and I intentionally turned my heart toward home.\textsuperscript{459}

Deborah expressed the same sensibility when she confessed that the more she works outside the home, the less capable she feels to perform her work within the home. Put simply, to be a good mother means to be exclusively focused on the domestic sphere—anything else is falling short of the ideal. This zero-sum approach to motherhood is something they share with American culture, which has only increased the expectations of the “good mother” since the second wave of feminism broke in the 1960s. This is something a number of authors have chronicled in the past couple of decades.\textsuperscript{460}

Still, a thick theological account of motherhood as sacred calling isn’t the only reason Quiverfull mothers are imagined as omnipotent and claim for themselves extraordinary skills. While it remains unacknowledged among such families, it is important to notice that Quiverfull mothers can practice motherhood in the way they choose because they possess a modicum of financial and familial stability. Each of the women interviewed for this project has made significant financial sacrifices in order to survive on a single income. Yet, in an era of stagnant wages, a housing crisis, and expanding household debt, the fact that they can live on one income puts them in a privileged socio-economic category. Many lower and middle class families cannot sustain themselves on one spouse’s wages, even if they wanted to. Some families, like the

\textsuperscript{459} Molly Evert, “God Changed My Heart,” in \textit{Three Decades of Fertility}, 132-133.
Olsons, get occasional support from mom doing occasional odd jobs like childcare, house cleanings, tutoring, or music lessons. And, Mary Pride, along with other Quiverfull writers, encourages women to turn their homes into sites of production through at-home businesses.\footnote{Pride asserts, “Homeworking means working at home. We are not supposed to be the breadwinners—that’s the man’s job. But we are supposed to make an economic contribution” (Pride, The Way Home, 165 [emphasis in original]).} But, the majority of the Quiverfull family income still comes from the father, as they believe God designed. So, it is important to recognize that the practice of motherhood in the Quiverfull movement is dependent upon the financial support of the single-income father, who possesses a salary sufficient to support a large family. Without this increasingly less common financial arrangement, the Quiverfull conception of motherhood would be nearly impossible to carry out.

I contend that all of the above comes to bear on Quiverfull mothers in such a way that they can construct motherhood as omnipotent, both in terms of her abilities in the present and effects on the future. Still, it important to clarify that none of the Quiverfull mothers I have interviewed would call themselves “omnipotent” nor would they claim to be reaching for an all-powerful standard. Indeed, they would say quite the reverse. Repeatedly, these women speak of their desperation for God’s help and their daily struggle to keep up with their responsibilities. And, while they take their duties as mothers very seriously, they bring a lot of humor to their work that seems to arise from a keen awareness of their weaknesses. They laugh easily at themselves and the endless number of daily demands they face as wives and mothers. But, even as these mothers are aware of the extraordinary endeavor they have undertaken, they do not shrink back from claiming that they are their children’s best educator and caretaker. They know that they
have filled the role of “stay-at-home mom” with many more responsibilities than most, but they undertake the task with confidence that God has set them apart for this purpose. Thus, even with a strong sense of their limitations, Quiverfull mothers claim for themselves capabilities that most American women do not: to birth and nurse many children in rapid succession, to educate their own children from preschool through high school, and to cook, clean, and manage a large family almost entirely on their own. We could add to this list of capabilities the fact that Carley claims some proficiency in homeopathic medicine and the use of essential oils. She is also supportive of natural childbirth and is currently training to become certified doula. Deborah carries out occasional jobs beyond the home to help make extra money. And, Renee teaches in their homeschool co-operative and supports her children in their extracurricular activities, all while taking classes at a local community college. These Quiverfull mothers are laying claim to a breadth of knowledge and skill that is larger than most. At the very same time that they are asserting their weakness, they are implicitly claiming for themselves extraordinary strength, ability, and influence.

Even so, in the construction of maternal omnipotence, Quiverfull motherhood is not unique but an intensification of broader American tendencies. The work of motherhood in America entails an endless list of responsibilities and demands. Its work is ever expanding and evolving, throughout the growth of one’s children from infancy into adulthood and beyond. In truth, mothers are expected to do it all—or at least be willing to do it all. Mothers must be teachers, caretakers, disciplinarians, nurses, nutritionists, cooks, maids, household managers, therapists, and more. And, the more “natural” they go in these tasks, the more mom is expected to know and do: extended breastfeeding, baby-
wearing, home grown vegetables, essential oils, homeopathic remedies, DIY clothing, crafts, décor, and the list goes on. If a mother chooses to educate her children at home, she is expected to be a skillful teacher, as well. The more specialized instruction is required, the more mothers have to learn and achieve, particular if she is helping a child with developmental or learning disabilities. All of this, mothers are expected to accept with loving acquiescence, always patient, always joyful, and always willing to sacrifice herself for her children.

While there is no one factor to blame for the extraordinarily high expectations for mothers described above, the cultural romanticization of motherhood is a powerful contributor to it. The roots of this idealization are many—too many to explore in detail—but they include nostalgia, religious symbols (especially, the Virgin Mother and other saintly maternal figures), cultural tropes, and persistent literary narratives. Whatever the source, by virtue simply of having a child, American mothers are expected to become morally virtuous, self-sacrificing, and extraordinary. In short, mothers qua mothers are supposed to be superhuman. As Paula Cooey has argued, there is really no such thing as an “ordinary mother” because the ordinary mother is supposed to be an extraordinary mother. To be less than extraordinary—whether through character flaws or making mistakes in some respect—is to fail your children and become a “bad mother.” And, at the feet of bad mothers is laid the blame for an endless number of things, from the psychological problems of individual grown children to the downfall of entire

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462 “If being ordinary involves characterological flaws, making serious and sometimes tragic mistakes while bearing or raising children, or leaving one’s children while working outside the home, then mothers must be extraordinary. Due to cultural romanticizing of both motherhood and childhood, U.S. society expects nothing less than extraordinary mothers as normative” (Paula M. Cooey, “‘Ordinary Mother’ as Oxymoron: The Collusion of Theology, Theory, and Politics in the Undermining of Mothers,” in *Mother Troubles*, 229).

463 Cooey, “‘Ordinary Mother’ as Oxymoron,” 229.
civilizations. In the words of Adrienne Rich, “Under the institution of motherhood, the mother is the first to blame...if anything whatsoever goes wrong.”⁴⁶⁴ Is it any wonder, therefore, that 70 percent of American mothers surveyed in 2000 said that they found motherhood “incredibly stressful”?⁴⁶⁵

I have chosen to call the romanticization of mothers as virtuous, all-powerful, and always capable the myth of omnipotent motherhood. Despite the fact that each individual mother knows that she is incapable of “doing it all”, most mothers still measure themselves against the standard of non-existent mothers who can. Of course, the debate about whether women can “do it all” or “have it all” has become something of an American pastime. Every couple of years, it seems, an article comes out in a prominent magazine or journal claiming alternately women can or can’t “have it all.”⁴⁶⁶ This conversation typically focuses on women who are seeking to have careers outside the home and raise a family simultaneously. (The assumption, of course, is that men do not face the tension between the work of fatherhood and employed work in the same way that women do.) But, the women under discussion in this project are not facing that conundrum. The Quiverfull movement, in particular, has made the work of mothers in the home central to their lived religion. Their print and online literature hold up motherhood as a woman’s “highest calling” in life.⁴⁶⁷ Not only are they physically reproducing and nurturing as many children as the marriage produces, but they are doing the daily work of

⁴⁶⁴ Rich, Of Woman Born, 222.
⁴⁶⁵ Reported by Judith Warner in Perfect Madness, 71.
⁴⁶⁶ The most recent such article from a major news source was Anne-Marie Slaughter’s “Why Women Still Can’t Have it All,” The Atlantic, July/August 2012, accessed June 14, 2015, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/.
⁴⁶⁷ Grenholm notes, “Both the glorification and the demonization of motherhood presuppose more maternal responsibilities than there are resources available and a diminishing or clouding of other people’s roles. There are biblical parallels here. The Gospel of John (7:53-8:11) describes how a woman is caught in the act of committing adultery. She alone is called to account; the man is never mentioned” (Motherhood and Love, 47).
educating their children and managing the home, as well. They have already made the choice to forgo a career outside the home in order to, in a very real way, make the family their career. In the words of Renee Tanner, “I think you can [be a stay-at-home mom] as fully and professionally and excellently as any career.”

Still, Quiverfull mothers remain stuck in the same problematic romanticization of motherhood that plagues the nation as whole. While Quiverfull mothers are committed to their performance of motherhood because they believe it is God’s ideal for the family and God’s personal calling on their lives, their thick theological explanation for their labor has left the myth of omnipotent motherhood intact. Working mothers might think that the choice to focus exclusively on the domestic sphere gives Quiverfull mothers more existential peace and freedom from unreasonable expectations. But, this assumption would be sorely mistaken. For women like Deborah, Carley, and Renee, the choice to make childrearing their career has led to difficulties and anxieties of another sort. They as much as any women in America are imagined as omnipotent and deal with the consequences of this ideal on a daily basis.

Thus, Quiverfull mothers help us to see the way in which American mothers are, as a whole, expected to be omnipotent. This expectation is a set-up, of course, because no mother is all-powerful. “Ordinary mothers” are not superhuman, no matter how romantic the myth may seem, and it is not a compliment to stereotype mothers qua mothers as invincible. To imagine otherwise is not only a private problem for individual women, as our ethnographic research shows, but also a communal problem for American society. If mothers as a rule are expected to be omnipotent, then there is no room in our collective imagination for women who can’t “do it all”—who have real weaknesses, who need help.
There is no way to take into account the experiences of mothers in poverty, drug and alcohol addicted mothers, single mothers and grandmothers who head households, illegal immigrant mothers, unemployed mothers, and more. Given that “ordinary mothers” include all of these categories, it is important that our theologizing comes to grips with the false doctrine of motherly omnipotence. Quiverfull mothers may come as close as any mothers in America to achieving the omnipotent ideal, but even they struggle under the weight of the expectations put upon them by the mother-centered and mother-directed nature of their lived religion. It is not a slight to the real heroism of these mothers to acknowledge their weaknesses and urge theologians to come to grips with it, as well.468

As I have argued, despite the way Quiverfull mothers are valorized and glorified rhetorically, and despite the way Quiverfull mothers implicitly claim for themselves extraordinary abilities, they are in reality “ordinary mothers,” like every other mother in America. But, as we shall see in the following section, what makes Quiverfull mothers ordinary is not simply the fact that they struggle under the weight of motherly omnipotence, but also that they experience motherhood as an undertaking of extraordinary vulnerability. In fact, the omnipotent expectations and the vulnerable experience of motherhood stand in stark contrast to each other. While all mothers are expected to be extraordinary, all mothers also know from experience that to be a mother is to be vulnerable in multiple ways. Theologian Cristina Grenholm reflects upon

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468 Judith Warner goes further: “The mess of the Mommy Mystique—the belief that we can and should control every aspect of our children’s lives, that our lives are the sum total of our personal choices, that our limitations stem from choosing poorly and that our problems are chiefly private, rather than public in nature—is not an individual problem that individual women should have to scramble to deal with. It is a social malady—a perverse form of individualism, based on self-defeating allegiance to a punitive notion of choice; a way of privatizing problems that are social in scope and rendering them, in the absence of real solutions, amenable to one’s private powers of control. It demands a collective coming-into-awareness, at the very least. And, I believe, once that awareness is reached, it cannot be cured without some collective, structural solutions” (Perfect Madness, 57).
motherly vulnerability in her book, *Motherhood and Love: Beyond the Gendered Stereotypes of Theology*. I will draw on Grenholm’s discussion of the subject as I devote this final section to exploring the vulnerability of Quiverfull mothers and its theological significance.

**B. Vulnerable Motherhood**

Following the course set out by Grenholm, we must begin a discussion of motherly vulnerability with an account of heteronomy, for the one necessarily leads to the other. Although autonomy has become something of an inviolable virtue of modernity, it is not altogether clear how or even if motherhood and autonomy go together. When a mother is pregnant, there is no clear distinction between her and the baby she carries. While the fetus is carried within her womb, the two cannot be completely separated.\(^{469}\) We may speak of the two as individuals, but the reality is that there is a blending of persons in the experience of the pregnant woman. In the words of philosopher Sara Ruddick:

> Birth, more than any other experience except perhaps sexuality, undermines the individuation of bodies. The growing fetus, increasingly visible in the woman’s swelling body, an infant emerging from the vagina, a suckling infant feeding off a breast, the mother feeding with and of her body express in dramatic form a fusion of self and other. Any man or woman might fear the obliteration of self that such an experience suggests.\(^{470}\)

The point here is not to romanticize the experience of motherhood, but to recognize that, in the words of Cristina Grenholm, “Pregnancy and birth challenge established thought patterns,” particularly regarding autonomy. In the modern age, to rule oneself, to be independent, to be in control of one’s life, has become an important aspect

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of what constitutes the good life. To be a healthy, well-adjusted adult is to be independent, self-supporting, and in control of one’s own destiny. The opposite of autonomy is not dependency (because autonomy is always relative and limited), but heteronomy. Heteronomy is to be ruled by someone else. Grenholm explains the relationship between autonomy and heteronomy in the following way:

One person’s autonomy is challenged by another person’s autonomy and need for self-control. It is also jeopardized in all kinds of relationships in which (relatively) autonomous subjects interact, but it is not compromised except by heteronomy, in which one lacks control and influence over one’s own situation.471

To lack control and influence over one’s own situation is often interpreted as necessarily perverse and wrong. Yet, Grenholm rightly points out that what a mother experiences in pregnancy can only be called heteronomy: her body accommodates a creative process over which she does not exercise direct control. Moreover, the birth of her child results in the establishment of a relationship that she cannot evade or dictate.472 In the words of Ruddick, “To give birth is to create a life that cannot be kept safe, whose unfolding cannot be controlled, and whose eventual death is certain.”473 Kathleen Norris expresses the same point prosaically in her poem “Ascension” about her sister’s experience of childbirth:

Now the new mother, that leaky vessel,
begin to nurse her child,
beginning the long good-bye.474

472 Ibid.
Thus, not only does the experience of motherhood involve the lack of clear
distinction between mother and child, but also the acceptance of a heteronomous life—a
life characterized by “the long good-bye.” As Grenholm elaborates:

Motherhood is necessarily heteronomous in relation to outer circumstances in that
the mother cannot protect her child from all danger or control its developmental
process. This heteronomy is also the foundation of our respect for the child’s
autonomy. The child should not be controlled by the mother.475

The lives of each of the women described above offer abundant examples of
heteronomy, from the uncontrolled nature of pregnancy and birth, to children with
chronic illnesses and disabilities. But, even the mundane details of our conversations
offer illustrations of heteronomy. When Carley and I met for the first time, she brought
along her still nursing baby boy, whose need for attention and sustenance took priority
over our conversation. At that time and on other occasions she has joked about the way
that she cannot even get 15 minutes by herself to take a shower. Later, as she and I
continued our discussions over the phone, we were often interrupted by a young child in
distress or in need of correction for some infraction. Carley always handles these
moments with patience and grace, but they remain small examples of the way in which
she is not in control of her life. The same could be said of Deborah or Renee, each of
whom must schedule time away from their children with great care, being sure to take
into consideration everyone’s schedule and individual needs. Again, these are small
examples, but they are the proverbial tip of the iceberg in the way that the lives of
Quiverfull mothers—and all mothers—are directed by the seemingly endless needs of
others.

Due to the way the life of a heteronomous person is ordered by the actions and needs of others, it is also necessarily a life of vulnerability. To lack control over one’s destiny is to be vulnerable. However, it is important to recognize that vulnerability is not the same as “exposure,” the word Grenholm uses to describe a person who has had her vulnerability exploited by another.\footnote{Ibid., 120.} In her words, “Vulnerability opens up to the possibility of love, whereas exposure is the result of oppression.”\footnote{Ibid. Grenholm references Vincent Brümmer, \textit{The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 225.} Also, vulnerability should not be equated with tragedy. Because of what is involved in the process of pregnancy, birth, nursing, and childcare, mothers are necessarily vulnerable. This vulnerability calls for love, which will protect vulnerability rather than exploit it.\footnote{Grenholm, \textit{Motherhood and Love}, 121.} \footnote{Ibid., 117.}

For Grenholm, the place in the Christian tradition where we see vulnerability enveloped by protective love is the Annuciation, where the unwed teenager, Mary of Nazareth, is given news from God’s emissary that she will give birth to a son. She argues that Mary’s story provides us a place where we need neither idealize nor demonize mothers, but recognize the way in which motherhood is vulnerability laid bare. Grenholm describes the connections between Mary and “ordinary mothers” in the following way:

Mary is a mother-to-be affected by uncertainty regarding the presence of the father. She is a woman who perceives her own responsibility for a growing life, a responsibility she cannot evade. She is in a vulnerable position that others can easily exploit in order to elevate themselves and subordinate her, or subordinate themselves and elevate her… Mary is not one of history’s many tragic women. She has dignity in the midst of her vulnerability, and we may be filled with amazement at this. She is enveloped in the presence of God, the love of God, which does not remove confusion, fear, or anxiety, but which remains with her. She is promised the presence of the Spirit.\footnote{Ibid., 120.}
Renee Tanner hinted at the vulnerability of motherhood and the need for protective love in one of her interviews. She was speaking of the “traditional” views on marriage and gender roles in evangelical circles and then made the following observation:

I’ve seen things change from the early years of following the traditional things the books says and then the practical things that change up the rules. I’m not into any certain view on complementarianism except that I can’t get away from the practical thing that we’re weaker when we’re pregnant and nursing and it helps to have someone look after you and take care of you. You can’t take get away from the biological thing that we have to do that part.

Here, she points to the biological given that women give birth and nurse as something that she “can’t get away from.” Moreover, the biological reality for women puts them in a vulnerable position: “we’re weaker when we’re pregnant nursing.” For Renee, this weakness means that there may be something to “complementarianism,” an evangelical doctrine that teaches male headship and wifely submission in marriage. But, we should notice that she interprets this teaching primarily in terms of “tak[ing] care of” the mother in her time of need. The vulnerability of the mother, she says, requires loving, protective care by the father. But, it isn’t just the father who should be coming alongside the vulnerable mother in her time of need. In the same conversation, Renee went on to say: “It’s not where it used to be where women had communities and relatives to help them and keep them company and help. And then you have ten kids like me and have no one there to help you.” Here, she envisions a time when women had extended family and close knit communities to help with the burdens of motherhood. And, she acknowledges that despite her reference to fatherly care, she had “no one there to help” her in her time of need.

Vulnerability that calls for protective love is also a running theme throughout the testimonies of Quiverfull moms found in the book, *Three Decades of Fertility*. In each
chapter, a woman living out the Quiverfull discourse tells her story of pregnancies, births, and childrearing from her 20s into her 40s. Although all of them contain sincere testimonies of faith and hope, each story also contains ample evidence of the way repeated pregnancies and births causes real physical, mental, and emotional vulnerability for the mothers involved. The list of problems is long: debilitating back pain, sciatica nerve pain, varicose veins, pubis-symphysis dysfunction (the movement or misalignment of the pelvis that can cause moderate to severe pain), hernias, adrenal fatigue, hormone imbalances, multiple miscarriages, depression, anxiety, and more. In each of the stories, Quiverfull mothers testify to the need for their husband’s support, as well as the help of their older children, as they dealt with the consequences of multiple pregnancies and the need to care for a large, homeschooling family.

Historically, heteronomy has been gendered stereotypically as the lot of women as a whole. Mothers in particular were understood to be naturally heteronomous: always willing and able to relinquish control and give up themselves for their children. The good, saintly mother was the thoroughly self-sacrificing mother. Thus, women as mothers were considered naturally vulnerable. But, this is not the only way to interpret the heteronomy and vulnerability of motherhood. The truth is, heteronomy is shared by anyone who provides care for children: fathers, grandparents, nannies, and other caregivers. To care for children is to give up a significant degree of control over one’s life. Also, as Grenholm wisely observes, lack of control is a “general life condition and an unavoidable phenomenon” of human existence.480 In the words of another poet, Mary Oliver:

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\text{To live in this world}
\text{you must be able}
\text{to do three things:}
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480 Ibid., 166.
to love what is mortal;
to hold it
against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when time comes to let it go,
to let it go.\textsuperscript{481}

Rather than seeing women, and mothers in particular, as the only ones who live in heteronomy, we can see that the experience of motherhood brings this vital aspect of human experience into sharper relief. To reject the stereotype that women are naturally heteronomous, and therefore naturally vulnerable, is not to reject the fact that human life is inherently heteronomous—because it is. Human beings lack control over their lives, for better or worse. Their days are, to a great extent, determined by the actions of others. To lack control of one’s life is to be vulnerable. In fact, the person who is invulnerable has cut themselves off from other human beings. And, as Grenholm elaborates, “If someone exploits someone else’s inability, vulnerability becomes exposure. Oppression is the misuse of heteronomy.”\textsuperscript{482} The fact that human beings, male and female, can be exposed and oppressed speaks to the inherent vulnerability of all human life.

Yet, there is another way that Quiverfull mothers are vulnerable that has nothing directly to do with the experience of motherhood. In whatever way it is expressed, the vulnerability and heteronomy of motherhood is exacerbated within the Quiverfull family because the family is so privatized. All the mothers I spoke with gestured toward this problem without naming it as such. Quiverfull mothers are also vulnerable because they have a privatized, individualistic vision of motherhood that is lacking in both an ecclesial and broader social context. We recall Renee’s words referenced above: “It’s not where it

\textsuperscript{481} Mary Oliver, “In Blackwater Woods,” quoted by Miller-McLemore, \textit{In the Midst of Chaos}, 195.
\textsuperscript{482} Ibid., 167.
used to be where women had communities and relatives to help them and keep them company and help.” The mothers of Quiverfull are the sole administrators of their children’s nurturance and education. Even in a situation where the father is heavily involved, the problem remains that the full weight of the burden for a “full quiver” of children rests exclusively on the narrow shoulders of two parents. While Quiverfull mothers are right in some respect to speak of large families as “normal” in days gone by, they are misguided if they think that the “normal” large family was the privatized, isolated nuclear family they currently embody. It is this privatized instantiation of the family, which I will consider in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6, that deepens and intensifies the vulnerability of Quiverfull mothers.

Going further, the theme of vulnerability in Christian theology often leads to the notion of self-sacrifice. Like vulnerability, self-sacrifice has traditionally been gendered female and associated with womanly duties, particularly as a wife and mother. Although I am unwilling to affirm this gendered account of self-sacrifice, I think theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore is right to point out the need for theologians to reckon with the reality of self-sacrifice in the lived experience of Christian families.483 Despite the problem the idea of self-sacrifice poses, the reality is that mothers (and fathers) must regularly experience self-sacrifice in the course of caring for children.

Given all the responsibilities that Quiverfull mothers are tasked with, therefore, one would think that the idea of self-sacrifice would loom large in their rhetoric. Yet, I was surprised to discover that was not the case. Although self-sacrifice appears quite

regularly in the literature of the movement (print and online), the concept was noticeably absent from the accounts that Quiverfull mothers give of their own lives.

Eventually, I felt compelled to ask my informants about this discrepancy. What I discovered was a more complicated account of motherhood-as-sacrifice than I expected. All of the mothers that I interviewed agreed that they would characterize motherhood as sacrificial in some sense. But, all of them pointed to the Christian life in general as one that should be characterized by self-sacrifice. And, despite the more common emphasis on motherhood as sacrificial, all of the Quiverfull mothers acknowledged that self-sacrifice is something expected of fathers, too, despite the fact that it might look different for them. Both Deborah and Carley both offered caution that self-sacrifice must be balanced with self-love or risk spiritual, physical, and emotional “burn-out.” Despite their passionate commitment to their domestic work, it seems clear that my informants are unwilling to subscribe to a notion of self-sacrifice that would result in total obliteration. They are seeking, in the words of Julie Hanlon Rubio, a kind of motherhood “that does not swallow women whole, but rather leaves them able to give not only to their children but to themselves and to others whom they, as Christians, are called to serve.”

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484 Only Renee, the oldest mother who is now past her childbearing years, hedged somewhat by suggesting that the sacrifices experienced in motherhood were nothing compared to what is owed to God in worship. In her words, “I don’t really remember thinking of [motherhood] as a sacrifice per se. I thought of it as a choice—the child is helpless and had no say in the matter, therefore, I was completely responsible, having a fair idea what that choice would entail. When I encountered the need to sacrifice my feelings, desires, health and personal happiness for the good of the child, I felt like that was a calling of God, whom I owed everything. I saw the sacrifices of motherhood tied to duty to obey and please God and serve unconditionally. As I thought of it over the years, I believe it is tied to love for and fear of God. If everything is ultimately for his glory, in this case my life and hopefully my children's lives, then the obedience and service required to be a good parent were for him, not merely for the child. So while I would agree, in our society full of choices, there are ‘felt’ personal sacrifices to motherhood. In perspective of our spiritual service of worship, there is no sacrifice, only gratitude.”

485 See Miller-McLemore, “Generativity, Self-Sacrifice, and the Ethics of Family.”

486 Rubio, A Christian Theology of Marriage and Family, 112.
Of course, what I have outlined above carries with it the risk of being misunderstood. Generally, feminists have “choked” on the mother-as-vulnerable, mother-as-sacrificial trope—and, in many cases, rightly so.\footnote{487} There is much to be skeptical of. When Christian mothers are seeking to emulate Jesus, who they see as triumphing through death on the cross, the avenues for abuse are many. But, it doesn’t necessarily follow that to take a vulnerable, sacrificial role is to annihilate oneself. There are other ways of envisioning motherhood as sacrifice that correspond with the experience of Quiverfull mothers and do not result in obliteration. Still, I want to be clear. In no way am I glorifying or romanticizing motherly vulnerability or heteronomy. Instead, I am pointing out the way that the experience of Quiverfull mothers adds to our understanding of motherhood as a work of unavoidable vulnerability—a vulnerability that mothers experience in different ways at different times of life, can be mitigated in some respects, but can never be entirely removed.

Therefore, I think the distinction that Grenholm makes between vulnerability and exposure is vitally important. Just because Renee, Carley, and Deborah are vulnerable in their way of life that does not mean they are exposed—taken advantage of, mistreated, oppressed. Certainly, we can talk about the ways that their financial dependence on their husbands and isolated in the privatized home, among other things, exacerbates and deepens their vulnerability. And, we can talk about how their chosen way of life could unwittingly limit the opportunities available to their daughters. But, at the same time, we must take seriously the fact that the Quiverfull mothers with whom I have spoken find their work enjoyable, fulfilling, and, yes, empowering. These women are vulnerable,\footnote{487 The choking metaphor comes from Daphne Hampson, ed., Swallowing a Fishbone? Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity (London: SPCK, 1996).}
stretched, even overwhelmed, but not exploited or defeated. There are certainly problems within their praxis when being overwhelmed is so common that there is a standard way of responding to it. But, the truth is, all mothers could share similar experiences. Whether we like it or not, vulnerability, heteronomy, and self-sacrifice are key aspects of motherhood, both within the Quiverfull movement and beyond.⁴⁸⁸

In closing, however, it must be said that if a number of factors were different, it is quite possible, even probable, that their experiences would be different. If the Quiverfull families encountered above were living below poverty level, or if the mental health of the mother were to deteriorate, or if the family lived in severe isolation—any of these circumstances could result in radically different experiences. And, as stories in the news media and online support networks have revealed, many of the cases involving abuse, neglect, and violence in Quiverfull families have occurred within these very circumstances. Although my ethnographic research has not uncovered firsthand accounts of such toxic family environments, the stories persist and must be reckoned with. I will consider in more detail the “dark side” to Quiverfull lived religion in the sixth chapter of this project.

⁴⁸⁸ Still, doesn’t the lack of reproductive choice that my informants face take away most of their power to avoid oppression? It would seem so. But, they have given up the need to choose when and how they become a mother and they do not seem plagued by it. Why not? First, they are mentally and physically healthy and they are more or less financially secure. Even Deborah, who is in the least secure financial situation, does not worry about money with the possibility of another pregnancy, but only her health. Also, they are completely focused on the task of raising and educating children. Because that is their focus, there is no career plan with which an additional child would interfere. Their profession is their children. Although additional children would disrupt and modify their routine, they are not daunted by the possibility of a new addition. Instead, with each child they find that they grow in their skills for management, delegation, and communication (as Renee’s story testifies). On the whole, these are not women who are despairing. They are constantly at the edge of their ability, constantly adding more to their plates. But, they are hopeful, not desperate—challenged, yes, but not exposed.
VI. Conclusion

Chapter 4 has made a long journey through the discourse of motherhood in the Quiverfull movement. First, I explained how I understand motherhood for the purposes of this project. Then, I described in broad strokes six characteristics of Quiverfull motherhood as it is practiced on the ground. Then, two major theological subjects were explored: 1) the tension between the Quiverfull practice of motherhood and their rhetoric of gender hierarchy, and 2) the tension between the omnipotent motherhood and vulnerable motherhood in the Quiverfull movement. In the first, we observed that elite producers of Quiverfull culture are led by their commitment to gender hierarchy to construct womanhood in a thoroughly antifeminist manner. Even the doctrine of original sin is recast for women as the temptation to assert authority over men. Moreover, within their gender hierarchy, Quiverfull elites collapse womanhood into motherhood, making motherhood completely constitutive of womanhood. To be a woman is to be a mother or mother-in-training. But, we also observed that Quiverfull women on the ground perform motherhood in a way that both defies the stridency of Quiverfull elites and creates tension with the gender hierarchy that they espouse. Because the daily life of Quiverfull families is mother-centered and mother-directed, there are many cases in which the doctrine of male headship is strained to breaking point. And, where it doesn’t break down, male headship is often redefined in such a way as to work harmoniously within a family environment where the mother is the primary actor in and inspirational force behind, their lived religion. Thus, the performance of Quiverfull motherhood taking place in the daily lives of many families is far more complicated than the picture painted by Quiverfull elites and cultural commentators who are observing from a distance.
In the second, we saw that even though Quiverfull mothers are aware of their limitations, they yet claim for themselves a kind of omnipotence, both in what they can accomplish every day and what influence they can have on their children in the long run. Quiverfull mothers, like all mothers in America, are stuck within the myth of omnipotent motherhood, where they are barred from being ordinary (with weaknesses, struggles, and needs) and expected to be extraordinary as a matter of course. Also, they are able to seek after the omnipotent ideal because of the financial security and support that their husbands provide. Without that, their way of life would be impossible. Moreover, we recognized that the ideal of maternal omnipotence is very much in tension with their reality of maternal vulnerability, something that all mothers face but Quiverfull mothers face in a unique way. It is at the point of their vulnerability, which includes physical, emotional, mental, and economic aspects, that the Quiverfull practice of motherhood is open to exploitation and abuse. While the women I have encountered in the course of the project have not personally experienced such oppression, the possibility for abuse remains—as the stories of some ex-Quiverfull mothers testify. This subject is very important and will be considered in more detail in this project’s conclusion.

Although we have covered much ground and considered Quiverfull motherhood from many angles, my hope above all is that I have been able to show that Quiverfull mothers are not as “other” as they may at first appear. They share in many of the challenges and conundrums of contemporary motherhood in America, albeit in a rather intense form. Mothers often find that their ideals do not practice as well as they preach. Mothers often try to “do it all.” Mothers often try to “do it all” alone. It is in these points where the situation of contemporary American mothers is laid bare to Christian
theologians and call upon them for a more nuanced response. In the next chapter, we will consider in more depth the way that Quiverfull families construct children and childhood. Although a different topic, Chapter 5 will build upon some of the observations made here, particularly the problems raised by vulnerability and privatization.
I. Introduction

Deborah Olson’s oldest child, Garrett, is eleven years old. Almost two years ago, he made a profession of faith in Christ. Although they believe he has had a “personal relationship” with Christ since he was quite young, only recently did he go through the process of praying a prayer of confession and personal faith (sometimes called the “sinner’s prayer”). As evangelicals, the Olsons believe that Garrett should be baptized based upon his profession of faith, but the outworking of that belief has been difficult for a number of reasons.

First, the Olsons are not entirely comfortable with the baptismal practices of their current church. An independent Baptist church, the congregation closely links a person’s baptism with church membership. According to Deborah, immediately following the baptism of a convert, the church takes a congregational vote to include that person in the membership role of the church. The Olsons find this problematic. Deborah says that baptism is something that should symbolize your union with Christ and the universal body of Christ. The local church or denominational affiliation shouldn’t have anything to do with it. Also, the Olsons have long thought that Dan would baptize their children. As the family’s primary spiritual leader, it makes sense for them that Dan would initiate his
children through baptism into the life of faith. But, Dan has recently begun to have doubts. He wonders if baptism isn’t supposed to be performed by an ordained person—a member of the clergy.

In addition to their anxieties about how the baptism will be performed, the Olsons are not sure that Garrett truly understands yet what he’s doing. In Deborah’s words, “I made a huge deal about his salvation but wanted baptism to be for a time when he understood it better and really owned it and could publicly share his testimony. The way I view baptism is that it should be a once in a lifetime thing.” In short, they aren’t sure Garrett is mature enough yet to make the choice to become a follower of Christ. The Olsons believe Christian faith is an important decision best reserved for those who are intellectually and emotionally prepared for it. If baptism should be done only once in a lifetime, then it is crucial to be sure that the person knows what he is doing when baptism is performed. Due to their concern for Garrett’s readiness, therefore, the Olsons want to provide him with an extended time of personal instruction before they commit to having him baptized. Due to Dan’s work responsibilities and the demands of their other children, however, the Olsons have struggled to fulfill this desire. Deborah found a curriculum that she wanted to use online, but they have been unable to find the time to teach Garrett like they want to. The end result of their various concerns and difficulties is that Garrett’s baptism has been delayed. As of our last conversation, the Olsons still don’t know when he will be baptized and, in Deborah’s words, “[W]e both feel really bad about it.”

I share this story because it evidences two important themes as we consider the Quiverfull imagination regarding children and childhood. First, the Olsons’ reluctance to baptize Garrett demonstrates the Quiverfull tendency to imagine children as adults-in-the-
making. Despite their emphasis on Christian formation from an early age, they are not sure that a child, due to perceived intellectual and emotional immaturity, is capable of making a profession of faith in Christ. As such, their children are barred from receiving the sacraments and participating fully in the life of the church until the parents deem them mentally and emotionally fit to do so. Second, the Olsons’ entirely private and personal approach to baptism demonstrates the Quiverfull tendency to view children as the sole responsibility of parents. As they sought to answer Garrett’s perceived immaturity with teaching, Deborah searched the Internet to find materials appropriate for his instruction. She described surveying the websites of multiple churches across the country to find something that was, in her words, “basic, Bible, Christian—not linked to denominations or traditions.” Also, they have seriously considered Dan performing the baptism since he is the children’s primary spiritual leader. Despite Dan’s recent doubts, this interest suggests that they think Garrett belongs first to his parents and only secondly to the church. Also, despite its significance as an initiation rite of the church, they don’t think baptism should be linked to local church membership. Deborah thinks the universal nature of the church should be in focus, not its local manifestation. In short, the Olsons see baptism as a church practice, but they want complete say-so over how the practice of baptism is carried out. The nuclear family and the parents’ leadership within it remain primary.

As we learned in Chapter 2, Quiverfull families are devoted to filling their quivers with as many children as God gives them. But, how exactly do they think about children and childhood? This chapter will consider the dominant themes through which children and childhood are imagined in the Quiverfull discourse. The focus here is not Quiverfull
children themselves. Certainly, Quiverfull practitioners do not imagine children in the abstract. Their ways of thinking about children are linked directly to their experiences with real children—usually their own. Still, an ethnographic study of Quiverfull children and childhood, while certainly a worthy and valuable pursuit, is beyond the purview of this project. Instead, I am focused on how adults in the Quiverfull movement imagine children, including the tensions within those imaginings.  

To that end, this chapter will consider four dominant themes and some of their practical consequences: 1) the child as a divine blessing; 2) the child as both innocent and sinful; 3) the child as an adult-in-the-making; 4) the child as the sole custody of the parents. First, I will describe each of these themes as they appear in Quiverfull discourse, along with some important context for these perspectives from Christian Scripture. Then, I will provide some theological reflection on the ethnographic data gathered on the given theme. These sections of theological reflection have three main purposes. First, I will show that Quiverfull practitioners are grappling with theological problems shared by their American evangelical neighbors. Put simply, their blind spots are our blind spots. Their weaknesses are our weaknesses. Second, I will demonstrate the ways in which Quiverfull

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489 I agree with Joyce Ann Mercer when she says, “the terms child, childhood, and children must be problematized.” In truth, there is no universal, natural identity of “the child” that exists across all times and places. Due to the focus of this project, I am primarily concerned with American children, but even in that context there exist a number of ways of constructing child and childhood. Children and childhood take a variety of forms based upon their particular historical, social, and cultural contexts. There are dangers to operating with an essentialized notion of children and childhood apart from particular locations, especially the tendency to ignore the way social forces shape our understanding of children, which has real, material consequences for children. Still, it doesn’t help matters simply to do away with all general uses of these terms and declare that there’s “no such thing” as children or childhood. As Mercer says, “To involve ‘children’ as subjects in theological discourse, we need some meaningful ways to speak about them in all of their sameness and particularity. Likewise, we must have linguistic terms to advocate with and for these children in the church and in the world” (Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood [St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005], 18). So, with Mercer, I will draw upon what Serene Jones has called “strategic essentialism” in the matter of children. In short, this means assuming a general, natural basis for “the child” and childhood, while also being aware of the need to make decisions about the usefulness of such terminology in particular contexts (19).
families are and are not well served by their imagination about children. Third, I will draw from the work of select Christian theologians in order to gesture toward more fruitful ways of imagining children and childhood. The point is not to produce a full theology of childhood but to suggest some remedies for the weaknesses within the dominant American Christian vision. I conclude the chapter by focusing on the relationship of children and the church within Quiverfull practice. This final section will highlight the tension between Quiverfull theology and practice in the case of children and foreshadow the more in-depth discussion of the family and church coming up in Chapter 6.

II. The Child as Divine Blessing

Quiverfull practitioners agree that all children are unqualified blessings or gifts from God. This theme is dominant in Quiverfull literature, both print and Internet, and in every day conversation. They root this conviction in Scripture, especially Psalm 127:3-5, which says:

Children are a heritage from the Lord; 
offspring a reward from him. 
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior, 
are children born in one’s youth. 
Blessed is the man 
whose quiver is full of them; 
They will not be put to shame 
when they contend with their opponents in court.  

There is a curiosity in the Quiverfull interpretation of Ps. 127. The Hebrew text of the psalm clearly indicates that it is not the gender neutral “children” that are a “heritage from the Lord” (Ps. 127:3) but the gender specific “sons.” Quiverfull writers are not particularly interested in gender inclusivity because they are convinced that men are the God-ordained leaders of the human race and that God is ontologically masculine. In every other case, Quiverfull hermeneutics is fiercely literal, but in this case, they are content to allow the gender inclusive English word “children” to substitute for “sons.” I see in this not only a methodological inconsistency but also a convenient oversight for the plausibility of their argument. If they were to interpret this passage literally, the way it reads in the Hebrew, Quiverfull teachers would be forced to argue that sons are a heritage from the Lord and that the more sons one has the more blessed one will be. But, this literal reading of the text does not support their universal claim that all...
For Quiverfull discourse, the gift quality of children is something intrinsic.

Children do not have to accomplish anything in order to be gifts to their parents, to the church, and to the world. And they do not become a blessing over time, through growth and maturity. For Quiverfull practitioners, a child is a blessing fundamentally, regardless of their perceived worth by others or the circumstances into which they are born. In the words of Rachel Scott, “The Lord says that every child is a gift… In God’s eyes there is no such thing as an unwanted child because to God each child is sent to be a blessing…” Perhaps Charles Provan says it most concisely: “Children are a blessing from God: the more the better!” Quiverfull families understand their insistence on this point as a stance in opposition to the dominant narrative of American culture, which sees children as expensive burdens or optional accessories. This section will explicate this way of imagining children with some attention to the larger context of Scripture. Then, I will offer a theological analysis of its merits and challenges.

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children are always a blessing. Moreover, it would put them in the uncomfortable position of arguing that daughters are less valuable than sons, something they are always seeking vehemently to deny due to their stridently hierarchical gender ideology.

Also, if they were to deal with the literal meaning of the Hebrew in Ps. 127, I venture to guess that Quiverfull leaders would have to acknowledge the socio-economic and cultural circumstances of the psalmist, ones that would lead him to affirm a multitude of sons as a divine blessing. For Quiverfull teachers to attend closely to the socio-economic and cultural context would, in their minds, lessen the perceived force of the text. Indeed, it seems challenging to extrapolate a universal divine command applicable to all people in all times and places from a poetic text understood to arise from an agrarian patriarchal and patrilineal society—a very specific people, time, and place. Quiverfull teachers often speak of those who reference the Bible’s cultural context as people looking for a way out of obedience, people who want to relativize the Bible in favor of contemporary cultural trends. In short, I suspect that this is why the Hebrew of Ps. 127 remains unexplored in Quiverfull writings thus far.

Many Quiverfull parents will claim that children, when trained rightly, will become more of a blessing to their parents over time. But, this doesn’t change the fact that they are viewed as inherently gifts from the beginning.


As always, Mary Pride says it most memorably: “All those cute T-shirts for pregnant women with ‘Mommy’ stenciled on them, all those cute coordinated quilts for baby’s room, are not proof that our culture overflows with love for children. They prove, rather, that children have been resurrected as pets” (*The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1985], 38).
A. Description

The Quiverfull conviction that every child is a divine gift rests on two assumptions. First, God has a direct hand in the creation of every human life. In Renee’s words, “You see all the passages in the Bible about God opening and closing the womb... Whether [you interpret that] literally or scientifically, the message is that God is very active in the process in a personal way.” If God “open[s] and clos[es] the womb,” then every pregnancy is, in some sense, the result of God’s creative work. The Hesses say it this way: “God sees to it that His blessings are...not happenstance births, but planned incidents of goodness.” Nancy Campbell is even more straightforward: “[W]hen you conceived a baby...God Almighty visits you!”

The second assumption at work here is that every child is a divine gift regardless of the circumstances into which he or she is born. As Deborah says simply, “They’re a blessing because the Lord says they are.” Not even poverty changes the gift nature of children for, as Doug Phillips says, “God declares children to be a blessing and a source of true wealth and happiness.” Thus, those with children may not have material abundance, but the gift nature of children means that they are truly wealthy and happy.

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495 The argument of Craig Houghton in *Family UNplanning* is a bit different. He starts with the words of Jesus about children (Matthew 18:1-5) and extrapolates their gift nature from there (*Family UNplanning* [Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2007], 20).
496 I am not going to explore all of the biblical passages that support this contention. Two Quiverfull books provide an exhaustive survey of the relevant literature. See, Rick Hess and Jan Hess, *A Full Quiver: Family Planning and the Lordship of Christ* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990), and Nancy Campbell, *Be Fruitful and Multiply: What the Bible Says About Having Children* (San Antonio, TX: Vision Forum, 2003).
497 Mary Pride concurs: “[T]he Bible makes it clear that a baby is a human being made in the image of God from the moment of conception... From the moment of conception...a baby has been given life by God” (*The Way Home*, 71). Rachel Scott says something similar: “Each time that a woman gives birth to a child, she loans herself, her womb, and her body to God so that He can send His special creation to earth” (*Birthing God’s Mighty Warriors*, 41; emphasis in original).
498 Hess and Hess, *A Full Quiver*, 34.
499 Campbell, *Be Fruitful and Multiply*, 68.
Still, it’s obvious that not everyone is capable of receiving children as a divine gift. Carley says, “It’s very clear [from Scripture] that children are a blessing. Whether we interpret it that way is a different story.” Renee agrees, saying, “If they’re not a blessing it’s circumstantial and not intrinsic to the child. I think the child as a person is a blessing to the world no matter who has to raise them or where they go.” Within Quiverfull discourse, therefore, all children are blessings from God, regardless of the circumstances of their conception, birth, or upbringing.

Quiverfull families enact this view of children by refusing to prevent their conception. Instead, all pregnancies are celebrated as direct gifts from God. As I explained in Chapter 2, not all Quiverfull families totally refrain from using artificial methods to control conception. But, all Quiverfull families view the total surrender of a woman’s fertility as the ideal. When they do use methods of birth control, they tend to see it as a failure of faith on their part, often brought about through fear of the physical or financial consequences of another pregnancy. Nevertheless, every pregnancy is interpreted as a direct work of God’s creative hand. Quiverfull families affirm each pregnancy as specifically willed by God and, therefore, worthy of embrace and thanksgiving. They speak of this conviction as a matter of faith because they do not always feel as though another child is a blessing. Indeed, Quiverfull mothers are familiar with the ambivalence that can surround the news of pregnancy.

During the course of my research, Deborah was surprised to discover that she was expecting another child. With six children already, the Olsons had begun to think that their time for having biological children was over, especially due to the physical difficulties Deborah faces with each pregnancy. Although she stubbornly affirms the gift
nature of children, she was unprepared for the news and found her feelings mixed. More than anything else, she is fearful for her health and her ability to care for her current children if her health is compromised. “I’m trying not to be scared about the way I feel,” she says. Her answer to this anxiety is to remind herself what she knows to be true:

Sometimes you have to just go back to the basics. [Children] are a blessing because the Lord says they are. The Bible says that they are a blessing and that having them is a gift from the Lord and an inheritance from him. You know, rain is a blessing, too. But sometimes it’s really annoying. [Laughter.] So, I just… I just… Yeah… They just are. That’s the truth. But, to feel that everyday? No, that’s not reality.

In their insistence on the gift nature of children, Quiverfull practitioners are well supported by Christian scripture. Throughout the Old Testament, “multiplication” and “fruitfulness” are considered a sign of God’s blessing (Exod. 1:7, 20). More specifically, the Pentateuch and historical books present stories that are continually focused upon the propagation of children, most famously, perhaps, in the narratives of Sarah, Rachel and Leah, and Hannah. In these stories, the formula is quite simple: to receive a child from God is to be blessed; to be childless is to be cursed. The Psalms also speak of children as a blessing. God’s kindness is illustrated in making the “childless woman” into the “happy mother of children” (Ps. 113:9) and, as we have already seen, the man with a “quiver full” of children is blessed with a “reward” and “heritage” from God (Ps. 127:3-5).

While the New Testament is not as concerned with reproduction per se, it remains positive about children. In fact, within the ministry of Jesus, children take on a central theological and ethical place in the context of the Kingdom of God. Jesus welcomes and

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501 Of course, there are important socio-economic reasons for this perspective on reproduction. In a patrilineal and patrilocal society the production of male heirs is important for family inheritance and social stability. And, in the mostly agrarian economy of ancient Israel, more children means more hands to help with daily labor. For discussion of these and other factors, see Leo G. Purdue, Joseph Blenkinsopp, John J. Collins, and Carol L. Meyers, eds., Families in Ancient Israel (Family Religion and Culture Series; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1997).
blesses children, in opposition to the behavior of the disciples who sought to keep them away (Mark 10:16; Matt. 19:13). Children are regularly the recipients of his healing and the little daughter of Jairus is raised from the dead (Mark 5:21-23). He teaches “the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these” (Matt. 19:14; Mark 10:13-14) and that becoming “like little children” is a prerequisite for entering the Kingdom (Matt. 18:3). And, in a statement reminiscent of Matt. 25:40, Jesus states, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me” (Mark 9:37). Thus, children are to be welcomed as the mediated presence of Christ and the God who sent him. This perspective continues and intensifies the perspective of children as a blessing that began in the Old Testament.\footnote{Beyond the pages of Scripture, the Christian tradition offers more support for the intrinsic gift nature of children. In a period that typically glorified celibacy as the purest form of devotion to God, John Chrysostom preached often on the virtues of the Christian family and the responsibility of parents for their children’s formation. Although implicit, the high value Chrysostom affords to the task of parenthood as a moral and ecclesial calling reveals his conviction that children are invaluable divine gifts. (For a helpful survey of Chrysostom’s preaching on children, see Vigen Guroian, “The Ecclesial Family: John Chrysostom on Parenthood and Children,” in The Child in Christian Thought, ed. Marcia J. Bunge [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 61-77.) Likewise, Martin Luther consistently affirms children as blessings throughout his writings. He says, “[C]hildren are a gift of God and come solely through the blessing of God, just as Psa. 127:3 shows.” Luther also notes that “saintly mothers” have always regarded prolific childbearing “as a great honor.” (See Jane E. Strohl, “The Child in Luther’s Theology,” in The Child in Christian Thought, 134-159.) More recently, Pope John Paul II describes children as follows: “When they become parents, spouses receive from God the gift of a new responsibility. Their parental love is called to become for the children the visible sign of the very love of God” (John Paul II, On the Family, no. 14, emphasis mine). Indeed, the majority of theologians within Christian tradition would uphold the Quiverfull conviction that children are a divine blessing. For more information on children in the Christian tradition, see Marcia J. Bunge, ed., The Child in Christian Thought (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Patrick McKinley Brennan, ed., The Vocation of the Child (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); and Jerome Berryman, Children and the Theologians: Clearing the Way for Grace (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2009).}
themselves. In Carley’s words, “God is the creator and author of life... All life.”

Moreover, neither their ethnicity nor religion matters because God says all children are blessings without any qualifications. Even the children of non-Christians are blessings because, as Deborah says, “Non-believers have many gifts from God. They can enjoy all of creation without ever acknowledging him.”

Still, the print sources of the Quiverfull subculture make the gift nature of all children a more ambiguous matter. Some writers fail to extend their belief about the gift nature of children to children that are abandoned, non-Christian, or otherwise outside the white Protestant norm. Indeed, for some, the passion for birthing children arises directly from a place of discernible antipathy toward the children of others. For example, when Mary Pride is encouraging her readers to have many children, she offers the following argument as justification:

Scripture draws a fundamental distinction between the children of the righteous (of whom there are never enough) and the children of the wicked (of whom there are always too many). The children of the righteous are blessings (Psa. 37:26). The man who fears the Lord and delights in his commands will have children who are “mighty in the land” (Psa. 112:2)… On the other hand, curses are on the children of the wicked (Psa. 109:10-13; 37:28).503

Here, Pride asserts that “the children of the wicked”—presumably non-Christians—are far too numerous and cursed by God. To state that there are too many of them is to imply that they are less valuable than the children of Christians. The children of “the righteous” are a blessing, but the children of “the wicked” are not. Rachel Scott, who writes from a more apocalyptic perspective, shares Pride’s dichotomous view of children. She says,

[T]he enemy is preparing his army for battle… I believe that there are children being born right now who already desire to promote the enemy’s agenda. Some

503 Mary Pride, The Way Home, 63.
are chosen in the womb through satanic rituals or other forms of evil. The only hope these children have is to find Christ, but until they do, they will be increasingly susceptible to the deeds and plans of the enemy.footnote{Scott, *Birthing God’s Mighty Warriors*, vii-viii.}

For Scott, non-Christian children are pawns in “the enemy’s agenda” and members of Satan’s “army.” Her encouragement to Christian families to have more children is, in part, for the purpose of providing soldiers for “God’s army” to fight against the “Anti-Christ” in the last days. And, perhaps most alarmingly, Scott sees some children as “chosen in the womb” by Satan. Certainly, within a dualistic vision of the end times, such children cannot credibly be called a blessing or gift of God.

Craig Hougton displays similar contradictions in his book, *Family UNplanning*. Houghton points to the demographic rise in the number of American Muslims as one reason for Christians to have many children. “At the present rate,” he says, “Satan will win the war against Christians through attrition – and we are cooperating with him, rather than trying to defeat his lies.” He goes on to conclude: “We can forecast that with the growth rate of Muslims far exceeding that of Christians, that by the end of this century, Muslims will be the majority in the USA.”footnote{Houghton, *Family UNplanning*, 77.} While Houghton does not say so explicitly, when he follows up a warning about Satan’s “war against Christians” with statistics about the natural growth rate of Muslims, it is clear that he associates the rise of the Muslim population with Satan’s triumph. It seems, then, that the children of Muslim parents are not blessings to be welcomed or gifts given by God. Instead, they are, at the very least, a sign of Satan’s victory, and at worst, a tool of Satan himself.footnote{Houghton isn’t the only author to specifically mention Muslims. Nancy Campbell bemoans the proliferation of Muslim and Catholic children in the U.S., while the number of Protestant children dwindles in comparison (Joyce, *Quiverfull*, 182-183).}
Of course, the problem of seeing the children of others as unworthy of love and protection is not necessarily new. Even Scripture, which offers strong affirmations of children as gifted by God, also reveals some ambiguity about the children of other nations. The stories of the Canaanite conquest involve the apparently God-ordained massacre of conquered children (Josh. 6:21; 8:24; 10:28-38), as does the book of Judges (Judg. 21:10). In the Law, the children of conquered and surrounding peoples can be taken as slaves (Lev. 25:44-46), even though Israelites are instructed not to force each other into slavery (Lev. 25:39, 42). The Psalms contain repeated requests for God to curse and bring harm on the children of the psalmists’ enemies (Ps. 17:14; 109:9-12; 137:9).\(^{507}\) So, when Quiverfull writers use the demonization of others’ children to support their practice, their reasoning has some biblical precedent.

But, it is important to acknowledge that inconsistency on the gift nature of children appears primarily in the rhetoric of Quiverfull elites. The women of my ethnography are united in their refusal to view any children as beyond the pale. For many women at the grass roots, who are doing the daily work of raising a quiver full of children, all really means all. And this conviction is born out in practice. Early on in their marriage, the Millers adopted a baby whose mother could not care for her. Carley took on extra work outside the home to raise money for the adoption. The Millers maintain a relationship with their daughter’s birth mother, offering encouragement and assistance as she pursues education and an independent life. The Olsons have opened their home to a young adult who is without immediate family and in desperate need of a place to stay. They are acting as his parents, providing physical, material, and emotional needs, even as

\(^{507}\) These are not the only instances in scripture of ambiguity about the children of others, but they are prominent examples.
they care for their own six children. Renee Tanner has made it a point to make her home welcoming to all of her children’s friends, co-workers, and neighbors. They regularly host “extra kids” for extended periods of time because Renee sees the home as her primary site of ministry. Her practice demonstrates her conviction that all children are a gift of God, not just the children she has conceived and birthed.

B. Theological Analysis

I affirm the Quiverfull commitment to seeing all children as gifts of God. The Christian tradition sees God-with-us arriving in the form of an infant, conceived by an unwed mother and born into Roman occupied Palestine. It is incumbent upon Christian theologians to affirm the intrinsic gift nature of children, regardless of the circumstances of their birth or upbringing. Furthermore, children are gifts not only to their parents, but also to the church and society at large. In the words of Adrian Thatcher, “A child is not bought, not possessed, is not an object, does not exist for another’s end. Of all the gifts that the Giving God gives, surely the gift of a child is supremely the greatest, next to the gift of one’s life partner, and of life itself.” The Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ is also the Gifting God. Thatcher explains: “Parents who receive the gift of a child joyfully are, by that very experience, better able to understand the central claim of the Christian faith. For God the Son is also a gift. God the Son is God the Given. The gift of a child to parents calls forth an endless response of freely-given love.” A strong stance for the

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509 Thatcher, *Theology and Families*, 100. For his part, Thatcher is drawing upon the theology of Jean-Luc Marion and Stephen Webb.
gift nature of children is an important act of witness in a society that views children either as valuable commodities or economic hardships.

I want to highlight the profound burden this conviction requires of Quiverfull mothers. Given the extent of their daily responsibilities and often challenging life circumstances, the steadfast openness of Quiverfull mothers to birthing and caring for more children is extraordinary. Certainly, fathers also affirm the blessing of children and have a hand in the consequences of their choice not to limit fertility. But, Quiverfull mothers physically embody this conviction, often over and over again, for up to thirty years. They continue to affirm that children are a gift to them even as they are giving of themselves repeatedly through the long months of pregnancy and nursing, not to mention the many years of schooling and daily care that come with each additional child. Despite the fact that American society has fetishized pregnancy and babies, it remains generally indifferent and even hostile to children and the demands they make of their caregivers. In the midst of this cultural enmity, there is a sense in which the stance of Quiverfull mothers is a kind of ascetic witness. Yes, children require sacrifice, but it is a sacrifice they are willing to make—over and over and over again.

Still, it is a big step to move from affirming that all children are an unqualified gift of God to arguing that Christians should never seek to limit or space their children (or, going even further, that Christians should seek to have as many children as possible). Quiverfull teachers usually justify the move from theological description (all children are blessings) to moral prescription (one must not put a limit on children) with the argument that no one wants to limit other kinds of divine blessings, such as money, possessions, power, or influence. Therefore, they conclude, the same unlimited openness must apply
to the gift of children. Yet, it is by no means certain that Christians would not want to limit things like money, possessions, power, or influence.510 As one evangelical critic of Quiverfull pronatalism has pointed out, even though the Bible says that a wife is a gift from God (Prov. 18:22) that does not mean that it is wrong not to marry (see 1 Cor. 7:8) or that one should therefore acquire many wives.511 It simply does not follow that because the Christian tradition affirms unequivocally that children are divine gift that taking steps to regulate, time, or limit these gifts is necessarily wrong.512

Furthermore, even as Christian theologians affirm children as good gifts from God, it is important to reckon with the experiences of contemporary families. This is something that Quiverfull mothers seem to understand instinctively and testify to in the previous section. Just because something is a gift does not mean one always receives it as a gift. Creation, too, is a gift of God and yet humans routinely mistreat and exploit creation without much thought. Perhaps the simplest way to name this discrepancy between conviction and experience is the reality of sin.513 This world is “not the way it’s supposed to be,” particularly in the matter of children.514 As Deborah, Renee, and Carley have indicated, children are a mixed blessing to families living in a world marred by sin and suffering. The news of a new life can be greeted as much with fear and anxiety as with joy and hope. In this respect, Thatcher offers an important caveat to the gift nature

510 The teachings of Jesus, especially, warn against the dangers of wealth and power, and urge those who would join the Kingdom of God toward a life of simplicity.
512 I say that limiting or spacing births is not necessarily wrong because this topic is worth a deeper discussion than the present context allows. The ethics of family planning is something that remains a debated issue among Protestants and Catholic theologians. The specific subject of family planning (and contraception) will not be treated in depth at this point.
513 Thanks to Jana Bennett for sharing this insight with me in the spring 2012.
514 Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).
of children: “While the notion of ‘planning’ a family may seem to be at variance with receiving children as divine gifts, the gift of too many children is also at variance with the ‘giftedness’ of children. The Catechism still regards large families as ‘a sign of God’s blessing and the parents’ generosity.’ Parents suffering poverty or in poor health regard them differently.”515 It is inappropriate, therefore, as Quiverfull teachers are prone to do, to dismiss parents who worry about providing and caring for children as faithless, materialistic, or disobedient. The problem of parental ambivalence toward the gift of children is more than simply a personal, private problem of the heart. Rather, it must be viewed within the context of larger cultural, socio-economic, political, and environmental factors. Only when viewed in this larger context can we begin to imagine alternative ways of life that might mitigate these fears and provide a more hospitable environment for receiving children as the gifts they are.516

Moreover, it must be said that the elite level promotion of Christian reproduction in Quiverfull literature through the demonization of non-Christian children is both deeply inconsistent and theologically erroneous. If all children are divine gifts, then the children of social, cultural, and religious others are included. More specifically, the teachings of Jesus about children do not allow us to limit Christian love and care for children to the biological product of a Christian marriage. Instead, the gift nature of children and the love of God for all children have serious social and political implications. As Julie Hanlon Rubio has said, “Christians love children not because children belong to them, but because children belong to God. Their commitment to their children is rooted

515 Thatcher, Theology and Families, 228.
516 David Matzko McCarthy is a theologian who has tried to do some of this re-imagining regarding the family in America. See, for example, Sex and Love in the Home, New Edition (London: SCM Press, 2004).
primarily in love, not biology.”\textsuperscript{517} Moreover, as Rubio goes on to argue, all children, not just one’s own children, are among “the least of these” that Jesus exhorts we must receive and care for as we would for his own person.\textsuperscript{518} Thus, the commitment to the wellbeing of one’s own children leads to the commitment to the wellbeing of all children.

**III. The Child as Innocent and Sinner**

In explicitly pronatalist materials, the theme of children as divine gifts looms large. The reasoning is simple: if every child is a blessing, then the more children you have, the more blessings you have. But, just because children are gifts from God does not mean that they always behave as such. In Quiverfull materials devoted to childrearing, another important theme emerges. Paradoxically, children are imagined both as innocent, vulnerable persons in need of protection, as well as sinful offenders in need of restraint and training.\textsuperscript{519} These two ways of imagining the child are affirmed simultaneously, creating a subtle tension in Quiverfull discourse. They also lead to a view of childhood such that as the child grows in knowledge and capability, she becomes less innocent and (potentially) more sinful. As the innocence of childhood fades, the sinfulness of childhood emerges as a force to be reckoned with. This section will attempt to explain

\textsuperscript{519} John P. Bartowski and Christopher G. Ellison posit a tension in evangelical parenting manuals that mirrors what is being described here. They report that evangelical parents are enjoined both to discipline their children (often with firm defenses of corporal punishment) and to cherish their children (with strong endorsements of loving nurturance and quality time). It seems that their enthusiasm for upholding a hierarchy in the home is matched by a commitment to “expressive caregiving” with fathers who are more involved with children compared to their peers in other faith traditions. Bartowski and Ellison conclude: “Evangelical child-rearing practices, then, seem to confound long-standing sociological typologies that aim to fit parents neatly into ‘authoritarian,’ ‘authoritative,’ and ‘permissive’ categories.” See, John P. Bartowski and Christopher G. Ellison, “Conservative Protestants on Children and Parenting,” in *Children and Childhood in American Religions*, eds. Don S. Browning and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 42-55.
this way of imagining children within the context of the Christian tradition and then offer a theological analysis of its merits.

A. Description

On the one hand, Quiverfull practitioners view children as innocent because they are ignorant of evil and totally dependent upon their family for care and guidance. All of my informants view children as beginning in some state of innocence, due to ignorance and lack of life experience. As they describe it, the innocence of little ones slowly fades away as they become more knowledgeable and develop their own will. As Renee says, “You’re innocent until you learn things.” Quiverfull writers tend to emphasize the innocence of children, particularly as they are seeking to convince the reader of the desirability of pronatalism. Rachel Scott says, “God intended for children to always be in people’s lives from the beginning of their marriages until their final days on earth. His desire was for people to be surrounded by the innocence, tenderness, and love that only a child can bring.”\textsuperscript{520} Mary Pride emphasizes the innocence of children, too, often returning to the adorable behavior of babies and toddlers to convince mothers of the desirability of stay-at-home motherhood over a career.\textsuperscript{521}

The perceived innocence of children is employed as the primary reason for familial protection, evidenced especially in the practice of homeschooling. Because children are so impressionable and vulnerable, especially early on, it is vitally important that parents, siblings, and other trusted family members are the primary influences in their lives. The “wrong” kind of people can have a profoundly negative impact on

\textsuperscript{520} Scott, Birthing God’s Mighty Warriors, 84.
\textsuperscript{521} “Is the old nine-to-five grind, or rat race as it is commonly called, really more wonderful than dandling your very own baby on your knee or teaching her to play ‘peek-a-boo’ while she squeals with delight?” (Pride, The Way Home, 51).
children, so it is best that the parents take responsibility for children’s education and development in the safety of their own home. Here, the innocence of children refers both to their ignorant, unformed state and their vulnerability to harm. In this twofold sense, the innocence of children calls for protection and Quiverfull parents do not apologize for “sheltering” their children from harmful “worldly” influences.

Still, the goal isn’t constant, unending protection. Renee describes it in the following: “I would think your overall goal would be that it’s a process of walking them through the process of becoming aware—becoming not naïve anymore. So, you protect their innocence as long as it’s necessary, as long as it’s a good thing. That’s what I’ve done with my kids.” To illustrate, she offers a recent interaction with her 11 year-old son, Michael. He had written a short paper for school in which he misspelled the word “where” as “whore” throughout the document. (She laughed as she related this mistake.) When Renee asked him if he knew what the word “whore” referred to, he said he did not. So, Renee took that opportunity to call over another older child (who is 14) and explain to both of them what the word means and how it is used. Renee’s commentary on this incident is as follows:

So, you can tell I’ve obviously protected the innocence in them. I’m not like a huge shield over them, but there are areas that I protect them… I’m not against telling them things, except maybe under seven or eight. I wait to tell them some things out of social behavior expectations. I don’t want them shouting out socially inappropriate things because they don’t know any better yet. But, I do see it as my job to walk them through it and tell them what they need to know.

Thus, while childhood innocence is perceived as something they will lose over time, Quiverfull parents see it as their duty to control both when and how that innocence
is lost. As knowledge and experience increases under the tutelage of parents, children become less and less innocent. Moreover, it seems clear that, in some cases, “innocence” is another way of speaking of the child’s inherent vulnerability. Wholly dependent upon parents for care and unfamiliar with the ways of the world, children are viewed as vulnerable to harm and corruption. Renee even said that perhaps it is better to see the innocence of children as their “ignorance.” Children are unfamiliar with the sinful, dangerous adult world and, as such, are innocent in their ignorance. This state will change, however, as children grow and are led through the acquisition of knowledge and experience by their parents.

Although viewed as a temporary reality, Quiverfull proponents routinely employ the image of innocent children in order to glorify the goods of motherhood and prolific

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522 Quiverfull practitioners are not the only ones to imagine children as innocent. Perhaps the most optimistic view of children as innocents came from the Romantic Movement, of which the thinking of Jean-Jacques Rousseau is an important example. Pushing back against the longstanding Augustinian anthropology that viewed humanity as born in sin and guilt, Rousseau posits, “Everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Author of Nature; but everything degenerates in the hands of man” (Jean-Jacque Rousseau, Émile, trans. William H. Payne (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1908), 1; quoted in David H. Jensen, Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood [Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005], 6). Thus, the innocence of children should be maintained by encouraging them to play, explore, express their creativity, and, most importantly, keeping them away from the cities (“the graves of human nature”) and connected to nature (Rousseau, Émile, 24; quoted by Jensen, Graced Vulnerability, 6). Later, Horace Bushnell echoed Rousseau’s optimism about children in his influential book, Christian Nurture. As a Calvinist, Bushnell never explicitly denied the sinfulness of children, but he certainly downplayed it in favor of an optimistic view focused on what Christian parents (especially mothers) can accomplish through the proper nurture of children. He thought that there was no good reason that a child had to resort to sin and wickedness provided the child has been lovingly guided toward loving God and the good. Bushnell suggested that parents “bathe the child in their own feeling of love to God, and dependence on him, and contrition for wrong before him…; to make what is good, happy and attractive, what is wrong, odious and hateful” (Horace Bushnell, Christian Nurture [New York: Charles Scribner, 1861; reprint, Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994], 10). Through careful, loving nurturance, the child of a Christian family would find it “all but impossible” to forsake the Christian faith. Children simply need the proper Christian care of godly parents in order to see that natural goodness come to fruition in a virtuous Christian life. (For more on Bushnell’s view of children, see Margaret Bendroth, “Horace Bushnell’s Christian Nurture,” The Child in Christian Thought, 350-364.)

523 This way of viewing childhood innocence as something inevitably lost through maturity could be contrasted with the view of childhood in other sectors of the homeschooling movement. For some on the progressive side, the child is naturally “enchanted” and the parents’ role is to protect and cultivate this enchantment. See, for example, Rebecca A. Allahyari, “Homeschooling the Enchanted Child: Ambivalent Attachments in the Domestic Southwest” in What Matters? Ethnographies of Value in a Not So Secular Age, eds. Courtney Bender and Ann Taves (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 179-214.
childbirth. Carley and Deborah both speak of the way the unrestrained affection of children blesses parents and how the addition of another child naturally brings additional joy to the family. Their comments are echoed in the works of Quiverfull writers who frequently employ Victorian-era pictures of cherubic, docile (white) children as they extol the goods of children. On the cover of Nancy Campbell’s book *Be Fruitful and Multiply*, a well-dressed, porcelain-skinned Victorian couple leans over the bassinet of a rosy-cheeked infant dressed in white lace. Even though the innocence of children is provisional, it remains an important part of the way children are imagined in Quiverfull discourse.

On the other hand, Quiverfull practitioners imagine children as sinners because they were born with the sinful nature that all humans possess as descendents of Adam. While the innocence of children is a temporary reality, elite and lay Quiverfull proponents believe that the sinfulness of children is something that endures. Because “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), they believe all humans are born sinful. Lacking proper training and instruction, children will persist in their sinfulness and choose a life of wickedness. Imagining the child as a sinner is evidenced in both the testimony of Quiverull mothers and the written materials of the subculture. In the following excerpt, Renee employs both the language of innocence (quoted above) and sinfulness simultaneously:

I would have to say that we’re born fallen, not sinners. And that’s going to come out in one way or another without any encouragement. But, there’s also a personality that’s innocent. You’re innocent until you learn things. Some children learn early by picking up things around them, by picking up what appeals to that sin nature… We just have a tendency to sin and always will without guidance not

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to. I think there’s a whole lot of goodness and innocence [in people] and if it’s
taken care of it can draw people more toward the good than bad.

Despite the fact that Renee opts for the descriptor “fallen” over “sinner,” the
tension between childhood innocence and sinfulness is evident.\textsuperscript{525} She affirms
simultaneously that children are “innocent until [they] learn things” and that they have a
“sin nature” and “tendency to sin.” The idea of innocence until the acquisition of
knowledge implies that children are a moral blank slate that needs only to be written
upon rightly. But, the idea of a fixed sin nature and inherent tendency to sin implies that
there’s a moral defect in children from the very beginning.

The same tension is present in the way Deborah describes children. When I posed
the same question about the nature of children to her, she laughed boisterously and
responded:

Oh they’re sinners. Oh my goodness, they are so sinners. [Laughter.] I don’t know
when that change comes, obviously. A baby is the most innocent thing possible.
And there are so many things about young children that are innocent—meaning
they have not been exposed to the world, the things that make us grow in bad
ways. So, in that way, yes, they’re innocent. But, I mean, they are sinners. They
are born sinners and as they grow and develop that becomes way more apparent
and obvious. And from the beginning I feel like that’s an advantage to a parent to
have that in mind and recognize it from an early age. The innocence is going to
diminish and their sinful nature is going to increase as they grow up and are
controlled by their own flesh. Babies don’t do that yet. But, once that starts, they
are more and more controlled by their flesh. Because every child will lie. Every
child will do things like that. That proves we all sin.

Both Renee and Deborah imagine a child’s innocence as something they possess
from the start but then lose gradually over the course of time. As Deborah describes it, a
baby is the most innocent thing possible. As they age, though, “their sinful nature is
going to increase” and they are “more and more controlled by their flesh.” (Here she is

\textsuperscript{525} Renee is the only one of my informants to make this distinction between “fallen” and “sinner”
and, to my knowledge, it is not a common distinction made within evangelical culture in general.
using “flesh” in the tradition of the Apostle Paul, who imagined the “flesh” constantly at odds with the Spirit in the Christian life: “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh” [Gal. 5:16, 17]). So, the innocence of children is lost as they age, while the “flesh” (or sinful nature) grows in its degree of control over the child. To put it starkly, children grow out of their innocence and grow into their sinfulness. Thus, it becomes of paramount importance to begin their training from a young age.

This point of view is in line with what Michael and Debi Pearl say about the moral development of children in their book, To Train Up a Child.\textsuperscript{526} Although considered marginal figures by many in the homeschooling movement, the Pearls have exercised considerable influence among Quiverfull families, especially in the area of childrearing.\textsuperscript{527} For example, Deborah and Renee both draw on some of the Pearls’ teachings in their childrearing practices, though not uncritically. A central premise for how the Pearls imagine children is that, “[Children] begin life in innocent self-

\textsuperscript{526} There is a significant amount of controversy surrounding To Train Up A Child (Pleasantville, TN: No Greater Joy Ministries, 1994), both inside and outside the Christian homeschooling movement. The book has played a part in a few well-publicized stories of child abuse and neglect, three of which resulted in death. (I will discuss these cases in more detail in Chapter 6.) For their part, the Pearls flatly deny that their book leads to abuse if parents follow their instructions (See, Michael Pearl, “Hanna William’s Death – Official Statement,” No Greater Joy Ministries, undated, accessed June 11, 2015, https://nogreaterjoy.org/ministry/answers/hana-williams-official-statement/. But, many others disagree and point to the teaching of the Pearls as necessarily harmful to children.

\textsuperscript{527} For example, despite the controversy surrounding it, their book To Train Up a Child has sold over 660,000 copies. Voddie Baucham confirms the influence of the Pearls by devoting an entire chapter in his book, Family Shepherds, to engaging their view of children as sinners. He says, “The influence of Pearl’s work in certain circles cannot be overstated. This is especially true in homeschooling families” (Family Shepherds: Calling and Equipping Men to Lead Their Homes [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011], 118).
centeredness. God does not impute it to them as sin, but it is the foundation of sin." Parents need to be aware that the small child’s “selfishness” is not itself sin, but it will “soon move in that direction.” They warn, “Drives which are not in themselves evil, nonetheless, form the seedbed on which sin will assuredly grow. As parents train the young child, they must take into consideration the evil that a self-willed spirit will eventually bring.” The Pearls use this construction of children to support their contention that the training of children in obedience to their parents must begin in infancy. Because the moral development of the child will mean an increase in the “flesh” or “self-willed spirit,” they teach that it is vital to bring the will of the child into “complete subjection” from early on. A child who learns to resist selfishness and “voluntarily surrender to the rule of law” early on will be less likely to fall into grave error when he is finally a “responsible, moral soul” (which they imagine takes place some time between 12 and 20 years old).

Although he is a less controversial author, Voddie Baucham actually goes even further than the Pearls in his characterization of children as sinners. He says flatly, “All children are shaped in iniquity and conceived in sin.” In his sermons, he repeatedly calls the child “a viper in a diaper.” For this reason, children must be trained “from the time they can crawl” to obey their parents immediately and without question, something he

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528 Renee speaks approvingly of the Pearls on the matter of child training. It may be that her idea that children are born fallen but later grow into sinfulness (note 525 above) is informed by the Pearls’ teaching.

529 Pearl and Pearl, To Train Up a Child, 19.

530 Ibid., 21.

531 Ibid.

calls “first-time obedience.” For Baucham, learning to obey parents immediately is the first step in ridding the child’s heart of sin and foolishness and teaching them to obey God. Without proper training, children will inevitably become unruly and ungodly. So, Baucham says, “[O]ur children must learn that they’re sinners. They didn’t simply ‘pick up bad habits’; they sin... Johnny doesn’t disobey because he’s cranky, tired, or hungry... He does it because he’s a descendant of Adam.” Child training, therefore, is for the purpose of restraining evil in children. In fact, not only does Baucham teach that evil is in children but also that children themselves are evil:

[T]hese small little cherubs — these so-called “innocent ones” — the reason that they do what they do is because they are every bit of Romans, Chapter 3, Verses 9-18. They come into the world like this. One of the reasons that God makes human babies small is so they won’t kill their parents in their sleep. They’re evil. Yes, this is true of children: “None is righteous; no, not one. None understands. No one seeks God. No one does good.” Yes, that little, precious one — you better believe it. If you don’t, you miss the big picture and you don’t realize your desperate need to get the gospel to your child again and again and again and again.535

Because of this view of the total depravity of children, for parents to neglect the task of child training and restraining sin is, in a real way, to abandon the child (and the world the child will inhabit) to destruction.536

534 Baucham, Family Shepherds, 119, 125.
536 The Pearls say as much: “Anticipating the child’s development, and knowing that evil will come to be a part of his moral being, places an urgent sense of responsibility upon parents. The world is a powerful, unrelenting undertow, pulling children to destruction. Looking at statistics alone, the probability is overwhelmingly against their moral survival” (To Train Up a Child, 19). Both the Pearls and Baucham promote the use of corporeal punishment in infants, toddlers, and young children in order to teach obedience and “restrain evil” (Baucham’s phrase). Yet, even though the Pearls are most associated with physical punishment, Baucham’s instructions (found in his sermons and writings) are even more extreme by comparison. In Stollar’s words, “[W]hereas Pearl believes parents should be more like ‘the Holy Spirit’
Of course, by imagining children as sinners, Quiverfull practitioners are not unique in the Christian tradition. They draw heavily on scripture to support this point of view. The psalmist, for example, speaks of being conceived in iniquity and being a sinner from the womb (Ps. 51:5). And, as referenced above, the Apostle Paul claims, “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Many quote from the book of Proverbs to support the use of physical discipline in childrearing, which is considered vital due to the natural sinfulness of children. According to Prov. 22:15, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him.” Also, “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him” (Prov. 13:24). The exhortation of Prov. 23:13-14 is particularly severe: “Do not withhold discipline from your children; if you beat them with a rod, they will not die. If you beat them with the rod, you will save their lives from Sheol.”

Baucham believes parents should be ‘like that of policemen.’ Baucham’s system thus ends up being more authoritarian than Pearl’s, and that is caused by the fact that Baucham not only believes in original sin (as does Pearl), but also total depravity. How Baucham applies his belief in the latter (total depravity) makes Pearl’s child training system appear gentle and weak in comparison” (Stollar, “The Child as Viper”).

Baucham says, “I have…discovered that there is a home training manual. It is called the Holy Bible. God has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:3), and that includes training and teaching our children. Anyone who has read the book of Proverbs knows that the Bible is filled with valuable child-training information. God has not left us in the dark on this issue” (Family Driven Faith, 96).

When writing and speaking about child training, Baucham and others quote often from Proverbs, which regularly advocates for corporeal punishment to train foolish children. Moreover, through the ages, the view of children as sinners has been quite common among influential Christian theologians. When Quiverfull parents speak of the need restrain the natural depravity of children, they do so in agreement with the likes of Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. Augustine’s Confessions laments, “[N]o man is free from sin, not even a child who has lived only one day on earth… If I was born in sin and guilt was with me already when my mother conceived me, where, I ask you, Lord, where or when was I, your servant, ever innocent?” (Augustine, Confessions [trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin; New York: Penguin Books, 1961], 27-8). Luther loved his own children deeply and called them his “little jesters,” yet he spoke of the need for parents to chasten the child’s natural sinfulness. In his “Treatise on Good Works,” Luther writes: “This work [of parenting] appears easy, yet few see it rightly. For where the parents are truly godly and love their children not just in human fashion, but (as they ought) instruct and direct them by words and works to serve God in the first three commandments, then in these cases the child’s own will is constantly broken” (Martin Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” in Selected Writings of Martin Luther: 1517-1520, ed. Theodore G. Tappert [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967], 164). While Calvin was prone to see infants and young children as less illustrative of sin as their older counterparts, his
All of the above verses lend support to the Quiverfull commitment to careful religious formation throughout childhood in order to combat their natural sinfulness. In practice, this vital task is accomplished with a combination of daily prayer and scripture reading, regular instruction and admonition, weekly family worship, and sometimes, physical punishment. In contemporary conversations about children, the harm and danger of physical punishment is a critical concern. In fact, many scholars have argued that a robust view of children as sinners is directly linked to physical, mental, and emotional abuse of children by parents and other caregivers.\textsuperscript{540} For now, we will postpone the matter of physical punishment (or spanking). But, at present it is important to see that the view of children as sinners is often, though not always, linked to the use of physical chastisement. Although it is by no means the only, or even the most important, practice in Quiverfull childrearing, the promotion and practice of spanking remains commonplace throughout the subculture. And, more often than not, the use of spanking is linked directly to the sin nature of children (as we saw in Proverbs), which is in urgent need of restraint and correction.

Robust doctrine of humankind’s total depravity led him to see children of all ages as subject to the curse of sin. In the \textit{Institutes}, Calvin writes, “Even infants bear their condemnation with them from their mother’s womb; for, though they have not yet brought forth the fruits of their own iniquity, they have the seed enclosed within themselves. Indeed, their whole nature is a seed of sin; thus it cannot be but hateful and abominable to God” (John Calvin, \textit{Institutes of the Christian Religion}, 4.15.10, trans. Henry Beveridge [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publisher, 2008].) We could also quote from the works of Menno Simons, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and more. For more discussion on this subject, see Bunge, \textit{The Child in Christian Thought}.\textsuperscript{540} See, for example, Alice Miller, \textit{For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence}, trans. Hildegarde and Hunter Hannum (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983); Philip Greven, \textit{Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse} (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Donald Capps, \textit{The Child’s Song: The Religious Abuse of Children} (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995); and Stephen Pattison, “‘Suffer Little Children’: The Challenge of Child Abuse and Neglect to Theology,” \textit{Theology and Sexuality}, vol. 9 (1998): 36-58. Greven makes the claim that Christian theology itself is rooted in punishment.
B. Theological Analysis

As I said above, when Quiverfull practitioners imagine children as both innocents and sinners, they are not exceptional. Despite the inherent tensions in these two ways of thinking, both strands of thought have a long history in Christian and non-Christian imaginings about children. Contemporary theologians have done important work shedding light on the problems inherent in both tendencies. On the one hand, those who insist on the inherent sinfulness of children overlook the way that children are can be mediators of truth, beauty, and goodness to those around them. Jesus holds out the vulnerable child as an example of those who will surely enter into the Kingdom of God (Matt. 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-15; Luke 18:15-17). He quotes approvingly of the psalmist: “Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise” (Matt. 21:16; quoting Ps. 8:2). Also, he asserts that welcoming children is a means by which disciples welcome Jesus himself (Matt. 18:1-6). Thus, hard and fast notions of childhood iniquity and corruption cannot stand without serious nuance. On the other hand, those who insist on the innocence of children overlook the way that children are implicated in, and influenced by the vulnerability of human life and the brokenness of their surroundings. Human interdependence means that all human beings are capable of harming and being harmed—including children. Of all people, parents and caregivers know the many ways in which, knowingly or unknowingly, their children can bring hurt and harm on others.

541 Perhaps what is unique in the contemporary context is the way that they leverage this vision of children into support for the practices of pronatalism and homeschooling (with an eye toward careful child training and discipline).
Within a Christian theology of children and childhood, romanticizing the child as a blameless cherub will not stand either.\(^{542}\)

Thus, as we seek a Christian imagination about children, it is important to recognize that they, like all human beings, are capable of both goodness and wickedness, charity and depravity, selfishness and selflessness—usually not one or the other but a mixture of both. Moreover, like all human beings, they are implicated within a web of relationships, in which they can both endure and inflict harm. To this end, Bonnie Miller-McLemore, drawing on Anne Higonnet, offers the idea of the “knowing child” as a correction to the innocent-sinner dichotomy.\(^{543}\) The concept of the knowing child recognizes the fact that children have “consciously active minds and bodies” that are capable of agency. Whereas children have often been viewed as the polar opposite of adults—either wholly innocent or wholly sinful—Higonnet suggests a more complicated perspective. Children offer as much “difficulty, trouble, and tension” as they do “celebration, admiration, and passionate attachment.”\(^{544}\) Miller-McLemore insists that we must distinguish between adults and children in a way that does not “rob children of sexual, moral, and spiritual knowledge and agency.” Children are not as innocent and carefree as adults imagine, nor are adults as “sophisticated or superior” as they like to think.\(^{545}\)

Among other things, the idea of the “knowing child” helps us to recognize that being prone to selfishness is not simply the purview of the child, but a problem that

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\(^{542}\) Joyce Ann Mercer agrees with the inadequacy of both the child-as-sinner and child-as-innocent perspectives. See, \textit{Welcoming Children}, 11.


\(^{544}\) Miller-McLemore, \textit{Let the Children Come}, 20.

\(^{545}\) Ibid., 22.
afflicts human beings in general. Certainly, children can sin against their parents and others in their sphere of influence, but parents and adult caregivers are just as capable of sinning against those under their care. Most of these violations are relatively minor and easily remedied, such as incidences of unkindness and impatience, unloving looks and words, or unjustified anger. But, parents can also sin against their children in grievous ways, such as neglect of physical, emotional, and educational needs, physical assault, and verbal abuse. The fact that parents are capable of harming the vulnerable children in their care is a point that must be kept front-and-center in any discussion of parental authority or child training. This is especially true in our discussion of the Quiverfull movement where families are often isolated within the single-family home. We will consider this matter in more detail in Chapter 6, but it will suffice for now to say that the children of Quiverfull families are not served well by theologies that overemphasize their sinfulness and downplay the sinfulness of parents. Although charged with the important task of raising children, parents and other caregivers are no less in need of training and guidance as the children in their midst.

This is something Carley especially seemed to recognize when she struggled to answer my questions about the purpose of childhood. My questions and her answers are as follows:

Emily: What do you think is the purpose of childhood?

Carley: Oh sheesh… Um… Oh man… That’s a hard one! [Laughter.] If you take everything back to Scripture and figure it out there… Clearly, Jesus loves children. He says that we are to have faith like a child. So, I think that we can learn so much from them… [T]hey can teach us so much about life. We get in that mundane routine and forget things that they don’t. Maybe they’re more free-spirited? They definitely don’t worry like we do.
Emily: So, then, are you saying that childhood is for the benefit of adults?

Carley: I don’t know! [Laughter.] I think adults benefit from children. But, also I think that children are learning from adults through their instruction and authority. Maybe there’s a pull back and forth. I don’t know. That’s a hard one. They test our patience, they test our patience, they test our patience. That’s just what they do… They humble me, you know? You think you have it figured out and then they shed some new light on it. Sanctify would be a good word.

Certainly, as Carley acknowledges, parents have a special duty to the instruction of their children that children do not have for their parents. But, she also recognizes that there is a kind of sanctification taking place as parents and children relate to each other. Within the church and the Christian family, both parents and their children are members of the new covenant in Christ and disciples in the Way of Jesus. As both seek conformity to Christ, both are in constant need of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. This makes careful examination of family practices, especially those pertaining to training and discipline, of vital importance. And it makes the family’s rootedness in the church and its practices even more imperative.

We will discuss these and related matters in more detail in Chapter 6. For now, though, the point is that the dominant Christian imagination about childhood, evidenced within Quiverfull practice, is inadequate. We must move beyond the innocent-sinful dichotomy to include a sense of moral agency and spiritual knowledge, including the capability for good and evil. Moreover, our imaginings about children must be closely connected to Christian anthropology as a whole, which envisions adults as well as children as perpetually in need of grace, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Within the Christian family, the capacity for sin within the heart of the child is found also
within the heart of the parent. Therefore, adults, as much as children, are in need of training and discipline as they learn to resist evil and choose the good. A theology that overly emphasizes the sinfulness of children over against the adults who care for them can unwittingly obscure the fact that adults, who are also spiritual “works in progress,” have much to learn from the children in their midst.

IV. The Child as Adult-In-The-Making

Thus far, we have seen that the Quiverfull movement imagines children as divine gifts, innocents in need of protection, and sinners in need of training. In this section, we turn to the third theme present in Quiverfull discourse about children: Children are adults-in-the-making and childhood is simply a period of training and preparation for adulthood. This section will explicate this way of imagining children and childhood. Then, as with the previous sections, I will offer my own theological perspective on the merits and challenges of this point of view in conversation with select voices from contemporary theology.

A. Description

Although there are some variations within the movement on this subject, the general picture is the same. Quiverfull childhood is understood to be a temporary stage of life that serves as preparation for adulthood. This period of time is for the purpose of learning how to be a responsible, contributing member of the family, church, and society.

Indeed, I find it a curious inconsistency that Baucham is not as insistent on the matter of total depravity with parents as he is with children. It is telling, for example, that Baucham uses the term “viper” to refer to children when, in the gospels, Jesus exclusively applies that term to adults—adult religious leaders, for that matter. A vision of total depravity that applies to all human beings—children and parents alike—would seem to point toward restraint and non-violence in respect to disciplinary methods. If all humans are totally depraved, then how can parents trust that they will rightly and fairly administer discipline with their children?
So, the primary posture of a child is that of student. Also, childhood is supposed to be a relatively short period of time, ending around adolescence or sexual maturity. Put simply, children are adults-in-the-making and childhood is a training and developmental period that ends at the onset of adulthood.

It is clear from talking with Quiverfull mothers that childhood is viewed as a temporary period set apart for training in preparation for adulthood. In Deborah’s words, “[I]t is [about] training and development. Developing into a man or woman. It’s [about] growing. [T]he purpose of childhood would be growing and training. It is a time to be trained because the Bible says to train them.” Because the Bible speaks of the vital importance of training children, childhood is viewed as a time of learning with an eye toward their growth into adulthood. Renee expands more on this idea when she says the following:

[A child is] moving from awareness to learn[ing] about life—to learn how everything works. To learn about people and learn information. To learn languages and music and all that stuff. To learn kindness and to be trained. From the parent’s perspective, childhood is for them to learn that they’re loved unconditionally and positively and gently trained toward goodness. That was my goal of parenting: to make goodness normal. To make kindness and happiness and love and good language normal. So that when they left they did not have bad habits like angry outbursts and bad mouths or temper fits. I’ve trained them in daily life not to have that. They all had their periods, right? They pushed boundaries and such where they behaved in a lot of ways that I didn’t teach them. But, it wasn’t their habit. They were just acting out temporarily. So, my idea would be childhood would be that period to enjoy and be happy and feel loved and secure and trained toward goodness.

In Renee’s imagination, children are adult-in-the-making who need unconditional love, security, and “gentle train[ing]” to help them grow “toward goodness.” If a parent is responsible and careful with the period of childhood, the child will grow up without “bad
habits,” viewing goodness, kindness, happiness, love, and “good language” as normal patterns of behavior.

The Pearls, referenced in the previous section, see children and childhood in the same way. They use the metaphor of a potter and clay (coming from Jer. 18:4): “If God is the potter and your child is the clay, you are the wheel on which the clay is to be turned.” Then, they switch metaphors and liken children to Adam and Eve:

There will come a time when you child must stand alone before “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” As the purpose of God has permitted, he will inevitably partake of the forbidden fruit. Now, in the developing years, you can make a difference in how he will respond after he has “eaten.” … Will he hide his sin, or repent? Everything a child experiences, either by way of indulgence or the self-restraint you impose, is preparing him for the day when he will mature into a responsible, moral soul.547

The Pearls’ language makes explicit that they view children as adults-in-the-making. During childhood, a child is like clay on a potter’s wheel, being formed by God through the work of Christian parents. Eventually, children will “mature into a responsible, moral soul,” but for now, children must be instructed in “self-restraint” so that when that day comes, they are ready to “repent” and choose the good. Childhood, therefore, is for the purpose of moral training

Not only is childhood a key time of training in morality, but also a vital time for learning how to be a quasi-independent, contributing member of the family, church, and society. I say “quasi-independent” because my informants do not envision children ceasing to be part of the family once they reach maturity. Indeed, it is an important family goal that close relationships exist among siblings and that parents are trustworthy advisors beyond childhood into adulthood. Moreover, they want their children to see themselves as obligated to contribute positively to church and society through their work,

547 Pearl and Pearl, To Train Up a Child, 21.
whatever form that takes. Although moral development takes primacy in Quiverfull families, there remains an eye toward preparation for work. Renee saw to it that her teenage children had jobs beyond the home that could make a contribution to society. Deborah and Dan lament that his job doesn’t allow him to apprentice his children in some kind of craft or trade. They wish they had a family-based business that they could pass on to their children. Nevertheless, the important point is that childhood is for learning and training. The primary posture of a child should be that of student or apprentice, preparing for “real life” in adulthood.

If Quiverfull childhood is a time of training for adulthood, then childhood is also a relatively short period of time, ending sometime between 12 and 21. Renee is the most outspoken on this subject and views childhood in the most limited terms. She says that society has been sold “a bill of goods” in the idea of adolescence because, in her mind, childhood ends around 12 years old. So, there are no “teen years,” just childhood and adulthood. Renee says, “Our culture has it wrong in what we expect of our teens. I think the way Jewish families do it is right. Around 12 or 13 you’re expected to act like an adult and live in light of the Law.” Here, Renee is invoking a common way of envisioning children within the Quiverfull movement and the Christian homeschooling movement as a whole. Arguably the most important source of this idea is David Alan Black’s book, *The Myth of Adolescence: Raising Responsible Children in an Irresponsible Society.*\(^{548}\) Basically, Black argues that Jesus should be the model for human development. Since Jesus became an adult at 12 years so should Christian children today. Moreover, Black argues that scripture as a whole sees human life in only

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three stages: childhood, young adulthood, and mature adulthood. He says that if Christians are to live in light of scripture, then they must abandon modern notions of adolescence and adopt the Bible’s view of childhood. This means that for many Quiverfull families, childhood is a very short period of training that ends at 12, even if, as is often the case, the child continue to live at home.

Although Deborah and Carley agree that childhood is a relatively short period of time that comes to an end when the child becomes an adult, they are less dogmatic about when that transition takes place. When I asked Deborah when childhood ends, she responded as follows: “Phew… I don’t know. It used to end a lot sooner, didn’t it? Now, it’s a lot later. I think it just depends… [The end of] childhood just depends on the family, culture, and individual. I mean, [an extended family member] is 20 years old and he’s a child. But, I don’t see [my oldest daughter] being a child at 20.” Although still a period of training that ends at adulthood, Deborah doesn’t see childhood ending at a set time. For her, the maturation of each child is different and dependent upon outside factors like the family of origin and surrounding culture. Carley seems to share this point of view, but her experience with special needs children makes her hesitant to assert one specific age for the end of childhood. Speaking of the existence of “gray areas” in child development, she points to an “age of accountability” as key to knowing when a child becomes an adult. Carley defines the age of accountability as a time when a child knows right from wrong and has the mental reasoning to choose one or the other.\footnote{When Quiverfull practitioners view children as adults-in-the-making, they do so with support from a number of thinkers in the Christian tradition. Most notable is Thomas Aquinas, who constructed his view of human development in conversation with the work of Aristotle. For Thomas, the full use of reason is the vital sign of adulthood. Speaking of infants and small children, he says, “So long as he had not the use of reason he is like a non-rational animal” (Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae}, II-II.10.12, quoted by Jensen, \textit{Graced Vulnerability}, 8). Once the child grows into the use of reason and right worship of God, the child grows into full personhood and accountability for sin. For Thomas, “Childhood…is not an abiding
B. Theological Analysis

In addition to complicating the vision of children as innocents and sinners, we must reckon with the inadequacy of the view that children are simply adults-in-the-making and childhood simply a stage on the way to adulthood. As David Jensen has observed, “The tendency…is to consider childhood as a state that will be molded into something more mature once the pernicious tendencies of children are stamped out. Childhood, then, serves partly as a foil to a life of mature discipleship, and is not celebrated for its own sake.”550 Certainly, there are developmental distinctions to be made between adults and children, distinctions that are particularly important in discussions of educational methods and age appropriate responsibilities and consequences. Still, I think the work of a few contemporary theologians point us toward two important realities: 1) there are aspects of childhood (“childness”) that remain part of human beings long after they cease to be considered children; 2) childhood is not a period to be passed through on the way to adulthood, but a vital and enduring part of the mature Christian life.

“Childness” is the term coined by Herbert Anderson and Susan B. W. Johnson in their book, Regarding Children. They use this neologism as a way of referring to the abiding nature of childhood. “[I]n becoming adults, we do not lose childhood,” they say, reality, but a state that adults leave behind” (Jensen, Graced Vulnerability, 9). In this way, children (and, really, anyone who cannot demonstrate the full capacity for reason) are not fully functioning human persons. They will become fully rational and fully human upon reaching adulthood. Children, therefore, are valued mostly for who they will become and childhood is something to be discarded as quickly as possible.

The concept of the child as adult-in-the-making is also in accordance with the way U.S. law imagines childhood. By and large, children are perceived as growing into their roles and responsibilities in society. Also, they do not share in adult cognitive abilities, especially the understanding of consequences, so children, in general, are not held to the same standards as adults. Nevertheless, this distinction has become more muddled in recent years. United States courts are increasingly more open to trying children as adults, particularly in the case of violent crimes.

550 Jensen, Graced Vulnerability, 6.
“[C]hildhood is an inevitable dimension of being human."\textsuperscript{551} Certainly, changes occur in a person as they grow and mature from childhood into adulthood. But, there are enduring elements of “childness” that remain with every human being regardless of their age.

So, what does childhood entail? Two aspects are important for our purposes. First, childness encompasses vulnerability in relationship to others and the world. To be vulnerable is to be open to harm. Children are vulnerable primarily due to their dependence upon others. Infants, especially, demonstrate profound neediness that is born not out of a complete reliance upon others for food, safety, and solace. But, if we consider carefully the nature of human existence, we realize that “we never outgrow the vulnerability of childhood, even when we are no longer obviously small, weak, and needful.”\textsuperscript{552} Indeed, as David Jensen argues, the “vulnerability-in-relationship” we see so obviously in children is an aspect of the “God-given relatedness” that all are born into and no one outgrows.\textsuperscript{553} This is not to romanticize vulnerability or the dangers of childhood, but simply to draw our attention to the fact that all people, including children, are vulnerable, something we explored in the unique case of motherhood in Chapter 4.\textsuperscript{554} This aspect of childness continues throughout human life.\textsuperscript{555}

Second, childness includes an “infinite openness” toward God and creation that is “already an expression of mature religious existence.”\textsuperscript{556} This is a claim that originates

\textsuperscript{551} Herbert Anderson and Susan B. W. Johnson, Regarding Children: A New Respect for Childhood and Families (Family Living in Pastoral Perspective Series; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 7.
\textsuperscript{552} Anderson and Johnson, Regarding Children, 22.
\textsuperscript{553} Jensen, Graced Vulnerability, 49.
\textsuperscript{554} Anderson and Johnson, Regarding Children, 23.
\textsuperscript{555} According to theologian Arthur C. McGill, human life is a resting-in-neediness. He says, “In the kingdom of Jesus we always begin with neediness, we always live outward toward neediness, and we always end in neediness” (Arthur C. McGill, Death and Life: An American Theology [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987], 83).
\textsuperscript{556} Anderson and Johnson, Regarding Children, 22.
with Karl Rahner, who argues somewhat counter-intuitively that within the Christian
tradition being human is about becoming a child in an ever-increasing degree. He says,

The mature childhood of the adult is the attitude in which we bravely and
trustfully maintain an infinite openness in all circumstances and despite the
experiences of life which seem to invite us to close ourselves. Such openness,
infinite and maintained in all circumstances, yet put into practice in the actually
manner in which we live our lives, is the expression of religious existence.\(^{557}\)

If childhood is understood as “infinite openness in all circumstances,” then the
mature Christian adult should embody childness in a fuller, more complete way than the
child. For adults to attain to the openness of children, they must repent and be converted;
but, “this conversion is only to become what we already are – children.” Jensen describes
this infinite openness in terms of being a “pilgrim, oriented God-ward and toward the
present,”\(^{558}\) but his language is very similar to Rahner’s. Through their attentiveness to
the present, he says, children call us “to become who we really are: children of God,
attentive to the surprise and mystery of creation.”\(^{559}\) No matter how it is described,
however, the point is that the child’s enthusiasm for God and God’s world is not a quality
to be shed in adulthood but “always appropriate for the life that is rightly lived.”\(^{560}\)

Thus, childhood is revealed to be a characteristic of human life in general.
Childhood is more than just a phase, but a vital and enduring part of the advanced
Christian life. We must resist the tendency, therefore, to view children as merely adults-

of Rahner’s view of children and childhood is his “transcendental method” in which “human beings
experience a fundamental openness (a self-transcendence) toward God in every truly human act.” So, at the
center of every human being is “a God whose mystery, light, and love have embraced the total person”
(Mary Ann Hinsdale, “Infinite Openness to the Infinite: Karl Rahner’s Contribution to Modern Catholic
Thought on Children,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, 419). This perspective would not necessarily be
shared by all or even most Protestants.

\(^{558}\) Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability*, 44. Jensen is building on the work of Robert Coles, *The Spiritual

\(^{559}\) Ibid., 53.

\(^{560}\) Anderson and Johnson, *Regarding Children*, 24.
in-the-making and childhood as stage to be dispensed with as quickly as possible. In the large families of the Quiverfull movement, it is understandable from a practical standpoint why childhood would be treated as a short period of training to be dispensed with swiftly. The practice of homeschooling, in particular, may reinforce the sense that children are unformed or incomplete persons in need of diligent instruction to become full persons (that is, adults). But, as we have seen, to be a child is to be vulnerable in relationship with others and to be infinitely open and on pilgrimage in God’s world. Viewed in this light, it is clear that adults have as much to learn from children as children do from adults—something Carley Miller tried to express above. Again, this is not a romanticization of children as such, but an exhortation to recognize within children a vital key to what it means to be human. Children are more than simply adults-in-the-making, but already fully human persons and religious pilgrims in their own right.

V. The Child as the Sole Custody of Parents

As we have seen thus far, Quiverfull practitioners imagine children as divine gifts, innocents and sinners, and adults-in-the-making. But, there is one more important way that children are imagined in Quiverfull discourse: Children are viewed as the sole property of their parents. When Quiverfull practitioners imagine children, they do not see them as in any sense belonging to larger communities or institutions, whether local

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561 Speaking about homeschooling, Renee Tanner warns against the tendency to view one’s children as always wearing “post-it notes on their foreheads.” She explained that homeschooling mothers are prone to seeing their children as projects to be worked on rather than people to be enjoyed in their own right. After over 20 years of homeschooling, Renee tries to avoid this tendency and works instead on forming a strong friendship with each of her children as they grow older.

562 One of the implications here is that our theology of adulthood is deficient in many ways as well. Any altered view of childhood necessarily has consequences for adults and adulthood.
neighborhoods, the nation, or the church. Instead, individual children belong to individual parents within individual families. Because children belong only to their parents, parents are the ones solely responsible for their care, upbringing, and spiritual formation. In other words, their vision of children and childhood is thoroughly privatized, limited to the home of the nuclear family. Still, Quiverfull families are far from unique in this respect, for they share this privatized vision of children and childhood with evangelicals and American culture in general. Following the same pattern we have seen thus far, this section will describe the Quiverfull perspective on this subject, followed by a theological analysis of the same.

A. Description

Mary Pride has been a key spokesperson against “governmental interference” in childrearing (especially the work of the Child Protection Agency) since the earliest days of the Christian homeschooling movement. This stance is rooted in her view that children belong only to parents, something shared with many Christian homeschooling families. Her comments in The Way Home are illustrative of this mindset: “God gave parents, and parents only, the job of shaping their children’s values… Our responsibility to teach our children their moral and spiritual values cannot be delegated. Both Deuteronomy 6:7 and Deuteronomy 11:19 make it clear that this training must occur at home, throughout the course of the family’s day together.” For Pride, the major appeal of homeschooling for parents is that it allows them to have total control over their child’s instruction.

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563 They also do not imagine children belonging to themselves because children are not understood to be independent of their parents. They only derive rights from their parents.
564 Pride, The Way Home, 92-93 (emphasis in original).
565 Ibid., 97.
This control is vital because of the Christian parent’s duty to raise their children in the Christian faith.

Although writing many years later, Baucham echoes Pride’s perspective when he says, “God has designed your family—not the youth group, not the children’s ministry, not the Christian school, but your family—as the principal discipling agent in your children’s lives. The most important job you have as a parent is to train and disciple your children.”\textsuperscript{566} Even in Christian households, therefore, children are envisioned not primarily as members of the body of Christ but as the (subordinate) members of the nuclear family. It is the parents’ job—and no one else’s—to train children and lead them into Christian maturity.\textsuperscript{567}

Of course, Quiverfull practitioners do affirm the theological principle that children ultimately belong to God. Pride says, “Who owns our kids? God owns our kids.” But, in the very next sentence she insists, “And [God] has given parents the responsibility of making sure they turn out to be his kids.”\textsuperscript{568} Children belong to God, but God has given children to their parents in the context of the private family home to raise them.

Speaking of the birth of his daughter, Baucham says, “She had to be fed, changed, clothed, educated, and protected. She has to be brought up in the ‘nurture and admonition

\textsuperscript{566} Baucham, \textit{Family Driven Faith}, 118. I think it is telling that Baucham names programs of the church (“youth group” and “children’s ministry”) but not the church itself in his denunciation of other institutions as “discipling agent[s]” for children. It seems that Baucham either sees the church as equivalent to its programs (an exceedingly thin ecclesiology, to be sure) or he doesn’t see the church as having any role at all in the Christian formation of children. In either case, he demonstrates a serious deficit of ecclesiology. I will revisit this matter in more detail below.

\textsuperscript{567} This vision of children is often wedded to a vision of parents in which they are representatives of God and God’s character to their children. In this view, parents are the dispensers of love and justice to their children, acting in God’s place. When parents fail to properly represent God to their children, they unwittingly lead their children away from God and into destruction. The Pearls offer a good example of this perspective: “In the limited world of the child, parents are representatives of truth and justice, dispensers of punishment and reward. A child’s parents are the window through which he develops a view of what God is life and how moral government functions… Your responses to transgressions are stage-playing the responses of God” (\textit{To Train Up a Child}, 53).

\textsuperscript{568} Ibid., 99.
of the Lord’… And the only people on whom this obligation fell were my wife and me. This little girl was our responsibility.”

As a result, the future success and failure of every child is laid at the feet of the two-parent nuclear family. The responsibility is not shared in any respect by other communities or institutions. So, if the parents fail in their responsibility to properly train the children given to their care, they have failed God in addition to their children.

Renee shares Pride and Baucham’s point of view. When I asked her about the responsibility of the church for children, she responded, “I feel like the parents should be the spiritual leader and disciplers of their children. That’s not the job of the church. They’re supposed to equip and empower them and teach to undergird and reinforce the parents.” When asked the same question of Deborah, she said something very similar: “I believe that it’s the parents’ responsibility for caring, training, everything… I think the church’s responsibility should be equipping families to do what the Lord has called them to do.” In this way of imagining children, they are the sole custody of the parents in the family home and it is the church’s role to support and encourage the work of parents.

Children do not, in any real sense, belong to the church or the wider community apart from their parents.

The central biblical passage for this insistence that children belong to parents is Deuteronomy 6:4-7, which says, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”

Deborah, in

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particular, repeatedly refers to the command of Deuteronomy to support her contention that it is her job to teach her children—no one else. And, for Quiverfull families, the teaching here not only refers to religious training, but also general education. Therefore, home education becomes the primary method by which faithful Christian families fulfill the Deuteronomic command. Speaking of Deuteronomy 6:4-7, Baucham says,

Moses saw the home as the principal delivery system for the transmittal of God’s truth from generation to generation. There is no hint here—or anywhere else in the Bible—of the multigenerational teaching of the truths of God being abdicated by parents in favor of “trained professionals.” That is not to say that parents should reject any help… However, we must be careful not to shift the responsibility for our children’s biblical training onto anyone else. ⁵⁷⁰

Here, Baucham uses Deuteronomy 6 to enshrine “the home”—understood as the nuclear family—as the “principal delivery system” of the gospel in every generation. He places on the two-parent family total responsibility for the education and formation of children. The delegation of these tasks is portrayed as “abdica[tion].” And Baucham insists that the survival of the church is dependent upon the work of Christian parents in the home. The family’s work of discipling children is what will sustain the people of God in the future. He says, “God designed the family to disciple children and insure the faithfulness and perpetuation of the community of faith throughout the ages.” ⁵⁷¹ In this perspective, the care of children within the private family home is assumed to be key to

⁵⁷⁰ Baucham, Family Driven Faith, 89. Later, Baucham targets the message of Hillary Clinton’s It Takes a Village campaign as illustrative of what’s wrong with today’s parents. He mocks her point of view, calling it, “It takes big, intrusive government programs and bureaucrats to raise a child.” Then, he laments, “We have come to believe that parenting is a task best left to professionals” (95). Clinton is a favorite target of homeschooling and Quiverfull proponents who see the “village” model as a threat to parental rights. For a fuller discussion, see R. L. Stollar, “Children as Divine Rental Property,” Homeschoolers Anonymous, January 5, 2015, accessed March 13, 2015, https://homeschoolersanonymous.wordpress.com/2015/01/05/children-as-divine-rental-property-an-exposition-on-hsldas-philosophy-of-parental-rights/.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 118.
the perpetuation of the church. And yet, there is no role for the church in the lives of the children who are said to be its future.

Bauahm, Pride, and others have the same approach toward other institutions beyond the church, especially the state or federal government. Suspicion of the powers of the state is a common theme in homeschooling circles and, more than any other group, the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) has targeted the state as a major threat to parental control over their children. In the literature produced by HSLDA leaders, the inviolability of parental rights looms large. For example, HSLDA’s current Director of Federal Relations, Will Estrada says, “Children are given by God to parents and families to be loved, to be raised and to be prepared to go on to become leaders in their community. It doesn’t take a village to raise a child. It takes parents—loving parents in a home—to raise a child.”

HSLDA founder and Patrick Henry College president, Michael Farris, targets the same “village” mentality, but intentionally invokes the fear of state force:

Those who believe that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ are willing to use coercion, threats, raw police power, and intimidation to enforce their agenda. Parents who raise children in a manner that the village doesn’t like have learned to fear the knock on the door lest they hear the dreaded words, ‘I’m from the government and I’m here to help you raise your children.’

As a result of this fear of state power, the HSLDA and many of their member families actively oppose any legislation or entity that are seen as threats to parental rights,

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including ratifying the UN’s child rights treaty,\(^{574}\) federal regulation of homeschooling,\(^{575}\) compulsory vaccination,\(^{576}\) and the work of Child Protective Services.\(^{577}\)

As I have argued above, for Quiverfull families, neither the church nor state has any responsibility for the upbringing of children. When such families imagine children they see them only in the context of the nuclear family. Children belong to parents and no one else. This way of understanding children produces a vision of childrearing that is thoroughly privatized. Parents are solely responsible for the care and education of children within the context of the private family home. Thus, Quiverfull couples come to embrace childrearing as their primary, all-encompassing work. All Quiverfull writers


\(^{575}\) The HSLDA actively opposes any federal laws that could potentially restrict homeschooling rights for American parents. Their analysis of such laws is ongoing. For a current list of laws they oppose or support, see “Federal Legislation” \textit{HSLDA}, accessed June 25, 2015, http://ncne.hslda.org/legislation/national/.

\(^{576}\) The HSLDA supports personal beliefs exemptions from mandatory immunizations and provides legal information to parents seeking to navigate changing laws on the subject. For example, they provide guidance for California parents seeking personal belief exemptions from vaccinations. See, “Changes to Personal Beliefs Exemption for School Vaccine Requirements,” \textit{HSLDA}, December 12, 2013, accessed June 25, 2015, http://hslda.org/hs/state/ca/201312120.asp.

\(^{577}\) The HSLDA has a large portion of its website devoted to CPS, including guidance for families dealing with CPS and proposed reforms to child welfare laws. See, for example, “Child Protective Services Investigations,” \textit{HSLDA}, undated, accessed June 25, 2015, http://www.hslda.org/docs/nche/Issues/P/Privacy_CPS.asp.

Although the HSLDA does not officially oppose CPS as a whole, their past leaders have spoken out against CPS. In 2009, for example, Doug Phillips, speaking at the Homeschooling Men’s Leadership Summit in 2009, said in his speech, “[T]he core problem with Child Protective Services is its existence… At the end of the day, the problem isn’t simply Child Protective Services to get better [sic]; it is eliminating it altogether” (Transcript provided by Homeschoolers Anonymous, “Doug Phillips, HSLDA, and the 2009 Men’s Leadership Summit,” May 14, 2013, accessed June 25, 2015, https://homeschoolersanonymous.wordpress.com/2013/05/14/end-child-protection-doug-phillips-hslda-and-the-2009-mens-leadership-summit/)

agree that the rearing of godly children is the most important task given to a Christian couple.\textsuperscript{578} This means that the married relationship is not primarily about romance or self-fulfillment, but sacrifice and service—making sure that one’s children are raised firmly rooted in and formed by, the Christian faith. Voddie Baucham says it straightforwardly: “The question is whether or not we are willing to adjust our entire lifestyle around the incredible responsibility God has given us to prepare our children to be launched from our homes as arrows (or ballistic missiles) aimed at the kingdom of darkness.”\textsuperscript{579} For Quiverfull families, nothing less than “adjusting our entire lifestyle” is required for the proper training of Christian children. The significance of children for the defeat of the “kingdom of darkness” and the triumph of the Gospel requires total commitment.\textsuperscript{580}

Of course, Baucham and others are adamant that both parents have responsibility in this work, but, in practice, mothers are tasked with the majority of the childrearing work. This is primarily accomplished through the practice of homeschooling, which we discussed in some detail in Chapter 4. Homeschooling is viewed as the only proper Christian option for parents who take seriously their responsibility for training their children. Deborah describes it this way: “[Y]ou’re losing grip on the persons you are trying to train when they are not under your training for seven hours a day. I

\textsuperscript{578} There is an interesting parallel here in what some American sociologists are calling the HIP marriage: heavily invested parents. These couples approach their marriage less as a romantic companionship and more as a way to work together toward the success of their children. In the words of Richard V. Reeves, the policy director of the Center on Children and Families at the Brookings Institution, “Married, well-educated parents are pouring time, money and energy into raising their children. This is a group for whom parenting has become virtually a profession.” See, Richard V. Reeves, “How to Save Marriage in America,” \textit{The Atlantic Online}, February 13, 2014, accessed August 10, 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/02/how-to-save-marriage-in-america/283732/.

\textsuperscript{579} Baucham, \textit{Family Driven Faith}, 172.

\textsuperscript{580} Chris Klicka, the late senior counsel for the HSLDA says it this way: “God describes our children as arrows in the hands of a warrior! … Have we diligently crafted our ‘arrows’ so they can be trusted to hit their target as we launch them into the world? … Have we personally guaranteed our ‘arrows’ are the most carefully crafted and have the sharpest point?” (Chris Klicka, \textit{Home Schooling: The Right Choice}, Fourth Edition [Nashville, TN: Noble Publishing Associations], 103).
mean…children need to be close to your proximity for you to have influence over them. … It seems unnatural for us that there would be such separation between parents and children for such a long period of time every day.” As a result, Quiverfull families unanimously believe that the work of Christian parenting requires the total of devotion of the mother to the educational task. Mitigating factors like the family’s socio-economic status or the mother’s education or skills are not even considered. Quiverfull practitioners insist that the task of education and discipleship cannot be delegated to others. In this vision of childrearing, it is only through 24-7, mother-led oversight and instruction of children that Christian parenting is rightly and responsibly carried out.

Although the practice of homeschooling is central, Quiverfull parents pursue the training of children through a number of other practices. For example, all of the Quiverfull moms of my study use spanking in the training of their young children. They do so, however, with very specific qualifications about its proper use. All of them agree that spanking is best used on very young children. The hope is that obedience and respect is instilled in one’s children from a young age and, therefore, physical chastisement isn’t needed when they are older. Moreover, all the mothers agree that spanking should never be done in anger or as a way of venting parental frustration. If a parent is angry, it is better to wait a period of time or forgo spanking entirely in order to avoid wronging the child in that way. Also, with verbal children, spanking should always be accompanied by an explanation of the offense and the reason for punishment. All of the mothers in my

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581 Deborah clarifies her thoughts as follows: “I would never say that parents can’t successfully raise a Christian child in a public school. But I would say that in order to do it you have to be mighty determined—mighty determined.”

582 In fact, even as they imagine children as belonging solely to parents, the Quiverfull movement also envisions the church as an entity that is in service to the nuclear family. This is a subject to which we will return in the next chapter.
study suggested that it is necessary to consider the constitution and personality of each child, too. For some children, they agree, spanking is ineffective or counterproductive. For example, Carley will not use physical punishment with her special needs child, saying that particular childrearing “tool” isn’t allowed in her “toolbox.”

Arguably, the most vocal proponents of spanking in the Quiverfull movement are Michael and Debi Pearl and Voddie Baucham. The Pearls’ book, *To Train Up a Child*, is adamant about the important of “the rod” in childrearing and provides very specific instructions on its proper employment. Although they provide explicit warnings against abusive practices and the misapplication of their principles, the Pearls’ work has been linked to a number of heinous child abuse cases, three of which led to the death of a child. For this reason, despite its popularity, the Pearls’ book is a subject of great controversy in the homeschooling and Quiverfull movements. Less controversial, but no less supportive of spanking, is pastor Voddie Baucham. At his Family Driven Faith conferences, Baucham literally begs parents to spank their children. “Spank early and spank often,” he says. Baucham denies the possibility of raising respectful, obedient children without physical punishment: “There’s not been a child born since Jesus who doesn’t need regular spanking.”

Although he acknowledges the possibility of abuse, he does not think that should cause anyone to abandon a practice that he thinks the Bible explicitly endorses (especially in the book of Proverbs, something we discussed briefly above).

Although spanking tends to get the most attention due to stories of abuse and controversy about its use, the families in my ethnography were not particularly

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583 Recorded from a sermon on child training at a Family Driven Faith conference held at a Baptist church in Cincinnati, OH, September 14, 2013.
enthusiastic about spanking. They affirm the need for spanking, especially with young
children, but consider it only one of many practices in the work of childrearing—and not
even the most effective. Instead, in our conversations, the two most emphasized methods
for child training were including them in domestic labor and regular worship of the
household. Quiverfull mothers agree on the significance of including children in the care
and upkeep of the home. Because of the number of children they have and the amount of
work involved in homeschooling, Quiverfull mothers simply cannot do all of the physical
labor necessary to keep the household running. So, as children mature, they are given
more and more responsibility for household work. Carley says, “In our house, our
children help us run the house… I can try to do everything but when they step up and
help then it makes the work load lighter for everyone.” In Three Decades of Fertility, the
authors regularly speak of the contribution of their older children to the maintenance of
the home. Terry Covey offers the following encouragement to mothers who may struggle
to delegate household work: “We do our children no favors when we don’t delegate the
various duties in a home. There is a two-fold benefit: it gives us the rest we need, and it
offers them the practice necessary to prepare for the adult world.” 584

In addition to including children in domestic labor, Quiverfull families emphasize
the need to include children in regular family worship. Both Carley and Deborah spoke of
the importance of their children hearing scripture, praying, and worshipping God as a
family. Typically, Quiverfull fathers, who are envisioned as the “pastors” of their
families, lead family worship. Baucham is one of the most vocal advocates of regular
family worship. He advises fathers to begin and end every day with scripture and prayer,
modeling for children the centrality of God’s word and teaching them how to apply it to

the Christian life. Above all else, though, Baucham views family worship as a way to sacralize the home and insure that one’s children are properly initiated into the Christian faith. In *Family Driven Faith*, he says,

> Through intentionally marking our home with things that will engage the senses of our children and through engaging in regular family worship, we can turn our homes into sanctuaries for the worship of Almighty God. No longer will our lives be subdivided and compartmentalized with the sacred on Sunday mornings (and Wednesday nights) and the secular dominating every other moment. Our lives can be fully engulfed with the presence and priority of God.\(^{585}\)

In all of these ways and more, Quiverfull parents seek to train responsibly the children entrusted solely to their care. Of course, the reason for each of these practices is that Quiverfull parents believe it is their job to raise adult Christians who faithfully carry on and reproduce the faith of their parents. Deborah explained her motivation as follows: “My goal for my children is that they don’t leave my home until they’re prepared to fly spiritually. So, they aren’t grasping for answers. Strong in doctrine and strong in faith. Not just good moral kids who go to church but actually knowing it and strong enough to defend it even if you are surrounded by no one else who does.”\(^{586}\) One mother in *Three Decades of Fertility* says it this way: “We are praying and endeavoring to raise children who raise children who will stand for Christ in their generation. By God’s grace, we trust that our fruitfulness will continue in the coming generations through the multi-generational faithfulness of our family.”\(^{587}\) In this way, Quiverfull families have redirected the evangelical impulse to public activism into the private family home. Indeed, the mission of God for the conversion of the world is handled primarily

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\(^{585}\) Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 148.

\(^{586}\) It’s significant, I think, that none of my informants insisted that their children must follow in their footsteps. Deborah states her wish that her children would “have five kids a piece and homeschool,” but clarified, “I would love for them to do that, but that may not happen. So, I just think there’s something about being able to verbally defend their faith.”

\(^{587}\) Molly Evert, “God Changed My Heart,” in *Three Decades of Fertility*, 142.
through the birth and training of many children. Quiverfull mother Yvonne Harink says it plainly: “There is no greater way we can influence the future than through giving birth to God’s children and raising them to reflect his image… History shows that giving birth can actually be God’s way of growing a nation. Each new child can grow into generations of children who will inherit the earth.”588 And, because Quiverfull families envision children and childhood as the sole responsibility of parents, the “multi-generational faithfulness” rests on the rather narrow shoulders of nuclear family (and the mother, in particular). The bearing and training of children is key to the future of the nation and the church, yet the responsibility for their formation is entrusted only to individual homes.

B. Theological Analysis

Certainly, one cannot deny the primary responsibility of parents for the care of their children. It is not necessary to endorse the totally home-centered vision of Voddie Baucham in order to support the prioritization of child training by Christian parents. Especially when it comes to the discipleship of children, the intentional cultivation of Christian identity is an important—if not the most important—task for Christian families.589 To that end, the inclusion of children in household chores and regular participation in household worship are important and profitable practices. When done right, both practices can encourage children to see themselves from an early age as an important part of the family, with something to contribute in a material and spiritual

589 This is something explored at significant depth by Joyce Ann Mercer in Welcoming Children, 162-207. Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, Mercer assumes that the Christian formation of children is impossible without the church.
way.⁵⁹⁰ Viewed against the modern tendency for families to be fractured and scattered, stretched between competing activities and priorities, the Quiverfull commitment to the cultivation of an integrated, holistic life is admirable. The sacred must not be relegated to the Sunday morning church service or Wednesday night Bible study. In a family that makes Christian childrearing their central task, this dualistic vision might be successfully opposed.

Still, the Quiverfull insistence that children belong only to their parents begs the important question: To whom do children really belong? When I asked Quiverfull mothers whether the church or broader community had any responsibility for the care and nurturance of their children, most responded with puzzlement. It simply didn’t occur to them that others would have any claim or interest in the rearing of their children. On the one hand, this is perfectly understandable in an American society that has so thoroughly privatized the domestic realm. Imagining children in any other way is to go against the grain of a culture that sees children solely as a private concern. On the other hand, the Christian tradition casts a much more communal vision for human life, particularly in regards to the church, which the New Testament calls the body of Christ. Indeed, the letter to the Ephesians envisions the church as the household of God formed in Christ to be a new humanity where the former divisions of Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female are done away with (Eph. 2:14-22; Gal. 3:28). Within this Pauline vision, it seems that the nuclear family must be viewed in relation to the household of God—the church. As the new humanity that points the world toward the new creation in Christ, the church (not the family) is “the principal delivery system for the transmittal of God’s truth

from generation to generation” (to quote Baucham). Thus, the nuclear family, which is a form of life Jesus says will pass away in the eschaton (Matt. 22:30), finds its true meaning and purpose within the church.

If the nuclear family is situated within the family of God, then we need to see that autonomy (something we addressed in Chapter 4) is not, in fact, the virtue we make it out to be. Certainly, it is good and right for families to be able to support themselves financially and provide proper care and security for their members. These things are a matter of human dignity. But, the Christian faith does not allow for any family to be entirely self-sufficient or autonomous. As each member of the family is adopted through the waters of baptism into the household of God, the family voluntarily takes upon itself the vulnerability-in-relationship that comes with being part of God’s family. There is, therefore, no parental authority apart from Christ’s authority, no discipleship apart from the community of disciples, and no family practices apart from church practices.\(^{591}\)

All of my informants insisted that children do not cease to be a part of families when they enter the church. Thus, the church should not subvert family bonds through age divided Sunday School and other such specialized programs. Certainly, there is room to discuss the efficacy and unintended consequences of such practices within the church. But, the prioritization of the nuclear family’s unity over and against the church (not to

\(^{591}\) I understand this to be the thrust of Jana Bennett’s argument in *Water is Thicker Than Blood*, where she says, “[G]ood marriages and families, but even more so, good households, in the thicker sense of the word and in the sense of being directed toward Christ, are sacramental and direct all of humanity toward its ultimate end in God. … Thus, the frenzy surrounding marriage and family and the consternation about how to live out the best household or raise the ‘perfect’ children…hopefully dies down. The focus is no longer a tunnel vision on the family but contemplation of Christ and Christ’s Body” (155). Bennett goes on to describe in more detail how exactly small households and the Household of God are related and oriented toward Christ (157-190). Of course, as a Catholic theologian, Bennett is writing with a particular vision of “Christ’s Body” that is not shared by the evangelicals under consideration here.
mention the broader community) remains a problematic way to redress the perceived failures of American church practices.

The most important problem with imagining children as the sole responsibility of parents is that it unintentionally exacerbates the vulnerability of children. Just as we saw in the lives of Quiverfull mothers, the isolation of Quiverfull children within their families can, in some cases, lead to neglect, exploitation, and abuse. This is a fact demonstrated in multiple studies.\(^{592}\) None of the families with whom I’ve worked evidence this kind of destructive isolation. But, they struggled and continue to struggle with the detrimental effects of isolation just the same. We must also be mindful of the fact that there are an increasing number of testimonies from the grown children of Quiverfull families that point to the exploitation of childhood vulnerability within families that succumb to the isolation that privatization yields.\(^{593}\) In a movement where children are not imagined apart from their parents, it is unclear what can be done in the case of parents who cannot or should not be the primary caretakers of their children. Lacking a broader sense of belonging, the Quiverfull movement does not have the resources to reckon with the many ways that families can fail children, both directly and indirectly.

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VI. Children and the Church

In the previous section, we saw that Quiverfull families imagine children and childhood as the sole responsibility of the two-parent family. Because children are understood to belong only to their parents, the task of raising Christian children becomes the main reason for the family’s existence and the mother devotes the majority of her adult life to accomplishing that goal. Even so, because they seek to inculcate their children with a strong sense of Christian identity, the sacraments and worship life of the church should be key to the Quiverfull way of life. But, the literature of the Quiverfull movement is remarkably silent on the role of the church in the spiritual formation of children. Therefore, unlike the previous sections, which focused on what is said by Quiverfull practitioners about children, this final section will consider what is not said. I am particularly interested in the lack of consideration given to the church: how the church contributes to the formation of children and how children can be welcomed and included in the church.

Most Quiverfull families are involved in some kind of church. But, they have precious little to say about the role of the church in the formation of their children. Moreover, the childrearing focus of Quiverfull families is often not reciprocated by the churches with which they participate. Indeed, for many families, ecclesial involvement is a difficult and discouraging experience. At times, this is due to the family’s own perception of their children and personal choices about their level of involvement. At other times, this due to the church’s unwillingness or inability to welcome children in a manner consistent with Quiverfull convictions. In either case, it is clear that the welcome
children receive in Quiverfull families is often at odds with the lack of welcome experienced in their churches, even churches explicitly devoted to “family integration.”

Quiverfull families routinely struggle with church attendance and involvement. All of my informants testify to a host of problems, past and present, with church participation. There appear to be a number of reasons for this. On the one hand, some churches are skeptical of Quiverfull families and unwelcoming to them (whether intentionally or unintentionally). The simple act of attending church with a large number of children can be viewed as problematic, marking the family in question as radical or extremist. Also, in smaller communities, where public schools and sports programs are central, the choice to home educate one’s children can be seen as a rejection of the community. As we saw in Chapter 3, Renee’s family found themselves ostracized by their home church. From her perspective, their commitment to both pronatalism and homeschooling, in defiance of the church’s status quo, came to be viewed as a threat to other families in the church. Following a number of confrontations and conflicts with church leadership, the Tanners felt compelled to leave. Eventually, they found refuge in a small rural church some distance away from their hometown. Even among churches that do accept Quiverfull families, however, they can feel marginalized because of their way of life. Deborah describes her feelings this way: “The thing Dan and I worry about sometimes is that...even in our church...sometimes we’re so isolated. I told someone this week that I don’t want to look like some freak show family. ‘Oh they’re the family with the good kids. They’re the family that home schools.’ I want other families who can hold me accountable and come alongside me.”
On the other hand, some families find integration into existing churches difficult because they are critical of perceived “unbiblical” church practices. A prime example of this is age-segregated church programs, mentioned above, which many Quiverfull families oppose because they see such methods as dismissive of parental responsibility for discipleship. Such families want a church that is “family-integrated” or “family-driven,” which, depending upon the region, is not always easily attained. Even more than family-integrated worship, some families are looking for likeminded Quiverfull or homeschooling families and, when they do not find any, choose to conduct church services in their homes (or the homes of friends). They find the necessity of shared convictions on pronatalism and homeschooling (and sometimes gender hierarchy) outweighs the desire to participate in an existing church in their community. In lieu of a local church that offers the fellowship of likeminded families, some Quiverfull families choose to conduct churches in their own homes or to start churches with others.

Still, it’s important to point out that Quiverfull families are not the only ones concerned with and conflicted about, the place of children in the church. Evangelical churches, in general, struggle with including children in the church’s worship and service in a meaningful way—a problem they share with mainline Protestants. In part, the family-integrated church movement, referenced in Chapter 2, is one attempt to address the question of children’s place in church. Their answer is that children belong in families and the integrity of the family—and leadership of the father—should be protected and

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supported within the church. In this view, the church exists to support and uphold the family, which is doing God’s work of evangelization and making disciples. Thus, the church should not have separate activities or programs for children apart from their parents. Instead, churches should equip parents to train their children and children should remain under the tutelage of their parents even within corporate gatherings. In this sense, then, the participation of children in church is always mediated through their parents.

But, do family-integrated churches fare any better at welcoming and including children? This is not a study of the family-integrated church movement, so an evaluation of the practices of such churches is beyond the bounds of my project. But, one episode from my ethnography is particularly telling on the subject of children and the church in Quiverfull families. Of course, this one story cannot say all there is say about the subject, but I think it is illustrative of some of the problems in Quiverfull imagination and practice regarding children and the church.

In September 2013, I went to a Family-Driven Faith conference, featuring pastor Voddie Baucham and hosted by a Baptist church in Cincinnati, Ohio. It was advertised as an event “for families.” They expressly stated in their literature that childcare would not be provided because parents were encouraged to include their children in the seminar. My husband and I attended the conference with our children (four years, three years, and four months) in order to experience what this kind of gathering was like for young families. The first two sessions were scheduled for Friday evening for two hours with the second two sessions on Saturday morning for another two hours. Although this set-up meant that our children would be sitting through four hours of teaching over the course of two days, we expected our children would be included in some way. At the very least, we expected
that there would be an attempt made to incorporate children into the adult-oriented teaching time. But, we were sorely mistaken.

After arriving at the church, I surveyed the sanctuary and saw at least 35 small children (out of a crowd of 200 or so) sitting next to their parents and grandparents. Most were sitting quietly in the pews while the adults chatted loudly around them. A few unruly toddlers were passed back and forth between parents and numerous mothers with babies were filing in and out of the sanctuary. But, children from the age of three and up were sitting quietly with their families before, during, and after the seminar. There were no special materials for them, no time for the speaker to address them, and no tangible way for them to participate at all. When the church said that this was an event for families, what they meant was an event for adults at which children could attend and sit quietly.

Over the course of the seminar, Baucham’s teaching backed up this seen-but-not-heard approach to family integration. In part of his discussion of the many social ills brought about by feminism, Baucham mentioned the “lengthening of childhood” so that children do not learn to become “biblical adults” at the proper time: 12 years. “That’s when Jesus became an adult: twelve years old,” he said. Moreover, he blamed age-segregated church programs for Christian children failing to become adults when and how they should. By keeping children with their parents as much as possible, through homeschooling and family-integrated churches, one could ensure that one’s children become the mature Christian adults they should be. It was clear that keeping young children with their parents in the adult-oriented seminar was considered an important method for training children to become adults. Baucham said, “They need to learn now
that the world does not revolve around them, that church is not about them. It’s about God. It’s about worship.”

One of the reasons Baucham could ignore the numerous children seated in the sanctuary is that he and those gathered to hear him agree that children are the primary responsibility of their parents. Put simply, it wasn’t Baucham’s job to teach the children in attendance. Parents should teach their children at home. As we saw above, Baucham is a fervent advocate of family discipleship, which includes Christian home education and family worship. And this conviction places all of the responsibility for childrearing upon the parents. If parents are doing their work properly in the home then the church does not need to provide child-focused services or programs for families.

Another reason Baucham was safe to ignore the children in his midst, despite the fact that the event was “for families,” is that Baucham shared with the congregation an assumption about the sinful nature of children. This is a matter I have already analyzed above, so I will not recapitulate the material already presented. But, the important point is that the conference attendees assumed that the inherent selfishness of children has to be trained out of them through a variety of experiences, including sitting quietly through a corporate worship service designed for adults. Providing another event for children or giving them alternative activities to enjoy during the service is not an option in this mindset because they reinforce the notion that church is about them. Instead, children must learn to sit quietly, submitting their own needs and wants to those of their parents and the other assembled adults.

Of course, small children are not always cooperative with this approach to family integration. At one point, I had to take my four month-old to the “Mothers and Babies”
room next door to the sanctuary. In addition to two couches, a rocking chair, and a changing table, there was a flat screen television mounted on the wall with sound from the sanctuary piped in to the room. Seated on one of the couches was a young mother (certainly not more than 25) who was in the early stages of pregnancy. The mother was trying unsuccessfully to keep her wiggly toddler still on the couch next to her in order to listen to “sermon time.” Over and over the toddler got off the couch to find something more interesting to do. “We need to sit still and be quiet for sermon time,” she would say and then place the child firmly onto the couch next to her. Eventually, the mother became so frustrated with her daughter’s disobedience that she took her into the private bathroom and spanked her. When they returned to the main room, the newly chastened, sniffling toddler sat obediently on the couch next to her mother, staring at the floor for the rest of the sermon.

What I took away from my experience at Baucham’s conference is that “family integration” does not necessarily mean that children are welcomed and included in the worship and sacramental life of the church. Families are welcomed and affirmed, of course, and the goods of pronatalism, homeschooling, and gender hierarchy are proclaimed proudly. But, when it comes to children in particular—the fidgety, unruly bodies of real, flesh and blood children—what “family integration” seems to mean is that children must be integrated into the established patterns and procedures of adults. The “adult world,” for lack of a better term, is the only real world and children must be initiated into it as quickly as possible.

I cannot say for sure whether this approach to children is unique to Baucham or this particular Baptist church, but I venture to guess that it is common throughout the
family-integrated church movement. Because they share with Quiverfull families a particular imagination about children—especially that they are sinners in need of restraint and adults-in-the-making—such churches more than likely do not provide any special attention to the needs of children. Instead, the parents are entrusted with that responsibility. It seems, therefore, that even churches that purport to be “family integrated” do not include children into the worship life of the church in a meaningful way. Parents are supposed to train children to resist and overcome their sinful nature within the home. Parents are supposed to guide children out of childhood and into adulthood within the home. And it is only then, after they’ve been properly trained and guided into adulthood, that the church takes responsibility for them.

Although the intention here is to empower parents in their work of Christian childrearing, it unwittingly contributes to the privatization and isolation of the family, as well as the continued inattention of churches to children. It’s unclear, for example, how the church is supposed to insure that parents are doing the work of education and spiritual formation with their children. Without a robust sense of church-family interdependence, it seems that any church involvement in the private family home would be considered unwanted meddling. Moreover, how can churches benefit from the good that children offer them if children are not provided regular, tangible ways to contribute to church worship?

Even so, churches cannot bear all the responsibility for the lack of welcome and inclusion offered to children. Quiverfull families also demonstrate a critical tension between the aim of their childrearing (to produce Christians) and their practices vis-à-vis the church. On the one hand, Quiverfull parents (especially mothers) devote an
exceptional amount of time and energy to the training of children so that they will grow up to be faithful Christians. By their own admission, Quiverfull parents value the spiritual formation of souls over the cultivation of intellectual prowess. Thus, their primary concern is that their children would be committed, practicing Christians upon reaching adulthood. On the other hand, due to their location in American evangelicalism, most Quiverfull parents do not treat their children as Christians until they manifest evidence of a “conversion experience” and make a “public profession of faith.” In this way, they do not imagine their unconverted children as a part of the church, the body of Christ. Natalie Klejwa offers an exemplary perspective on this subject:

Having babies is one thing, but ultimately my deepest desire is to seem them all saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. Since that day I found out I was pregnant for the first time, I have prayed almost daily: “Father in Heaven, SAVE the souls of every single one of my children. Save them for eternity. Make them Yours. May you keep them in the palm of Your hand and never let them be plucked out... Do not only save them, but save all of my posterity. Let there not be one black sheep among them, but let them all belong to You eternally, fulfilling the purpose for which you created them.”

Until they go through this prescribed process of conversion, most children are treated as unbelievers within Quiverfull families and subsequently barred from receiving the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. This perspective on the sacraments is rooted in the Anabaptist tradition, which views inclusion in the church as dependent upon

595 Natalie Klejwa, “Eternal Treasure,” in Three Decades of Fertility, 87 (emphasis in original). Baucham offers an exhortation for parents to convert their children in Family Driven Faith: “God ordains both the ends and the means of salvation, and we must do everything in our power to move our children toward faith in God. I believe wholeheartedly that salvation is a sovereign, monergistic work of God’s grace from beginning to end. I also believe that I must do everything in my power to employ the biblical means through which salvation is brought about. Thus we must be committed to proclaim the gospel to our children with a view toward their conversion” (143).

596 Of course, this is not true of families that participate in Reformed or Presbyterian churches that extend the sacrament of baptism to infants. A prominent example is author and blogger, Stacy McDonald, who is married to a Reformed pastor. Their church, Providence Church of Peoria, IL, extends baptism and communion to the children of Christian parents. Still, the families in my ethnography, along with the majority of elite Quiverfull proponents, fall within the free church, evangelical mainstream that sees the “born again” experience and individual choice to follow Christ as a vital part of Christian identity and requirement for inclusion in the sacramental life of the church.
the individual profession of faith. Therefore, until they reach a stage of mature decision-making, Quiverfull children are potential converts, not full members of the body of Christ. Within the Anabaptist stream of Protestantism, there are important theological reasons for this practice, which I will not go into here. Rather, I am concerned only to point out that the exclusion of children from full participation in the worship of the church works against their stated aim to equip their children with an enduring Christian identity.

But there’s another tension demonstrated by Quiverfull practice that is at work here. We’ve already established that within evangelical, free-church ecclesiology, church membership is based upon one’s voluntary profession of faith in Christ and subsequent baptism. This is the explicit ecclesiology operative within most Quiverfull families. But, at the same time, Quiverfull discourse reveals a sacralization of the family unit and domestic space that turns the nuclear family into a kind of church. I will explore this dynamic in more detail in Chapter 6, but I introduce it now to show that the tension between their explicit and implicit ecclesiology may be at the root of both their problems with church membership and their lack of concern for children’s church participation. If the nuclear family is a little church, a family-church, then participation in another church beyond the bounds of the home, within the evangelical framework, may be viewed as optional or redundant. Moreover, if children are born into the family-church and trained within that environment 24-7, then their participation in the sacraments and church

597 As I said above, the exception would be families that practice infant baptism. I did not encounter any families in my study that fall within paedobaptist traditions, but such families no doubt exist within the Quiverfull subculture. The Orthodox Presbyterian denomination, in particular, has a number of prominent pastor-bloggers who promote Quiverfull teaching. Despite the fact that their sacramental practice and explicit ecclesiology would differ markedly from their free church, Baptistic neighbors, I would venture to guess that their tendency to view children as sinners and adults-in-the-making would lead to the same exclusion of children within the adult-dominated church environment.
worship may seem relatively unimportant. All in all, it seems that the church as an institution beyond the bounds of the nuclear family is relativized in importance.

Toward the end of his book, *Family Driven Faith*, Baucham addresses the problem of evangelical young people falling away from the church upon reaching adulthood. But, as has been the pattern seen throughout this chapter, his answer is entirely (nuclear) family-focused:

[The lack of young people in church] is not a problem that can be fixed by fads, programs, or personalities. This is a problem that must be addressed one home at a time. The answer to our current crisis is a renewed commitment to biblical evangelism and discipleship in and through our homes. You and I as individual parents must begin to take responsibility for the spiritual well-being and development of our children. We must commit ourselves to family driven faith. More importantly, our churches must facilitate this commitment.\(^{598}\)

Although Baucham says, “churches must facilitate this commitment,” what he seems to mean is, essentially, that the church needs to get out of the way. Even though training children in the faith is central to Quiverfull lived religion, their weak ecclesiology means that discipleship is a private affair, lacking both a broader community of disciples and access to the sacraments. Mothers, who do the most of the work, are often isolated, pursuing the Christian training of their children alone. If they have a church, they are often marginalized within it. Some Quiverfull families belong to churches where children are welcomed and childrearing is a central focus. But, even within such “family-integrated churches,” children are not typically included in ways that empower them to live as disciples now. They are expected to conform themselves to the ways of the adult church members until they have a conversion experience and can then receive the sacraments and participate as a member of the congregation. This state of affairs works against the Quiverfull goal of forming children into Christian disciples.

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\(^{598}\) Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 189-190.
Children are welcomed in the sense that they are allowed to be born and mothers reorganize their lives in order to attend carefully to their care and education. But, children are not welcomed in the sense of being fully included in the life of the church. They remain outsiders and observers rather than fully integrated disciples, falling into the same trap that Baucham and other Quiverfull teachers are seeking to avoid.

VII. Conclusion

This chapter has considered and elaborated upon four major ways that Quiverfull practitioners imagine children and childhood. First, children are seen as divine blessings or gifts. In this way, all children, no matter what the circumstances of their conception or birth, are true gifts from God. This means that every child is inherently valuable and should be received as such. There remains some tension within Quiverfull elite literature, however, regarding whether the children of non-Christians share this gift nature. Another way that Quiverfull practitioners imagine children is as simultaneously innocent and sinful. On the one hand, children are born innocent, which means that they are ignorant of the world and totally dependent upon others for care. But, as they age, children become less and less innocent and their sinfulness becomes more apparent. Because they imagine that childlike innocence fades and childlike sinfulness emerges, most Quiverfull families consider child training an especially urgent task. Third, Quiverfull practitioners view children as adults-in-the-making. Childhood is understood to be a bounded period that exists for the purpose of training for adulthood. Ideally, it constitutes a very short period of human life, ending some time between 12 and 21 when the capacity for independent moral reasoning emerges. Finally, the Quiverfull movement imagines children as the sole custody of their parents within the nuclear family. Because children are not viewed as in
any way belonging to the broader contexts of church and society, Quiverfull families are
tend to see childrearing as a solitary endeavor, undertaken only by the child’s parents.
Although the perspective of individuals and families vary somewhat, the four themes
described above are demonstrative of the way the Quiverfull movement generally views children.

As a movement singularly focused on the propagation and education of Christian
children, it is no small matter how Quiverfull practitioners imagine children and
childhood. Indeed, how they (and we) imagine children has a profound effect on the way
we order our households, communities, and churches. Guided by the Quiverfull concerns
for both efficacy and witness, I have attempted to show that more careful elaboration and
modification of these themes is needed in order to clarify our theological imagination and
practices regarding children. Three matters are of particular concern. First, Quiverfull
practitioners need a more nuanced vision of childhood agency in order to account for the
reality of the “knowing child”—children who are neither totally depraved nor cherubic
innocents. Children must be viewed as agents and people in their own right. Second, the
Quiverfull movement requires a vision of childhood that understands it not as a stage to
be passed through quickly, but an enduring part of human life. In this way, children are
not simply unformed adults in need of training, but beloved and vulnerable people of God
who have much to teach us about the Christian life. Finally, Quiverfull practitioners
evidence a lack of ecclesiology in the way they imagine the task of childrearing. While
understandable within the excessively privatized American context, it is inadequate from
a Christian perspective to view children as the sole responsibility of parents. Moreover,
the goal of raising Christian children is hindered by the view that a radical conversion is
required before participation in church is permitted. A community of practice is essential to the formation of Christian identity.

Of course, some of the abovementioned criticisms apply only to the Quiverfull movement, but much of it could be applied to American evangelicalism or American society as whole. We saw in Chapter 4 that many of the deficits in the Quiverfull imagination and practice of motherhood are shared by broader American society. The same holds true in their imagination regarding children and childhood. Although Quiverfull practice stands out in many ways from that of their neighbors (even their Christian neighbors), they are still prone to the same privatized vision of childrearing. Within this vision, children are the sole responsibility of the nuclear family and other institutions, whether communities, schools, or churches, have little stake or role to play in their formation. Thus, despite their desire to enact and witness to a counter-cultural way of life, Quiverfull families end up replicating some of the same pitfalls of the surrounding culture. Most concerning here is the way their vision isolates children within the nuclear family, exacerbating their natural vulnerability, and isolates families from their communities, especially the church. The next chapter will take up the subject of how the Quiverfull movement imagines and practices “the family” with a continued focus on the weaknesses indicated above.
I. Introduction

When Carley’s oldest daughter, Caroline, was ready to be baptized based upon her confession of faith in Christ, the Millers were not members of a traditional church. For a couple of years, they had been participating in a “house church” made up of a few other families with young children. Even though they were convinced that David should be the one to baptize her, the lack of church facilities, particularly a baptistery, presented a problem. But they were undeterred. In the end, they found a friend willing to loan them their swimming pool for an afternoon. There, in their friend’s backyard, David baptized Caroline surrounded by the rest of the Millers, their extended families, and a few close friends. Although Carley knows that this scenario is somewhat unique, she is unapologetic. “We just believe that we all are ministers,” she says. “David’s plan is to continue baptizing our children, but we aren’t picky about where we do it. [Laughter.]”

While the performance of baptism by a layperson in a private swimming pool might be shocking to some, the Millers’ actions make sense within their practice of church to that point. Their weekly worship involved informal meetings in private homes. The worship services included singing songs, listening to scripture lessons taught by one of the fathers, and then the celebration of communion. For the Millers, a few families
reading scripture and breaking bread in a private home constitutes a church. Moreover, Carley characterizes their family as a “mini-church” that is seeking to “to serve the Lord as a family.” So, why not baptize their own children at the time and in a place of their choosing?

I begin Chapter 6 with this story because it brings to the fore some of the complicated issues at work in the Quiverfull construction of the family. I have argued throughout this project that the Quiverfull movement’s way of life is not especially unique but ultimately an intensification of broader American and evangelical tendencies. We have seen this evidenced in the Quiverfull performance of motherhood and their imagination about children. As we will see, the same dynamic is at work in their construction of the family. In the Millers’ choice to baptize their daughter outside the confines of an institutional church, we see evidence of the family’s privatization and disconnection from broader communities. Also, we see on display the conviction that the family is itself a “mini-church,” headed by the father and capable of carrying out the work of discipleship and celebration of the sacraments on its own terms.

Chapter 6 will consider the way Quiverfull families imagine “the family” and seek to practice it in their daily lives. This is the most appropriate way to end our theological engagement with the Quiverfull movement because it is the broader context within which mothers and children (considered in the previous two chapters) conduct their lives. Chapter 6 proceeds in several parts. First, I discuss the difference between “the family” and “families” and explain the approach I am taking in this chapter. Then, I introduce the idealized family presented by Quiverfull discourse. This discussion encompasses the family’s form—its structure, boundaries, and roles—as well as the
family’s function—what the family does, both privately and publicly. After a thorough consideration of what constitutes “the family” for Quiverfull practitioners, I offer a theological analysis in two major parts. First, drawing on the work of theologian Nicholas Healy, I explain the problem with using theological blueprints for the Christian family. Second, I consider in detail three problems with the Quiverfull blueprint in particular.

From the beginning, though, we must distinguish the present discussion from other important works on the family. This chapter is not addressing American families in general. I am not investigating why American families fail or what can be done to buttress the nuclear family in today’s society. Also, I am not proposing a full-scale theology of the family or advocating for particular methodologies for ministering to families. Although I hope that my work will have something to contribute to such research, my aims are much more modest. I am interested chiefly in what Christian theologians can learn from the way families within the Quiverfull movement imagine and practice “the family.” Much in the same way as Chapters 4 and 5, we will see that the Quiverfull movement, despite seeking to offer a counter-cultural vision of Christian family, retains many of the limitations of the surrounding evangelical and American cultures. There are places of insight, which theologians do well to recognize. But, on the whole, their vision is in need of critique and transformation.

599 These are some of the important concerns that occupy the attention of contributors to the Religion, Culture, and Family Project, a cooperative research and writing project directed by Don Browning of Chicago Divinity School and funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment. The group met every year for five years, published eleven monographs and books, and sponsored numerous symposia and conferences on the family in North America. A full list of the publications can be found in Lisa Sowle Cahill, Family: A Christian Social Perspective (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 138-139, n. 5.
II. “The Family” and Families: Clarifying the Terms

Most scholarly treatments of the family begin with a discussion about whether there is such a thing as “the family” at all. In contemporary America, family forms are so greatly in flux that many scholars are inclined to discard the abstract concept of “the family” as an outdated relic too closely connected to the “Leave it to Beaver” ideal: a breadwinning father, homemaking mother, and their two to three children. These scholars opt to speak of “families” instead, which emphasizes the fact that contemporary America features a variety of different forms of family, all of which perform the functions of family even if they do not fit the “traditional” form.600 Of course, even the existence of a stable “traditional” ideal has been called into question in recent decades. Stephanie Coontz, in particular, argues persuasively in The Way We Never Were that the “traditional family” of June and Ward Cleaver existed mostly in the imaginative realm of television. She says, “Like most visions of a ‘golden age,’ the ‘traditional family’…is an ahistorical amalgam of structures, values, and behaviors that never co-existed in the same time and place.”601

I am sympathetic to the skepticism of some scholars regarding the use of “the family.” For many, to be sure, “the family” is associated with an imagined ideal that is no longer the majority in the American context. Part of my sympathy is personal: I grew up

600 For example, the perspective of editors John Muncie, Margaret Wetherell, Rudi Dallos, and Allan Cochrane in Understanding the Family (London: Sage Publishing, 1995), who confess that they are using the term “family” in an “intentionally ironic” way (1). John Drane and Olive Fleming Drane suggest that there are at least seven “distinct types of family structure and domestic arrangements” (Family Fortunes: Faith-full Caring for Today’s Families [London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2004], 22-41). Fiona Williams prefers to focus on “family practices: what we do rather than what we are” (Fiona Williams, Rethinking Families [ESRC CAVA Research Group; London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2004], 16-17). Lisa Sowle Cahill writes from a similar perspective in Family: A Christian Social Perspective.

without knowing my biological father and my mother divorced my stepfather when I was an adolescent. A single mother led the family of my childhood. Part of my skepticism is professional: theological discussions of “the family” can easily become caught up in abstractions with the tendency to hover above the messiness of daily life. Imagining “the family” as a sacramental expression of the love of the Trinity is well and good, but it doesn’t easily connect to discussions about who does the laundry or helps the children with their homework. It seems that speaking of “the family,” with its implied ideals, could exacerbate that tendency toward abstraction.

Nevertheless, the topic of this project is the Quiverfull movement, for which “the family” remains a central and very powerful religious symbol. The subjects of my study live their lives with “the family” ideal very much in tact. In fact, they see the ideal of the nuclear family designed by God in Genesis and reaffirmed in the letters of Paul (something I will discuss in more detail below). For example, William Einwechter, a pastor and regular contributor to the now defunct Vision Forum website, defines family in the following way:

By ‘traditional family’ we mean the family structure that developed in Western society under the direct influence of Christianity and the Bible. In the traditional family, the man is the head of the home and the one responsible for providing those things necessary for the sustenance of life. The woman is a ‘keeper at home,’ and the one primarily responsible for the care of the children. The traditional family thus defined is in line with the biblical plan for the home.602

Of course, the descriptor “traditional” implies that Einwechter knows there are other versions of the family to choose from. Yet, for him and others in the Quiverfull movement, there is really only one “biblical plan for the home,” which he calls the

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“traditional family.” Even though they will advocate mercy and grace for families that do not or cannot conform to this ideal, they will continue to hold forth their vision of “the family” as the Christian standard, which all families should strive to attain.

Moreover, despite the fact that they would take issue with Einwechter’s very prescribed vision of family, most Christian theologians retain some sense of “the family” as an ideal, even if it is a flexible ideal, nuanced and clarified for cases of nonconformity. For example, Lisa Sowle Cahill defines the family as “an organized network of socioeconomic and reproductive independence and support grounded in biological kinship and marriage.”\textsuperscript{603} Yet, Cahill clarifies that even though family created by kinship and marriage is “the most basic family form” it is not the only legitimate form of family. She cautions against adopting “punitive attitudes and policies toward nonconforming families.”\textsuperscript{604} Following Cahill’s example, I think it is possible to uphold the basic notion of “the family” rooted in both kinship and marriage without alienating and condemning other forms of family as they appear on the American landscape. The following chapter will use the terminology of “the family” with the abovementioned caveats in mind.

III. The Quiverfull Family: God-Given Form and Functions

In any discussion of the family as it is embodied in daily life, one must deal with both ideals and realities. Oftentimes, the two are difficult to disentangle. This is especially true of the Quiverfull movement, which possesses very particular standards for the ideal Christian family. In an attempt to make the discussion of their familial discourse

\textsuperscript{603} Cahill, \textit{Family}, xi. Cahill goes on to clarify: “Kinship denotes affiliation through reproductive lines. Marriage, in turn, is a consensual and contractual manner of uniting kin groups, especially for the purpose of reproduction, and the perpetuation of kinship structures through which social and economic relations are managed” (xi).

\textsuperscript{604} Ibid.
easier to follow, the following chapter will utilize the categories of form and function. The word “form” refers to the structure of the family, its boundaries, and the “roles” family members occupy within it. The Quiverfull sense of form is their answer to the question, “What is the family?” The word “function” refers to what the family does, both its practices and the impact of those practices, both privately and publicly. The Quiverfull sense of function is their answer to the question, “What does the family do?” For Quiverfull practitioners, both the family’s form and function are designed by God and clearly spelled out in Scripture. So, it is important to realize that in both the form and function of the family, Quiverfull family members are always negotiating between the ideal and the actual. The ideal is something toward which they continually strive even as they seek grace and peace to accept the actual circumstances and limitations of their daily lives.

A. The Form of the Family

For Quiverfull practitioners, the family form is fixed and unchanging, having been designed by God in the first week of creation. It is not a stretch to say that they see in Scripture a divine “blueprint” for family life. Key passages in this regard are the first two chapters of Genesis; Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-21; 1 Peter 3:1-7; and Titus 2:1-8. As the account of humanity’s creation and the first “marriage” between Adam and Eve, Gen. 1-2 is particularly important. Although part of the narrative genre, Gen. 1-2 is read as a propositional outline of God’s roles for husbands and wives. As the first human created,

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the man answers directly to God and is given charge over the world. As the second human created with the stated purpose of being the man’s “helper,” woman answers to her husband and assists him in his care for the world. She is necessarily subordinate to him and designed to serve him and help him with his responsibilities. Together, they are to “be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). For Quiverfull practitioners, this reading of Gen. 1-2 significantly controls the way the rest of scripture is interpreted. And because they believe scripture only speaks with one voice (God’s), they find the same family form reinforced in the rest of Scripture.

After Gen. 1-2, the next most important biblical passage is Eph. 5:21-33. Here, Quiverfull practitioners see the hierarchical form presented in Gen. 1-2 given more theological depth. The author of Ephesians exhorts wives to “submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (vv. 22-24). Then, he goes on to exhort husbands to love their wives “just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (v. 25). Quiverfull practitioners, like most of their evangelical neighbors, view these verses as an affirmation of the gender hierarchy presented in Gen. 1-2 but now with a revelatory purpose. As the Christian wife submits to her husband “in everything” and the husband loves his wife “as Christ loved the church,” the couple thereby demonstrates the loving relationship between Christ and the church. The couple is thought to be, in a sense, preaching the Gospel by their willingness to fulfill the model for marriage given by God.
Within the scripturally sourced blueprint, Quiverfull families find a set of divinely ordained “roles” assigned to the husband, wife, and their children. Husbands are the leaders of the family, given “headship” over his wife and children by “God’s decree and design.”606 Wives are the equal but different “helpmeets” to their husbands, given by God “to complete him, to be suited to his needs” such that her life is centered on his.607 Together, the married couple is tasked with the job of “populat[ing] the earth with future generations of men and women who would love God and seek to fulfill His purposes in the world.”608 And their children, therefore, are called to faithful obedience to their parents, learning the Christian faith within the home and readying themselves for their own future marriages and children. For Quiverfull families, these basic roles compose the basic form of the family as designed by God and they are understood to provide both stability in structure and fluidity in function.

Many Quiverfull writers link these family roles to a transcendent reality beyond the earthly family. Quiverfull elites characterize the proper performance of marriage and family roles as key to both the revelation of God’s character and the realization of God’s will in the world. The wife must submit to her husband “as to the Lord” because this, it is thought, is the way that the church submits to Christ, her head (Eph. 5:22-24). Husbands must lead and love their wives because that is the way Christ behaves toward his church (Eph. 5:25-30). As Baucham says, “[T]he headship of the man in marriage is merely an expression of the heavenly reality… [I]t goes to the heart of what we believe about the

608 DeMoss, Ten Lies Women Believe, 127.
Children must submit to their parents because God commands it (Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-3) and, in so doing, they learn to submit to God. In fact, if children do not learn to obey their parents, they will never learn to obey God and will never accomplish God’s purposes for them. In this way, every Quiverfull family role both reveals and accomplishes something transcendent.

Consequently, it is a vitally important aspect of Quiverfull family practice to continually pursue faithfulness to the God-given roles spelled out in the family blueprint. Fathers are continuously encouraged to be the leaders and caretakers of their families, while mothers are encouraged to be supportive, submissive “helpmeets” to their husbands. Children are admonished to obey their parents, especially showing honor to their father, who is a representative of God in the home. The rightly ordered home is considered a testimony of Gospel truth to the world. The roles of the Christian family must be performed in the right way so that “the word of God may not be reviled” before the watching world (Titus 2:5b). As wives submit to husbands, husbands love wives, and children obey their parents, God’s truth is revealed to others and God’s blessings will come to the family.

The Quiverfull vision for divinely prescribed family roles is often juxtaposed with the perceived “feminist” or “feminizing” impulses of other American families, which they assume are in the majority. In the most strident rhetoric of the movement, the reconstruction of the “biblical” family is a sacred mission incumbent upon every Christian man. For example, William Einwechter, quoted earlier, has the following to say in his article, “The Feminization of the Family”:

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[W]e must take up the task of the de-feminization of the family and the re-Christianization of the family. This task is the work of every individual Christian family; but it is primarily the work of Christian husbands and fathers who have been appointed by God as leaders in the home. Men must lead by precept and example in eradicating all aspects of feminist influence from the life and structure of their family and restore it to a biblical pattern. Men must prove themselves men and shoulder the full load of responsibility given to them by God. Men must stop being intimidated by feminist rhetoric and radicals and fearlessly promote God’s order for the family.\textsuperscript{610}

Of course, not all Quiverfull practitioners are so vehement in their antifeminism. But, all Quiverfull families speak of their “biblical” family structure as something that stands in opposition to the feminist or liberal vision of family life, which they associate with weak-willed men, domineering career women, and disrespectful children. Not only do they see that family form as anathema to scripture, but also a recipe for familial disaster. It is only when each member of the family rightly carries out the role designed for them by God that the family will be blessed.

Gender and age based roles are not the only element in the Quiverfull vision for family form. Also key to their form of family is a strong sense of family privacy and autonomy. Both individuals and institutions of the Quiverfull movement expressly deny the “it takes a village to raise a child” approach to children. Instead, they see parents alone possessing inviolable rights over the care and education of their offspring. They root this idea primarily in a particular reading of Genesis 1-2 and Deuteronomy 6:6-9. Genesis 1-2, already mentioned above, is thought to provide an account of the private institution of marriage (assumed to be separate from all other institutions within the domestic “garden”). Deuteronomy 6:6-9 is thought to give commands specific to parents on the education of their children. God’s commands should be taught “when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” Also,\textsuperscript{610} Einwechter, “The Feminization of the Family.”
“Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the
doorframe of your houses and on your gates” (v. 9). Within these two scriptural passages,
the family is viewed as a private institution, separated from surrounding society and the
government of the region in which they reside. Moreover, the private family is rightly
governed by the husband and father, who should act as prophet, priest, and king within
the home.\footnote{611} In this way, there are no institutions, whether social or ecclesial, to which it
owes allegiance or participation. The family is a private entity and the two parents within
it are the only ones tasked with the job of caring for and rearing their children.

Not only is the family imagined in thoroughly private terms, but the family is also
viewed as an autonomous entity. Quiverfull practitioners believe that sacred scripture
contains God’s express instructions for family life and childrearing. Therefore, parents
are accountable only to God for their success or failure in following his instructions.
Voddie Baucham describes the autonomy of the family in his book,\textit{Family Shepherds}:
“God designed the world with three distinct institutions—the family, the church, and the
civil government—each with specific jurisdictions. The church can no more tell the
family how to run its affairs than it can tell the state how to run theirs. Certainly, the
church has a responsibility to teach, admonish, warn, and guide. However, it may not
govern the other jurisdictions.”\footnote{612} The family, church, and state are conceived as parallel,
autonomous institutions. Each one is able to speak to the other, but there is no

\footnote{611}{The father as prophet, priest, and king of his family is explored in detail by Philip Lancaster in\textit{Family Man, Family Leader: Biblical Fatherhood as the Key to a Thriving Family} (San Antonio, TX: Vision Forum, 2003).}

\footnote{612}{Baucham, \textit{Family Shepherds}, 176. The source of Baucham’s “three distinct institutions” is
unclear. Most likely, Baucham would simply point to scripture as evidencing these institutions. But, one
wonders if there’s any room for the community or society beyond the family, church, and government. If
these institutions are parallel, autonomous institutions, then there is no sense of a “common good” for
society, including local communities and neighborhoods. What about the rest of the world that doesn’t fall
within these three?}
overlapping “governance” among them. Later, Baucham exhorts “family shepherds” that they are responsible for being a part of a local church that can provide edification and accountability, especially for the father’s family leadership. But, it is unclear how this “accountability” is supposed to work without the power of “governance.”

Baucham never suggests any accountability of the family shepherd to the state, such as in cases of abuse or neglect that exceed the powers of the local church to correct.

Deborah suggests that it would be ideal for families to be held accountable to their local church for faithfulness to their marital and parental duties, but she does not see most churches as being capable of that kind of oversight. That is to say, she sees most churches neglecting God’s instructions on marriage and family, which makes them incapable of helping families in that regard.

Renee touches on the same perceived problem when she says that she found more support and fellowship from fellow homeschooling families that the church with which her family worshipped. If the church doesn’t do what the family is convinced God commands them to do, how can the church provide any kind of oversight or accountability? And, if most churches are not being faithful to God’s teachings (as Quiverfull practitioners repeatedly state), then why would Quiverfull

613 Baucham is adamant about the significance of the church to the life of the family, so much so that he devotes an entire chapter to it. He says, “I’m arguing that the most important thing for a family shepherd to do…is to ensure that they’re healthy members of a healthy church” (147). And later: “I’ve had conversation after conversation with fathers and mothers who are committed to family discipleship, but who are struggling tremendously as they either attended an unhealthy church or no church at all. These families don’t testify of overwhelming joy and fulfillment because ‘family is enough.’ On the contrary, they testify to struggle, strain, loneliness, fear, isolation, and despair. Family discipleship is absolutely crucial, but there’s no substitute for healthy membership in a healthy local church” (154). Yet, it is telling that his chapter on church membership is thirteenth out of fifteen, coming after a thorough description of the family, family shepherds, family discipleship and evangelism, and the training and discipline of children.

614 His only consideration of abuse occurs in the following sentence: “A family shepherd would never abuse his children” (Family Shepherds, 144).

615 Baucham agrees with this evaluation, saying, “If we are to change the world, we must first change the church. Currently, there is no distinguishable difference between the way our culture views marriage and family and the way we do in the church” (Family Driven Faith: Doing What it Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011], 203).
families see the need to participate in them at all? This is not to mention their characteristically dismal view of the state, especially at the federal level. The Quiverfull prioritization of family privacy and autonomy means that the state is always suspect. And, as we saw in Chapter 5, the rights of parents over their children supersede those of the state and any other institution. The Christian family is viewed in entirely autonomous terms.

The Quiverfull privatization and autonomy of the family affects everything from their approach to education to healthcare to economics. In *The Way Home*, Mary Pride expressly offers the Christian woman a thoroughly “home-centered” vision for life in direct opposition to the perceived threat of outside institutions. She says pointedly, “[Homeworking] is a way to take back control of education, health care, agriculture, social welfare, business, housing, morality, and evangelism from the faceless institutions to which we have surrendered them.” In this sentence, Pride lumps together the state and the church, calling both “faceless institutions” and then places on the shoulders of the nuclear family the responsibility for all of the basic, life-sustaining elements of Western civilized society. She argues that the family alone should perform these tasks and, in so doing, declares the family an entirely autonomous entity.

Because God created the family to be the most important social institution, its right to self-rule is to be strongly protected. This means that Quiverfull families value self-sufficiency and are typically unwilling to rely upon government assistance of any kind. It is the proper roles of the father to provide for his children therefore reliance on the state is beyond the pale.

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This section has considered the form of the Quiverfull family blueprint as expressed in their discourse. The form of the family hangs on the proper performance of the gender and age specific roles within the home: father, mother, sons, and daughters. There is special emphasis in Quiverfull literature on the subordination of wives to husbands and children to parents. Moreover, the nuclear family is understood to be a private and autonomous entity, governed first by the divinely ordained patriarch and then by God. Although lip service is paid to “accountability” to local churches, the authority of family governance is vested solely with the father in the private home. So, accountability is seriously limited. And the autonomous family has no obligation or accountability to the state or broader society. Indeed, the family has an entirely voluntary relationship with both the church and society. This is the form of family that we find in the Quiverfull subculture. The next section will consider in more detail how the functions of the family are imagined in their discourse.

B. The Functions of the Family

In addition to a God given form, complete with specific roles and clearly delineated boundaries, the Quiverfull blueprint for the family also includes a number of God-given functions. Put simply, these are the things that a family is supposed to do. Certainly, Quiverfull families believe with most families that they are supposed to perform the most basic functions of provision and safety for its members, especially children. These include food, water, shelter, and bodily safety. But, I am not as concerned in this chapter with these obligations. Instead, I want to focus on the explicitly

theologically oriented functions of Quiverfull families, which show up repeatedly in their discourse. So, beyond the basic functions of provision and safety, the functions of the Quiverfull family include the following: 1) fulfill God’s design for the family; 2) bear, raise, and educate children in the Christian faith; 3) evangelize others through the family and private home; and 4) contribute toward the advance of the Kingdom of God and the transformation of America. In this section, we will consider each of these functions in turn.

First, as mentioned above, Quiverfull families are supposed to enact God’s design for the family in their daily life. This requires a daily dedication to fulfilling the roles delineated in scripture. Quiverfull literature, both print and internet, is very much focused on this point of the family’s function, filled with exhortations to wives, husbands, and children regarding the proper performance of their family duties. Although they do not claim that the importance of gender and age based roles is equal to that of the Gospel, they do explicitly link the two. To fulfill the former is to properly proclaim the latter. Of course, this is an emphasis in broader evangelical culture, as well, evidenced by the proliferation of volumes in Christian bookstores devoted to being a godly wife, husband, or child (with considerably more emphasis on wives). Because of their location in evangelicalism, this literature is often a part of Quiverfull homes too and the language about role fulfillment is a key part of their vocabulary.

We have already discussed at some length the Quiverfull view of mothers and children, in general. But, what especially stands out in Quiverfull family blueprint is the inordinate emphasis on how to be a godly daughter. Perhaps as a result of their strident antifeminism, many teachers emphasize the proper behavior of a godly daughter in
contrast to the worldly ways of most American young women. For Quiverfull elites, Christian girls are called to be obedient to their parents, respectful of and submissive to their fathers, nurturing of their younger siblings, committed to learning the womanly arts of home working, and ready to marry, bear children, and homeschool them when the time is right.\(^{618}\) (There is even an internal debate among Quiverfull practitioners regarding the appropriateness of young women attending college. Some teachers think this is folly given God’s design for gender roles. They believe daughters are better off at home with their family, learning homemaking and childrearing from their mothers until they are married to a man of their father’s choosing.\(^{619}\) This God given role for daughters is advocated through numerous websites, magazines, books, DVDs, and merchandise. And among the most ardent proponents of Quiverfull daughterhood, the future success of the Kingdom of God and transformation of American culture is to a large extent dependent upon the Christian daughter’s faithful fulfillment of her role.

The second major function of the Quiverfull family is to bear, raise, and educate children in the Christian faith. Certainly, Quiverfull practitioners know that not all

\(^{618}\) See, for example, the following books: Anna Sofia Botkin and Elizabeth Botkin, *So Much More: The Remarkable Influence of Visionary Daughters on the Kingdom of God* (San Antonio, TX: Vision Forum, 2005); Voddie Baucham, *What He Must Be... If He Wants to Marry My Daughter* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009); Jasmine Baucham, *Joyfully at Home: A Book for Young Ladies on Vision and Hope* (San Antonio, TX: Vision Forum, 2010); Sarah L. Bryant, *The Family Daughter: Becoming Pillars of Strength in Our Father’s House* (KBR Ministries, 2010). Also, the following websites: *King’s Blooming Rose Ministries*, which is devoted to “encouraging girls to grow in their walk with Christ” (http://kingsbloomingrose.com/); *Steadfast Daughters in a Quivering World*, which began as a means of responding to anti-SAHD and anti-Quiverfull blogs (http://steadfastdaughters.com); and *Raising Homemakers*, which is devoted to “teaching and preparing our daughters in the art of homemaking” (http://raisinghomemakers.com/).

\(^{619}\) Voddie Baucham, Doug Phillips, and Geoffrey Botkin are among the teachers committed to this point of view. For example, in Baucham’s book, *What He Must Be*, Baucham discusses the responsibility of fathers for protecting their daughters’ virginity and arrange for her marriage to a suitable man. On the other hand, some teachers think that denying women higher education is an overreaction and that treating young women as the property of fathers is dangerous. Mary Pride and Michael Farris are among leaders committed to this point of view. See, Pride, *The Way Home*, Second Edition, 217-222; and Michael Farris, “A Line in the Sand,” *HSLDA*, August 5, 2014, accessed January 26, 2015: http://hslda.org/courtreport/V30N2/V30N202.asp.
married couples will have children, but they do see it as the general norm. And God gives
to such couples the task of ensuring that their children grow up to be practicing
Christians. In fact, the conversion and Christian education of children is to be the primary
focus of the family’s life together—everything else is secondary. As we saw in prior
chapters, Voddie Baucham calls this family function “multigenerational faithfulness,”
which is the propagation of Christian faith among one’s children unto multiple
generations in the future. Indeed, the survival of Christianity and the success of the
Kingdom of God are viewed as largely dependent upon the work of Christian families to
rightly form their children in the faith. In movement literature, this familial
responsibility for Christian formation of children is often presented in contrast to a view
that sees the church tasked with this work. Quiverfull practitioners expressly deny that
the church is in any way responsible for the Christian training of children and gives that
task to the nuclear family instead.

All Quiverfull practitioners see the two practices of homeschooling and family
worship as key to the work of Christian formation. By spending the majority of every day
under the instruction of their mother, children in Quiverfull families are thought to have
the best chance of embracing and being formed in the Christian faith. And by being led in
worship by their fathers, who teach scripture and pray for the family (and in the most
devoted homes, train children through a catechism), children are given an example of

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620 Of course, Reformed minded leaders like Baucham will deny this dependency because of their
view of God’s sovereign providence. But, I would argue that regardless of their theological worldview, in
practical instruction they exhort families in such a way that their faithfulness to home education and family
worship has eternal consequences.

621 This strident rejection of the church’s responsibility for the spiritual formation of children may
be due, at least in part, to the fact that many Quiverfull families imagine the nuclear family as the church.
Certainly, they don’t deny the existence of churches beyond their family, but for many, the only church that
really matters is the one within their four walls. We will consider the faulty ecclesiology at work in the
Quiverfull movement in more detail in the sections that follow.
faithful discipleship and invited to join in regular devotion to God. Parents are exhorted to ensure they are equipping their children with a “biblical worldview” that prioritizes the truth of God’s word (the Bible) above all and responds to the challenges of life with praise and prayer. Baucham’s comments about family worship explain well the focus of this particular family function:

[T]hrough engaging in regular family worship, we can turn our homes into sanctuaries for the worship of Almighty God. No longer will our lives be subdivided and compartmentalized with the sacred on Sunday mornings (and Wednesday nights) and the secular dominating every other moment. Our lives can be fully engulfed with the presence and priority of God.622

Without being “fully engulfed” in God’s presence, it is thought that children are unlikely to possess for themselves and carry on the evangelical faith of their parents. For the family to do its divine duty of Christian formation, they must be faithful to worship regularly as a family and educate their children in the home with a Christian worldview.

All of the above works toward the ultimate end of producing children who embrace and embody the faith espoused by their parents. No other goal for Quiverfull children is more important.

The third function of the Quiverfull family is to do the work of evangelism and outreach. Within the evangelical tradition, the work of proselytizing is often viewed as an individual responsibility that is given direction and organization by the local church. So, churches will encourage their church members to “witness” to their neighbors individually, which typically means a discussion of the gospel message and an

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622 Baucham, Family Driven Faith, 148. Christian homeschooling researcher, Monica Smatlak Liao, calls this phenomenon “unification,” which she describes in the following way: “When conservative Protestant home schoolers integrate curricula with Christianity, family with education, and schooling with child development, they are deploying in their domestic worlds the more general practice of unification by which conservative Protestants know themselves to be set apart, or made holy: the unification of their selves, habits, and world view under the umbrella of Christianity.” See, Monica Smatlak Liao, “Keeping Home: Homeschooling and the Practice of Conservative Protestant Identity,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 2006, 64.
encouragement that the person repent and be “born again.” At the same time, churches will often organize broader, sustained efforts of outreach in an attempt to meet community needs and seek conversions among the church’s neighbors. But, in the Quiverfull movement, these tasks are more or less taken from the church and given to the nuclear family. This is not to say that Quiverfull families are not members of churches that participate in personal evangelism and community outreach. But Quiverfull families are usually intent on carrying out such work from the “base” of their private family home. This is another instance where what has traditionally been considered the work of the church among American evangelicals has been turned over to the nuclear family.

How does the Quiverfull family evangelize and carry on Christian outreach among their neighbors? Elites of the movement have a number of suggestions. Mary Pride advocates hospitality as the best tool for sharing the gospel with others. She points to the fabled example of Edith Schaeffer who helped her husband “bring literally thousands to the Lord” through her homeworking and hospitality. “Why did the Schaeffers have such great success?” she asks, “For the same reasons you and I can. They obeyed God and tried to really live by the Bible. Their two great assets were sound biblical doctrine and a family.”

She thinks this is particularly suited for older women and describes home-centered outreach in the following way:

[P]erhaps the most exciting ministry the older woman can have is her ministry of evangelism and hospitality. Her youngest children are now old enough to help, or perhaps are grown and on their own. Now her years of learning how to create a gracious home for her own family can be put to use for a wider flock. She knows the Bible and how to answer serious questions. She knows how to create a warm and loving atmosphere and is sensitive to people’s needs in the way only a mother learns to be. She has, in short, been trained to be an evangelist.

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624 Ibid., 201.
James McDonald, a Presbyterian pastor and husband of Quiverfull blogger, Stacy McDonald, speaks in a similar way of the home as a site of outreach. Writing from the perspective of a husband and father, he explicitly links the proper fulfillment of God given family roles (addressed above) as a powerful way to evangelize non-Christians:

When a husband strives to sacrificially love his wife as Christ loves the church, and when a wife seeks to honor her husband as the church should Jesus, a house becomes a home. There is an aroma of godliness that radiates from such a union, and is attractive to all. First it draws in the children, then extended family and friends take notice and are intrigued. You see, God’s blessings are not given for us to greedily hoard; they are for us to share with others. Our goal should be to see God’s Kingdom come, His will be done, on earth, as it is in Heaven. Fear God and walk in His ways… As you commit to glorifying God, the spiritual blessings in your family will naturally shine, and the scent of Heaven drifting through your home will draw even the most stubborn unbeliever.\(^\text{625}\)

In Quiverfull subculture, the evangelistic function of the home is also directed in a more specific way toward the conversion and training of young people—not just their own. (Recall the focus of the movement on the propagation of the faith to the next generation.) Rather than send children or teenagers to church-run programs so that they might be evangelized there, Quiverfull practitioners think it should be the work of the nuclear family to carry out this task. So, speaking of the need for American Christians to retain young people in the church, Baucham says, “This is a problem that must be addressed one home at a time. The answer to our current crisis is a renewed commitment to biblical evangelism and discipleship in and through our homes.”\(^\text{626}\) For Baucham, if a Christian family is faithful to train its children in Christianity, it is thought that they will naturally bring others into the faith as they spend time with them.


\(^{626}\) Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 189.
Echoing Baucham, Renee suggests that non-Christian children should be assigned to Christian families in the church, so that they might form relationships with them, evangelize them, and help with their instruction. She says, "As far as those children that we bring in [to the church], I think they probably should be included with the family. We should win them and take them in as a family and include them because they don’t have a Christian family. The kids who get bussed in should be sitting with families in worship and sitting with us when we have meals." Like Baucham, Renee thinks that discipleship is best carried out in the context of the nuclear family, even if the family isn’t the child’s biological family. Deborah has a similar view of the nuclear family’s evangelistic potential. Although the responsibility of raising six children under 10 presents many limitations, she expresses a desire to host adult Bible studies or “backyard Bible clubs” for children in order to intentionally evangelize and minister to her neighbors. The evangelical emphasis on personal evangelism remains, but it is understood to be a function of the nuclear family rather than the local church.

So far, we have seen that the Quiverfull family is understood to function in the following ways: to fulfill their God-given gender and age based roles, to educate and form children in the Christian faith, and to evangelize and disciple their non-Christian neighbors through the home. All of these functions play a major part in the fulfillment of the final function of the family: to contribute to the transformation of America and the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that Quiverfull practitioners see the future of America, in particular, and the Kingdom of God, in general, hanging on the obedience of the Christian family to their divine blueprint. In 1985, Mary Pride promised her readers that even though her proposal would not “usher in the
Millennium” it would certainly “change [American] society.” And, “if [Christian] homeworkers don't reconstruct society, the feminists will.” More recently, Geoffrey Botkin suggests: “[A]ssertive Christian families, even when a small minority, can triumph over conditions of national sin by directing society and culture to greater heights of righteousness and the blessings that come from God’s favor… Christian culture can be restored again to the West and it can endure with greater permanence if Christian families refuse to surrender their responsibilities.”

Baucham says it more succinctly: “The family is the cornerstone of society… [A]s goes the family, so goes the world.” In all of these examples, the transformation of American culture (and the world!) is linked to the faithfulness of Christian families to carry out their proper “responsibilities” within the home.

Still, it is important to point out that this more far-reaching function of the family does not appear to loom large among Quiverfull families on the ground. My ethnographic

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628 Botkin has a truly messianic vision for the family. In the same post, he goes on to say of his own family: “The building of our family legacy continues to be a pioneering effort. At the time of this writing, only a small minority of American families are seeking to recover the foundations of a godly heritage for the purposes of building a civil society according to biblical standards. Like our family, these families are also novice kingdom-builders. They know their efforts must begin in the family, and ultimately end with the family. This gives us hope, because we can control the culture of our families, and we know God blesses families that all the ends of the earth may fear him (Psalm 67:7).” Geoffrey Botkin, “A Botkin Family Secret Revealed,” Western Conservatory of Arts and Sciences, May 14, 2010, accessed January 26, 2015, http://westernconservatory.com/articles/botkin-family-secret-revealed.
629 Baucham, Family Shepherds, 11.
630 Something should be said at this point about the Quiverfull conception of the “world.” There is no coherent theology of the world shared by all Quiverfull practitioners. But, there are two identifiable ways that “world” is regularly used. First, “world” is used in the Johannine sense, where “world” is the realm of darkness, sin, and disbelief. In this understanding, “world” is often placed in juxtaposition to the church, the people of God, and is perceived as a source of defilement. In this sense, God’s people are to protect themselves from the world and see to it that they resist the world’s influence. At the same time, “world” is also used to refer to creation in a general way, including humanity and human culture within it. In this second sense, the world is not perceived in terms of its sinfulness, but as the location of God’s redemptive work. The world—the good creation of a good God—is where God’s people work so that God’s will is done “on earth as it is in heaven.” When Baucham says, “as goes the family, so goes the world,” he is using “world” in the second sense. If Christian families would only submit to God’s plan, he says, then the world (in the second sense) could see heaven come to earth and the world (in the first sense) would be turned from darkness to light.
research yielded very little reference to broader national or Kingdom-oriented goals for the family other than seeking the “multigenerational faithfulness” of their offspring. When I asked Renee whether she thought her work contributed to the “culture wars” in America, she responded, “We aren’t called to fight culture wars. We were called to make disciples. Raising children in the Lord is making disciples.” Deborah distanced herself in a similar way from those who would link the Quiverfull family to the function of world transformation: “[N]ever would I have considered myself part of a movement that’s conspiring to have more children against the world… We just want to follow God and teach them to follow God.” It seems, therefore, that the family as catalyst for world transformation and Kingdom advancement may be a preoccupation of Quiverfull teachers among the elites more so than the laity.

At this point, it is important to note that many elite Quiverfull practitioners view the family in such expansive terms because they have been influenced, either directly or indirectly, by the work of R. J. Rushdoony, who we discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Rushdoony’s writings described the family as the primary force in God’s plan for both human dominion (Gen. 1:28) and the spread of the gospel (Matt. 28:18-20). For example, in a 1977 article, “The Trustee Family,” which is regularly cited in Quiverfull literature, Rushdoony states:

In Scripture, the family is man’s basic church, state, school, society, welfare agency, and social power. Control of the children and their education rests with the family, but strictly in terms of God’s law. Inheritance is a family power, in terms of faith. Welfare is a family duty, not only with respect to non-related widows, orphans, and strangers (Deut. 14:28–29), but also and especially with all relatives, for “if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house [or, kindred], he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (1 Tim.
The authority of the husband, and of the wife, is not personal but theological and is a trusteeship for God, first of all, and then the family.\textsuperscript{631}

Rushdoony envisions most of the needs of humankind being met by the work of the nuclear family, which provides “man’s basic church, state, school, society, welfare agency, and social power.”\textsuperscript{632} Some of the most vocal proponents of the Quiverfull movement are intentionally drawing on Rushdoony’s expansive vision for the family when they write about the family’s divinely ordained functions, but most are simply imbibing his influence from within the Christian homeschooling movement. Whether directly or indirectly coming from Rushdoony, if it seems as though Quiverfull elites expect the family to do just about everything, it’s because that really is their expectation. Apart from maintaining a standing military, the family is designed by God to do the rest. Even when Quiverfull elites do not quote Rushdoony on this point, the influence of his expansive vision for the family is hard to miss.

This section has described multiple ways that the functions of the family are envisioned by Quiverfull practitioners. We have seen that paramount to Quiverfull families is the fulfillment of the God-given roles of the home, spelled out for family members based on their gender and age. Of particular concern to many in the Quiverfull movement is the proper behavior of daughters, who are supposed to be godly, chaste, “pillars of strength” in their father’s house. Also, Quiverfull families are tasked with the


\textsuperscript{632} Rushdoony’s theology here is based mostly upon a particular reading of Deuteronomy. The Law is central for his Reconstructionist (or Dominionist) theology and the New Testament plays only a supporting role. Thus, his account of the family leaves out the vital witness of the Acts of the Apostles, where the church (not the family) is the key Christian institution. Indeed, the church is the body endowed with the Holy Spirit in order to carry on the mission given by Christ. Families do indeed repent, believe, and receive the Holy Spirit in Acts, but they do so as part of the rapidly expanding church of Christ. To prioritize the family over and above the church, therefore, is a decidedly Old Covenant move that must ignore most of the New Testament’s teachings on the church as the “new humanity” and “household” of God (see Eph. 2:14-22).
duty of raising and educating the next generation of Christians. In this formative and educative function, families are especially exhorted to practice homeschooling and regular family worship, which are thought to work together to fully immerse children in the Christian faith and ensure their perseverance in the future. Moreover, Quiverfull families are expected to perform the work of evangelism and outreach through the private home, using hospitality and the proper performance of their gender roles as ways of drawing non-Christians to the faith. Finally, Quiverfull families are imagined as catalysts for the transformation of American society and the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Indeed, the private work of the Christian family in the home is imagined as the key to God’s plan for the world. But, we observed that this more expansive view of the family’s function seems to be more popular at the elite level of Quiverfull discourse. Now that we have reviewed in broad brushstrokes the form and function of the family according to the Quiverfull blueprint, it is time to turn our attention to analysis. In the following section, therefore, I will consider the Quiverfull discourse on the family from the perspective of Christian theology.

IV. Theological Analysis

Similar to the Quiverfull conceptions of motherhood and children, there are a variety of ways one might go about evaluating and analyzing the Quiverfull blueprint for the family. As in previous chapters, my primary concerns in the remainder of this chapter will be theological. The following analysis on the Quiverfull vision of the family will be divided into two major parts. First, drawing on the work of theologian Nicholas Healy, I will show that the Quiverfull theology of the family represents a “blueprint” by his definition. And, despite claims to the contrary, their family blueprint is as much a product
of 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} Century gender and family constructs as the Bible. Still, whether sourced from scripture or tradition (or both), the construction of family blueprints is wrongheaded and ultimately unhelpful for Christian theology. Then, we will consider the problem with the particular family blueprint offered by the Quiverfull movement. I will suggest that, among other things, the Quiverfull family blueprint results in 1) an excessively privatized vision of the family; 2) an imagined sinless space within the home that increases the risk of abuse and neglect; and 3) a serious deficit in both ecclesiology and a broader sense of the common good.

\textit{A. The Problem with Family Blueprints}

Evangelicals, in general, have a penchant for constructing systematic theological models. Twentieth Century evangelical theology is replete with theologians whose primary methodology was to dissect, extract, collate, and present in a systematic fashion the propositional truths of scripture on a variety of subjects.\textsuperscript{633} Furthermore, we saw in Chapter 1 that at least since the Victorian era, evangelicals in America have been applying the same method to define and uphold a particular construction of the family against a perceived onslaught of secular influences. This has led to a proliferation of evangelical marriage and family manuals, especially since the 1960s, all of which purport

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\textsuperscript{633} Examples of this approach include the systematic theologies of Charles Hodge, Charles Ryrie, Wayne Grudem, Norman Geisler, and Millard Erickson. Hodge famously argues that the task of the Christian theologian is to “ascertain, collect and combine all the facts which God has revealed concerning himself and our relation to Him” (Charles Hodge, \textit{Systematic Theology} [Reprint; Hendrickson Publishers, 1999], 11). Furthermore, “It is...unscientific for the theologian to assume a theory as to the nature of virtue, of sin, of liberty, or moral obligation, and then explain the facts of Scripture in accordance with his theories. His only proper course is to derive his theory of virtue, of sin, of liberty, of obligation, from the facts of the Bible. He should remember that his business is not to set forth his system of truth (that is of no account), but to ascertain and exhibit what is God’s system, which is a matter of the greatest moment” (Hodge, \textit{Systematic Theology}, 14).
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to delineate the properly “biblical” form and function of the family. The Quiverfull theology of the family, which we have outlined in some detail above, continues in this evangelical tradition. They offer the Christian a very specific, divinely designed model for family life, based upon the purportedly clear commands of scripture. In other words, they offer a family blueprint.

The Quiverfull movement shares with general evangelical literature on the family a number of elements (including the emphasis on wifely submission and male headship), but the most important of all is the language of God-given “roles” and authority. In fact, one might even argue that the evangelical blueprint for family life is based upon a prior, presupposed gender blueprint that includes both a gender-based hierarchy and dualism of spheres. The result is an imagined pyramid-style distribution of authority, with the father on top, mother below him, and children below both. The father answers to God, the mother answers to the father, and the children answer to mother and father. Thus, their conception of gender and age-based roles arranged into a hierarchical model of authority is the foundation for their family model.

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635 In her book, Godly Women, Brenda Brasher draws on Peter Berger to argue that a strict sense of gender dualism is a key part of the evangelical or fundamentalist “sacred canopy.” See, Brenda Brasher Godly Women: Fundamentalism and Female Power (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

636 Still, I think it is safe to posit that other Christian traditions have their own versions of the family blueprint. For example, Don Browning and his associates posit the “equal regard family” as the ideal for contemporary American families. (See, Don S. Browning, Equality and the Family: A
readers with a blueprint for family life, an eternal “form” of the family that must be emulated closely as a central task of Christian discipleship.

In his book, *Church, World, and the Christian Life*, Nicholas Healy offers a trenchant critique of what he calls “blueprint ecclesiologies.” While his broader conclusions remain beyond the purview of this project, many of the deficits that Healy recognizes in blueprint ecclesiologies are also present in family blueprints. First, blueprints offer systematic and theoretical forms of normative theology. In the case of Quiverfull, practitioners present an imaginary model of the family based upon the supposedly clear, propositional commands of scripture. Here is the “biblical model,” they suggest, and you are responsible for doing whatever is necessary to emulate this model, regardless of your particular context or circumstances.

But, as we know, family members and their lives together are, to a great extent, formed by the specifics of their various contexts. One’s context comprises, to use Healy’s words, “all that bears upon or contributes to the shape of Christian witness and discipleship” in its familial embodiment. So, the family context includes its generational history and the personal biographies of its members, their foundational beliefs and social status, all major changes in occupation and lifestyle, experiences of tragedy and strife,

individual personalities, styles of communication and argumentation, and much more.\(^{637}\)

Yet, the systematized family blueprint that Quiverfull offers is, in large part, disconnected from the contexts of particular families. It offers a normative vision for family life against which all families are to measure themselves without reckoning with the real lives of contemporary families.

A clear example of the abovementioned problem is evidenced in the Quiverfull advocacy of so-called “stay at home daughters” (SAHD), briefly mentioned above.\(^{638}\) Because the Quiverfull blueprint presupposes a gender-based dualism of spheres—men in the public sphere and women in the private sphere—daughters are to be brought up differently than sons. Their training and education is to be focused on the domestic sphere, especially the tasks of housekeeping and the education of children. Once they reach adulthood, the ideal situation is that daughters would remain at home under the authority of their fathers and tutelage of their mothers until such a time that they are married to a husband of the father’s choosing.\(^{639}\) Thus, unmarried daughters are

\(^{637}\) This list is adapted from Healy’s description of the church’s context in *Church, World, and the Christian Life*, 39.


\(^{639}\) Pastor James McDonald’s explanation is worth quoting at length: “To be a ‘stay-at-home daughter’ does not mean that she should lounge about the house waiting for Prince Charming to come along. Our daughters are to be productive and industrious keepers at home. Yes, I said ‘keepers at home.’ While they are preparing to be keepers of their own homes one day, until our daughters are married, they should serve as keepers at home in the house of their father. They are to be helpers to their mother and blessings to our entire family, as well as to our local church and community. Our daughters are to be busy preparing themselves to be helpers to their own husbands by developing their skills, continuing their education, enhancing their talents, and glorifying God right here where He has them – at home. … Since I am the head of the home, many times the tasks and activities in which our daughters are engaged reflect the occupation that God has given to me. As I am a pastor, many times my daughters (as well as my young son) rise up with my wife in assisting me with pastoral duties (hospitality, prayer, visiting the sick, preparing meals, and other various needs and ministries of the church). The activities of a family will often reflect the calling that God has given a man. While the husband and wife are one, and the wife is the
instructed to be happy and productive at home, assisting with housework, the education of siblings, the work of their father’s business, and, in some cases, the creation of their own home-based business.  

Of course, this blueprint for the family (and daughters in particular) assumes a particular socioeconomic situation that not all families possess. To fulfill the SAHD ideal, families must be financially secure enough to care for an unemployed adult daughter, the father must have a line of work to which a daughter can contribute, and the family must have enough financial capital to start and maintain a small business. This is not to mention the fact that it assumes that all daughters will necessarily relish the work of housework and homeschooling their younger siblings. Families who cannot offer their daughters the required financial security or productive at-home occupations have necessarily failed, settling for something less than the divine ideal. And daughters who do not enjoy home-based work and/or aspire to higher education or outside employment are transgressing God’s commands for women.

We can see the problem with the Quiverfull ideals for daughters illustrated vividly in the testimony of Elizabeth, an adult Quiverfull daughter. In our conversation, Elizabeth expressed particular frustration with the narrow parameters offered for Quiverfull

suitable helper—the completer of her husband, the entire household should be pointed in the direction of its leader—helping him to fulfill his mission” (James McDonald, “The Blessing of Daughters,” Family Reformation, October 2, 2007, accessed, March 24, 2015, https://familyreformation.wordpress.com/2007/10/02/the-blessing-of-daughters/).  

This is a common theme of SAHD literature, both in print and online. Many of the exemplary daughters of the Quiverfull movement operate their own home-based businesses. For example, Sarah Bryant runs a home-based ministry for fellow SAHDs. Her non-profit, King’s Blooming Rose (http://kingsbloomingrose.com), publishes books, calendars, stationary, and hosts annual conferences. Emily Rose and Breezy Brookshire operate Noble Rose Press (http://www.noblerosepress.com/), a publishing company that prints historical paper dolls, coloring books, and more. Emily Rose is an illustrator of children’s books, as well, and sells embroidery patterns through her Etsy shop, Clementine Patterns Co. (https://www.etsy.com/shop/clementinepatterns). Lisa Hallahan is a SAHD who helps her brothers run a web design company, CIDesign (http://www.christian-internet.com). She also blogs at A Lovely Calling: http://alovelycalling.com.
daughters. The dissonance she encountered between her lived experience (especially her personality, gifts, and passions) and the family blueprint offered by the subculture eventually led her to abandon the movement entirely. Because of the pertinence of her comments, I quote her at length:

From the age of 12, I was convinced that I never wanted to get married because I couldn’t handle the idea of being a mother and nothing else. My spiritual struggle was trying to accept the idea of female submission and I couldn’t do it. It was the idea of it, though, not anything that I saw. Also, I was getting some conflicting messages because my parents didn’t really enforce gender stereotypes. My dad would be proud of me when I beat boys at things and I wasn’t really raised with seeing those gender stereotypes enforced. And it was just a personal struggle that I was raised with all these passions to change the world but I felt that I couldn’t put any of that into action in the way I wanted to or fulfill the kind of mission I wanted to have if I was just a mother. So that was part of it. I was raised with all this passion and I was given only one outlet and I didn’t feel like I could put that into practice with only one outlet.

... I think [the Quiverfull] way of life is only possible when you sequester yourself in a tiny community with very little dissent where everyone is the same and believing the same things and no one is disagreeing. Once you leave that community, the entire thing just crumbles. For example, we couldn’t implement the model of courtship that we thought we believed in when I lived 1,000 miles away [at college]. We tried for a while, but it just didn’t work. We just saw that it was impractical for living in modern life... So, now my younger siblings date and have boyfriends. I really think a lot of it was my church becoming more extreme and pushing against me and my family and that just pushed us in the other direction.

Elizabeth began to realize in her adolescent years that the family blueprint she was given did not correspond well with her personal experience. The gender role mapped out for her did not fit either her personality and gifting or the sensibilities of her parents. Later, she came to believe that the idealized vision of daughterhood—especially the father’s authority over his daughter—was “impractical for living in modern life.” Elizabeth thinks that the Quiverfull family blueprint only works “when you sequester
yourself in a tiny community” with very little dissent. But, “Once you leave that community, the entire thing just crumbles.”

As we have already suggested, the family blueprint’s disconnection from the concrete context of families means that it represents a highly idealized account of the family. Quiverfull practitioners, particularly at the elite level, present a blueprint of who family members are supposed to become and what they are supposed to do. If only the family blueprint were rightly understood, valued, and implemented, then all of the practical considerations would fall into place.641 If all members of the Christian family are “doing it right,” then there will be no conflict, failure, or harm involved. For example, in his manual for fatherhood, *Family Shepherds*, Voddie Baucham puts forward a hierarchical vision for the family under the rubric of “male headship.” He especially emphasizes the authority of fathers over their children, advocating the frequent use of corporal punishment to “restrain” their wicked hearts.642 But, of the risk of abuse within this hierarchical model, Baucham states flatly, “A family shepherd would never abuse his children.”643 Never mind that research shows that some Christian men do, in fact, abuse their children and that, in some cases, hierarchical models of the family are a key part of

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641 To use Healy’s words, “The impression is given…that theologians believe that it is necessary to get our thinking about the [family] right first, after which we can go on to put our theory into practice” (*Church, World, and the Christian Life*, 36). James Davison Hunter makes a similar criticism of evangelicals, especially in their obsession with “worldview.” They emphasize the formation of a Christian worldview in the naïve supposition that if only people could think rightly then they would act rightly. Moreover, they suppose that if only they could convince people, one by one, of the correctness of the evangelical worldview, they could thereby transform American culture into something more harmonious with evangelical Christianity. See, James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

642 Baucham, *Family Shepherds*, 113-144.

643 Ibid., 144. Earlier in the chapter, Baucham says, “When a child has decided to rebel against parental authority, spanking is the authoritative response that reminds the child that the parent, under God, has the final word. However, this is by no means a license to abuse a child” (139). Nowhere in his chapters on the training and discipline of children does Baucham explain the difference between spanking and child abuse.
Rather than reckon with and anticipate this contextual factor for American families, Baucham employs the “no true Scotsman” defense: no real family shepherd would abuse his children.

Despite the fact that Quiverfull elites promote a divinely ordained model as the cure-all for familial (and social and cultural) problems, my research has shown that some in the Quiverfull laity are uncomfortable with the blueprint approach to the family. As we heard in Chapter 3, Renee speaks freely of the fact that her husband did not live up to the patriarch ideal put forth in Quiverfull literature. She very much wanted a husband who would be the spiritual leader and family shepherd, but found herself addressing the education and discipleship of her children entirely on her own. While Renee may have struggled in earlier years to make peace with the disparity between her experience and the family blueprint, eventually she let the blueprint slip away. She no longer holds to patriarchy, rejecting it as unnecessary and potentially harmful. The systematized and idealized family blueprint, disconnected from the contexts of particular families, offered Renee nothing but the recognition that her husband failed to live up to the ideal. And, because he didn’t live up to the ideal, neither could she or her children. But, rather than assume failure on her part, Renee traded the Quiverfull blueprint for a more flexible

vision based not on form (with clear-cut gender roles) but function: making disciples of her children.

Carley’s experience is very different from Renee’s, but they share an aversion to prescribed models for the family. When I asked her to describe God’s ideal for the family, she demurred: “[Y]ou think about absolute truth and culture, you know? Absolute truth should be firm across any culture but then you have our cultural differences. So, is [our view of the family] just a cultural thing? Or, is it a biblical model? … I don't know if there’s something exactly clear like that. I don’t know.” Although Carley acknowledges that she’s associated with a movement that does have a very particular vision of the family, she calls herself the “oddball in the group.” She firmly believes in “male headship” and that parents are ultimately responsible for instructing their children in the Christian faith, but she’s unwilling to spell out in detail what that must look like on the ground. In fact, she goes so far as to call it “sin” for her to condemn the different practices of another Christian family when she can “see the [spiritual] fruit” of their faithfulness. Carley is uncomfortable with blueprints because she sees them as a form of “legalism” and what she pejoratively calls “religion.” Therefore, she speaks of the ideal family in terms of practices and virtues, using words like “gathering,” “communication,” “compassion,” “togetherness,” “vulnerability,” and “pitching-in.” Like Renee, Carley is more focused on the function of the family (what it does) over the form (what it looks like). Ultimately, she says, the family should function like a “mini-church.”

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645 When I asked about the instructions of Deut. 6 for parents to teach their children, Carley responded, “I do think that parents are supposed to be the primary teachers [of their children]. Can they send them to school and still be the primary teachers? Absolutely. We have friends that do that. And we see the fruit. I think it would be a sin for me to say that is wrong. I do. I see that families that homeschool that aren’t the primary teacher and they’re doing their children a disservice. So… I am pretty firm in the belief that we should be our children’s primary teacher. Does that mean we have to homeschool? I don’t think so.”
seeking to “serve the Lord as a family” (more on this below). It seems that role fulfillment takes a backseat to this higher purpose.

Although Renee and Carley’s stories cannot be said to be representative, they do suggest that some in the Quiverfull laity are dissatisfied with the family blueprint offered by the cultural elites. They know from experience that rigid forms and narrowly prescribed roles do not work in organic family life. Also, Renee’s story illustrates what Healy says is a problem of theological blueprints in general. Systematized and abstract models necessarily float as an unattainable form above the various messy contexts of contemporary families. Many families cannot attain to the idealized family form no matter how firmly they believe or how hard they try. Thus, the Quiverfull blueprint marginalizes many (most?) families because, for a variety of contextual reasons, they are unable to attain the divine ideal. This approach may be good for culture war visions of the “faithful remnant” but it is bad for Christian theology as a whole. A tradition whose vision of the family is viewed as so impractical and unrealistic cannot hope either to inspire the world through faithful witness or effect transformational change. Healy’s warnings about modern ecclesiology are applicable here:

The tendency of modern ecclesiology…is to include little explicit analysis of the church’s concrete identity and its context. A given blueprint ecclesiology may indeed respond adequately to its context. But, again, the lack of such analysis increases the likelihood that it will not, even though it may be consonant with Scripture and tradition. In such a case, the theologian would have misconstrued the historical movement of the church and its present shape, or misinterpreted the ecclesiological context, or both. As a result, the blueprint, although fine as a presentation of doctrine, would be unfruitful or impractical in the concrete in that, like most bad judgments, it would respond to what is peripheral rather than to what is central. And because the blueprint is developed without consideration of the ecclesiological context, it may well take longer to recognize its inadequacy.  

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646 Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life*, 47.
The last few sentences are particularly appropriate for our discussion of the evangelical and Quiverfull attachment to family blueprints. What such blueprints offer may represent a fine “presentation of doctrine” that appears cohesive, biblically rooted, and “traditional” in appealing ways. But, because there has been little to no engagement with the changing contexts of American families through the years and no accounting of the real lives of Christian families today, they are promoting a family blueprint that is increasingly inadequate—or, to use Healy’s words, a “bad judgment.”

Still, even with the weaknesses of family blueprints so plainly spelled out, it’s possible that both Quiverfull practitioners and evangelicals in general would respond to all of the above with a rhetorical shrug. They might say that their “biblical model” for family life is divinely revealed and therefore not dependent on cultural contexts. The family blueprint does not depend for its veracity on its perceived practicality in contemporary life. The biblical ideal is to be emulated in faith, whether or not it is perceived as practical. Indeed, the very impracticality of their family blueprint might be put forward as a strength! “[S]mall is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matt. 7:14).

Yet, the assumption that their family blueprint is a divine design culled straight from the pages of Scripture is naïve and simplistic. As we saw in Chapter 1, American evangelicals have constructed their model of gender and the family over the past couple of centuries in interaction with a variety of socioeconomic and cultural factors. And, like all theology, the evangelical family blueprint has been conceived within a particular tradition, with a particular understanding of history and God’s work in the world. As Healy notes,
While a blueprint…may be presented as if it were a normative and systematic deduction from a single model, in fact any…proposal, systematic or otherwise, depends for its cogency upon appeals, explicit or tacit, to complex relationships among a wide range of factors. Besides Scripture and tradition, construed within a particular horizon, these include an interpretation of the history of the church, a construal of Christianity and the mode of God’s presence to the faithful, and a construal of the present…context.647

The nuclear family, for example, is a recent development in human history, born of a number of factors including the industrial revolution, urbanization, and consumer capitalism. Moreover, contemporary evangelical writings that put forward the nuclear family led by a male breadwinner as the “biblical” ideal are not reckoning with the multiplicity of family forms found in Scripture, nor are they paying attention to the vast differences between the contexts of the biblical writers and the present day. The Bible does not, in fact, offer Christians a blueprint for the family. Instead, what we find are a collection of texts pertinent to theological thinking about the family. In the Old Testament, we see narratives about the lives of some ancient near eastern families, law codes governing patrilinear, patrilocal Israeliite families (that may or may not have been followed in ancient Israel), prophetic denunciations of husbands who abandon their families, wisdom literature enjoining the young to reverence their elders, and poetic statements about the blessing of children. In the New Testament, we hear warnings from Jesus about the trappings of family loyalty, the creation of a new family among Jesus’ disciples, and, several decades later, the instructions of Pauline “household codes” promoting orderly families within the Roman Empire. In these texts, the language of “roles” and the concept of the modern nuclear family, are nowhere to be found.

All this is to say that even by their “biblical” standards, the evangelical family blueprint falls short. Despite the claim that they possess a “biblical,” divinely ordained

647 Ibid., 43.
model for family life, evangelicals have no such thing. They are reading a late 19th and early 20th Century form of middle class family life into sacred scripture and extracting from it gender-based roles to circumscribe the behavior of individual family members, especially women. Moreover, their systematic and normative vision for family life is problematically detached from the contemporary context of real families. Due to their inattention to the shifting cultural, political, and socioeconomic contexts of American families, the evangelical family blueprint constitutes an impractical and unattainable form. Rather than empower the work of faithful discipleship, the blueprint can easily become a millstone.

This is not to mention the fact that many factors go into the particular theologian’s reflections on the family. Healy suggests that all of the following come to bear on a theologian’s choice of ecclesiology, and I would argue, family theology: theological imagination as formed by their particular tradition and community; their interaction with the church; their particular interpretation of the narrative of church history (especially when the church was at its “best” and “worst” and why); the theologian’s worldview or metanarrative; and the theologian’s view of how God is present among the faithful (i.e., scripture, Eucharist, the poor). See, Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life*, 39-43.

But, one might ask, if the evangelical family blueprint is so problematic for Christian theology and practice then what should take its place? Healy offers a way forward on this subject, as well. He argues that the proper function of ecclesiology is “to aid the concrete church in performing its tasks of witness and pastoral care” within its “ecclesiological context” (*Church, World, and the Christian Life*, 38). I suggest something similar could be said of theologies of the family, whether they arise from academic, clinical, or pastoral situations. The task of family theology is to aid concrete families, regardless of their form, in performing their tasks of witness and discipleship within their multiple contexts. This means that critical analysis of these various contexts and the activities within them should be a central task of family theology, even in an evangelical mode (39). Again, riffing on Healy, in contrast to the structure of family blueprints, theological reflection on the family must be, from the outset, a matter of practical rather than theoretical reasoning. The practice of family theology should arise out of lived experience and family practices and ordered directly toward them (46).

But, how would we assess such contextually dependent and practically rooted theologies of the family? Healy argues that a criterion is needed with which to assess ecclesiological proposals. I think the same could be said of family theologies: The most important would be how well they respond to the familial contexts for which and within which they are made. It is not enough to assume that theologians and families have a shared understanding of their political, cultural, socioeconomic, and practical contexts; theologians need a sophisticated description of both particular families and their various contexts to serve as a source of critical reflection (49).

But, in the end, the final judgment about the adequacy of Christian family theologies must arise from what Healy calls a “thoroughly theological horizon” (50). Although a thorough exploration of these points remain beyond the bounds of the present project, I think all of the above insights offer a more fruitful way forward in theological reflection on the family than the blueprint approach that has dominated evangelical theology for over a century.
Before leaving the general subject of theological blueprints, it is important to acknowledge that much of their allure, especially in the matter of the family, has to do with the presumption that if one properly emulates the divinely ordained form, one is guaranteed success. For the Quiverfull movement, success takes the form of the blessing of God manifested through godly Christian children, personal satisfaction, and long-term cultural impact. But, the truth is, none of these things are guaranteed, no matter how perfectly a family blueprint is put into practice. In the end, the family is an organism made up of flawed human beings with various strengths, weaknesses, inclinations, habits, and patterns of behavior. In the end, Christians are better off focusing on what the family does, both for its members and for the church and community beyond—something that some of my Quiverfull mothers already understand.

Now that we have considered the problems with family blueprints, in general, it is time to consider the specific weaknesses of the Quiverfull family blueprint in particular. Although the following section is aimed at the Quiverfull movement, some or all of the following points are applicable to more generic, evangelical family blueprints, as well. Moreover, we will see in the conclusion to this project that Quiverfull offers us a surprising and invaluable perspective on contemporary approaches to the American family in general. But, we will reserve that discussion until then.

B. The Problem with the Quiverfull Family Blueprint

While there are problems with the use of blueprints in family theology as a whole, there are also some specific issues with the Quiverfull family blueprint, in particular. A number of issues are worthy of attention, not least of which is their patriarchal vision of the home. Indeed, the strident gender dualism and gender-based roles espoused by
Quiverfull practitioners is among the most objectionable elements to movement outsiders. Yet, critique of their version of Christian patriarchy has been done, both within and beyond American evangelicalism. And, I have considered some of the issues with Quiverfull gender hierarchy in Chapter 4 of this project. So, for the present analysis, I will assume the problematic nature of Quiverfull patriarchy and consider in more detail three less obvious, but no less problematic elements of the Quiverfull family blueprint: 1) the excessive privatization and resulting isolation of the family; 2) the eclipse of ecclesiology and a broader sense of social connectedness; and 3) the construction of the home as a sinless space, leading to the cover up of domestic abuse.

i. Excessive Privatization and Isolation

The first weakness of the Quiverfull vision of the family has been discussed in a limited way above. Quiverfull elites and laypersons imagine families as private, autonomous entities governed by the father or, in some cases, the parents as a unit. The family is imagined with well-defined boundaries, wholly distinct from the church and the nation, each of which viewed as “parallel institutions.”650 The head of the family answers directly to Christ. Although this may sound like a novel perspective, in this point Quiverfull families are simply doubling-down on broader American tendencies. As has been well documented, the family as a private, autonomous institution is essential to the American cultural imagination.651 Americans generally think that what happens “in the bedroom” is a totally private matter. Sexual practices and any resulting pregnancies are

the concern of the parties involved and no one else. Likewise, marriage is a matter of romantic love and personal choice with no broader social context or responsibilities. Similarly, most Americans think that caring and providing for children is the private duty of parents, something that should only be supplemented in the most extreme cases. So, European institutions like universal childcare, universal healthcare, or universal college education are almost unimaginable in the American context. And this doesn’t even take into consideration the fact that retirement, end of life care, and other such matters are envisioned mostly as the private family’s concern.

The imagined privatization and autonomy of the American family is particularly obvious in the various public conversations about the crisis of the family. Rather than view the nuclear family’s decline within the context of broader social, economic, and cultural problems, Americans at all levels regularly reverse the correlation, crediting the family’s dissolution as the cause of most social ills. If only individuals would “fix” their private families—by being less selfish, less lazy, or less promiscuous—then American society would be strengthened and stabilized. This perspective is particularly common in discussions of America’s urban poor, who are often offered the institution of marriage as a cure-all for persistent poverty, never mind the problems of unemployment, systemic racism evidenced in high rates of arrest and incarceration, the proliferation of guns exacerbated by loose gun laws, and more. That the nuclear family could be fixed through sheer moral determination persists despite the fact that sociologists and other experts regularly argue that there are “multiple realities and therefore multiple responsibilities” at work in the dissolution of the American family. For example, social systems theorists
Jaime Inclan and Ernesto Ferran, Jr. offer the following on the relationship of families to their environments:

We are increasingly aware that when families fail in large numbers, their environment contributes to that failure. That is to say, where there is trouble in families, there is likely to be a crisis in the “village” itself. Therefore, we cannot do the urgent work of rehabilitating families without at the same time addressing problems in education, transportation, health care, employment, race and class and sex discrimination, conspicuous consumerism, and the exploitation of the land, all of which contaminate the “village” environment in which families attempt to survive. It is true that a civilization is only as strong as its families because its future lies in the health and welfare of its children. However, the converse is also true: families can only thrive in healthy communities.

There is much more that could be said about the dominant American model of the family, but that is not our focus here. What the above discussion clarifies for our purposes is that in their tendency to disregard the importance of the family’s environment, Quiverfull proponents perpetuate the typical American myopia about the problems facing the family today. Because they imagine the family in thoroughly private and autonomous terms, their answers to the dissolution of the family remain private matters, disregarding broader cultural, political, and economic factors affecting contemporary families. Theirs is a decidedly “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” approach to the family—not a new concept for most Americans.

Thus, the Quiverfull construction of the family is far from innovative. Quiverfull practitioners are simply adding even more responsibilities to the existing American privatized view of the family. Just as the Quiverfull performance of motherhood is like *Lean In* for stay-at-home moms, so also the Quiverfull vision for the family is *Lean In* for

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the nuclear family.\textsuperscript{653} Now, on top of everything else, the nuclear family is also tasked with the formal education of children from preschool through high school (and beyond); the spiritual formation and catechesis of children; personal evangelism, community outreach, and discipleship; and the long-term transformation of American society through a demographic shift and cultural takeover. If American families under the dominant cultural model were weighed down by their extensive burdens before, the Quiverfull family blueprint increases the demands a hundredfold. Quiverfull practitioners like Mary Pride may be right to claim that government-funded programs for public schools, daycare, healthcare, and more are novel endeavors, but “so too is the idea that a nuclear family can adequately carry all the responsibilities previously carried by the ‘village.’”\textsuperscript{654}

Now, some might object that the Quiverfull focus on raising “sons and daughters who walk with God” does indeed stand out from the cultural status quo. This argument has merit insofar as Quiverfull parents prioritize their understanding of spiritual success over the educational or recreational success of their children. It is true that most Americans do not conduct the work of parenting with single-minded devotion to the propagation of their faith. Even so, the prioritization of the Christian conversion and formation of one’s children retains the American tendency toward an inward-looking focus on the success of one’s own children, however that success is defined. Though they may not understand “success” as attending an Ivy League school or competing in an elite soccer league, Quiverfull families remain, for the most part, entirely focused upon the protection and formation of their offspring. Certainly, the shift in focus to children’s


spiritual and moral formation is preferable to other, more common superficial concerns like material prosperity. But, there is no doubt that the Quiverfull focus on the success of their own children, within the walls of the private family home, unwittingly perpetuates the private, autonomous, and self-interested model of the American family.

We see evidence of this privatized self-interest in the testimony of some Quiverfull mothers. When I asked Deborah if she felt responsible for the wellbeing of other people’s children, she said no: “I feel like I have a responsibility to pray for other people’s children. … I can’t save the world so I just try to pray for the world. When we [as a family] see those who don’t make good choices we just pray for them that the Lord would help them. I think that is our responsibility, but beyond that… I need to do a good job at the ministry in my home. Unless there’s a specific thing the Lord’s asking me to do, that needs to be my focus.” Carley is more open to the idea that she has a responsibility for the care of others: “I think we should love our neighbors as ourselves—and specifically orphans. I do have a responsibility for that.” When I pressed her on the matter of organized care through healthcare, education, etc, she was hesitant. Eventually she conceded, “I do think it’s our responsibility as Christians. And the character of Jesus showed that he cared for people in those kinds of ways. But, to make people do those things as a society is a whole different thing. We should as Christians take care of others in that way, but I don’t think we should be forced to.” In this way, Carley, acknowledges a personal responsibility for caring for others, but rules out the use of broader social or governmental structures. The burden continues to rest squarely on individual families and their private choices. Renee, the oldest of the mothers I interviewed, was the most open to organized structures of care for others. She said, “Yes, in the case of poor families or
families that neglect their kids… Yes, I think as a society, as Americans, we should take care of them.” But, even with this affirmation, Renee is concerned about the family’s autonomy, following up with, “I think we’re still working that out, though, because there’s such a fine line on the matter of parental rights, which, of course, people like us want.” Indeed, the issue of “parental rights” is a common concern among both Quiverfull laity and elites. It seems that familial autonomy remains primary, even when the love of neighbor is acknowledged as a concern.

Of course, the inwardly focused self-interest alluded to above is not surprising given the extensive responsibilities shouldered by Quiverfull mothers and their families. Do they realistically have time to think about the care of others when they have so much to do for themselves? And the concern for “parental rights” is, in many ways, fostered by elite narratives about state persecution and interference with Christian families. I need to clarify, however, that my intention here is not to criticize the focus of Quiverfull mothers or their families. By bringing up the lack of broader social vision or engagement beyond the nuclear family, I am not seeking to add to the extensive responsibilities already shouldered by these families. As if adding more care-giving tasks for those outside the nuclear family is all that is needed to “fix” Quiverfull theology and practice! Instead, I am simply shedding light on the way that the Quiverfull vision for and practice of the family seems to exacerbate the general American myopia about anything beyond the walls of the private home. In short, what was already an extant problem in the American cultural imagination is exacerbated within Quiverfull discourse. Because of their inability and, in some cases, unwillingness to address broader social and economic factors, the
Quiverfull movement is unable to offer a viable response to the challenges facing American families today.

Because they imagine the family in thoroughly private and autonomous terms, Quiverfull families have a tendency to live isolated lives—arguably more isolated than typical American families. There seem to be two interconnected reasons for this. First, the practices of pronatalism and homeschooling almost inevitably result in an inward-looking focus on the home. And, second, the peculiarity of the Quiverfull way of life works against the formation of friendships and systems of support. The majority of homeschooling instruction takes place in the private home and any schooling beyond the home usually occurs with likeminded families in a voluntary homeschooling cooperative. If the family is involved in a church that is distinct from their homeschooling colleagues, they may interact with others in that environment, as well. Still, given their inordinate responsibilities, there is only so much support that fellow Quiverfull mothers can offer each other. When I asked her if isolation is an ongoing problem, Deborah answered in the affirmative. I will quote her reflection on that problem at length:

Yes, I guess because of our situation. And I think it would be fair to assume that even in a church with a bunch of families that look like us, those families might still feel isolated. Because I don’t think you can physically go through what we are going through and not feel isolated. I just don’t think you can. We take up an entire pew by ourselves! [Laughter.] When we go to a church meal, we take up a whole table. [Laughter.] I don’t have time to do every ladies coffee that’s available. We cannot sign up to volunteer in every single activity that the church decides to serve the community with… There are still ways to have fellowship. When I take my kids to the homeschool co-op, I’m totally happy to have my kids go play and sit and fellowship with the other moms. So, there are ways to not feel so isolated when you’re with likeminded people and be encouraged and not discouraged. But, any family that chooses to really make family and training their children a priority and chooses to do things like us, I think they often look kind of like hermits. [Laughter.] I have two very dear friends who both have seven children, both homeschool, who I just thought we would be best friends forever. But, I just went through a really rough time this past year. I was sad and
overwhelmed and struggling. And it wasn’t my friends who comforted me, but it was random people at our church… So, my friends don’t talk to me and I get all worked up about it. What did I do? I think, Why doesn’t she talk to me? Why doesn’t she call me? Then I just decided that they could be thinking the same thing about me. We cannot as mothers of seven kids, homeschooling, doing everything we do, and still have the time… If you can find the time to [have active friendships] it’s like a gem in the rough. But I think it’s fine. We do this on purpose. But the enemy can make you feel lonely and down. The enemy can use the isolation to make you feel down and draw your attention away from your home. But, I feel like what we’re doing is purposeful and it’s OK.

Interestingly, Deborah assumes that “any family” that “chooses to do things like [them]” will face isolation. She links the isolation first to their large family size, which causes them to stand out (“We take up an entire pew by ourselves!”). She also points to the peculiarity of their lifestyle, organized around the priority of “family” and “training their children.” So, she seems to assume that they are unlikely to make connections beyond the bounds of fellow Quiverfull families. And, even among those who share their convictions, Deborah acknowledges that friendship and support is hard to come by: “We cannot as mothers of seven kids, homeschooling, doing everything we do, and still have the time.” Indeed, she sees isolation as a constant avenue for “the enemy” (i.e., Satan or the Devil) to make her and others like her feel “lonely and down.” But, speaking with an air of resignation, there doesn’t seem to be anything Deborah thinks can be done about that. She sees isolation as an inevitable result of their “purposeful” family practices, so she accepts it as a kind of necessary evil.

The same acceptance of isolation as a necessary evil is evident in the stories of Renee and Carley. Renee recalls the short periods when she had likeminded friends who lived close by as dear and important times in her life. But, most of the time, she was carrying on her motherly work on her own. She says,
Not having any help or moral support—that was the biggest challenge for me emotionally. Not to get depressed or resentful. Not to have any help built into the culture, whether it’s through marriage or extended family. As a big family, no one else understands. They don’t know what you need or how to help or even that you need help. And as a person and a woman that was the hardest part. The best years that I did have were when the Smiths lived here and we both had lots of kids and could share and go to each other’s houses. That friendship was important but I didn’t always have it.  

But, it’s not just mothers who face isolation; children deal with it, as well. Many Quiverfull families intentionally keep their children from socializing with anyone but the likeminded. Depending on where the family lives and their level of involvement in a local church, Quiverfull children may have a very limited number of friends outside their immediate family. Many families are unapologetic about their choice to keep their children from the influence of non-Christian and non-Quiverfull families. Some families are so wedded to the form—focused on getting their performance of the family “just right”—they happily embrace disconnection from church and community. Their pursuit of (perceived) purity leads to the further disintegration of support structures beyond the home. In these cases, the children are expected to socialize with their own family members and the friends of the parents’ choosing. Of course, it is quite common for American families to associate with those within their own religion, race, and socio-economic status. And certainly Quiverfull parents are not the only ones to exercise

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655 The same is true of Carley. Even though she seems to have the most friends of the three mothers at the center of this project, she definitely conducts the majority of her life on her own within the private family home. Carley’s isolation seems more attenuated, however, because of the involvement of her husband. She portrays their work in the home as a partnership and speaks of her husband pitching in when he is home. This more equitable division of the domestic work may lead to a more companionate marriage and less isolation for Carley.

656 For example, on the subject of race, see Andrew Hacker, Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal, Revised Edition (New York: Scribner, 2003). This problem is no less apparent in the lives of American Christians either. See, for example, Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Christena Cleveland, Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013).
leadership in the friends their children acquires. What I pointing out here is the way that
the Quiverfull way of life manifests an intensification of broader tendencies in American
society.

Unfortunately, the privatized and autonomous Quiverfull vision for the family,
often combined with a suspicious view of government, established churches, and other
institutions, does not provide the right conceptual tools for a way out of the isolation
conundrum. The primary concern for the Christian formation of offspring—conceived of
as the responsibility of the private family alone—has trumped all other concerns.
Moreover, they think that Christian formation is properly carried out only through
mother-led schooling in the home. This conviction, combined with pronatalism and
gender hierarchy, often results in an isolated mother within an isolated family. Certainly,
Quiverfull mothers are to be admired for their industriousness and courageous
perseverance in the midst of such trying circumstances, but surely we cannot affirm this
familial situation as ideal in any sense. Moreover, their theology and practice of the
family works against their own aims of robust Christian formation of children and
“serving the Lord as a family.” Their social and ecclesial isolation (to be considered in
more detail below) hinders their ability to practice and impart a full Christian identity to
the next generation.

The Quiverfull vision of the family contributes directly to the experience of social
isolation in these families. While I certainly cannot presume to “fix” the Quiverfull vision
of the family in this limited context, I can suggest some elements within the Christian
tradition that offer a better, more socially engaged vision for the family. Catholic social
teaching, for example, presents a more open, others-oriented vision of family life. The
writings of Pope John Paul II, in particular, point us away from the privatized, autonomous, and isolated American vision of the family and toward a much more social, others-oriented institution. In his encyclical *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul explains the purpose of the family in four parts. First, the family is tasked with the responsibility to guard, reveal, and communicate love. Second, the family is supposed to “serve life” by having children, educating them, and forming them in the Christian faith. Third, the family is to participate in the development of society because “far from being closed in on itself, the family is by its nature and vocation open to other families and to society and undertakes its social role.” Finally, the family is to serve the church by being a “domestic church,” which includes the work of evangelizing its members, witnessing to the world, using its home as a sanctuary, and serving the broader community. A number of lay Catholic theologians elaborate and build upon John Paul’s teaching, including Julie Hanlon Rubio and Lisa Sowle Cahill. Rubio writes, “The genius of Catholic teaching on the family is its refusal to limit families by telling them simply to focus on themselves. Christian families, from this perspective, are to grow in self-giving love within and outside the bonds of kinship.” Cahill says something similar: “In my view, the Christian family is not the nuclear family focused inward on the welfare of its own members but the socially transformative family that seeks to make the Christian

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657 Of course, this account of the family is rooted firmly in Catholic social teaching regarding the common good. Without a sense of connectedness to broader society or responsibility for the common good, it is uncertain whether the Pope’s insights are immediately applicable to Quiverfull families.  
659 Ibid., no. 37.  
660 Ibid., no. 42, 44.  
661 Ibid., no. 49-64.  
moral ideal of love of neighbor part of the common good.”

As we have seen, it is the latter point with which Quiverfull families have the most difficulty. Despite their desire to be witnesses and effective agents of change in American society, their imagination and practice of the family results inadvertently in “the nuclear family focused inward on the welfare of its own members.”

ii. Tensions between the Family and the Church

In addition to a general problem with the privatization and isolation of the family, Quiverfull discourse has a tendency to create tensions between the family and the church. This is somewhat surprising given the fervency with which Quiverfull families are seeking to embody and pass on the Christian faith. One might expect their commitment to Christian formation to translate into faithful church participation, but the opposite is often the case. As I shared in Chapter 2, all of the Quiverfull families with whom I have worked testify to a long history of problems with church involvement. What I have found is that, more often than not, their commitment to the Quiverfull discourse takes precedence over ecclesial loyalty. In fact, sometimes their Quiverfull practices bring them into direct conflict with churches. This can’t help but have an affect on the family’s relationship with the church, both in theology and in practice.

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663 Cahill, *Family*, xi, xii.
664 I could just as well say that Quiverfull discourse tends to replace the church with the nuclear family—that is, the nuclear family becomes, for all intents and purposes, the church. This is something I have already considered in some detail in Chapter 5. I have chosen not to characterize matters in that way here because I do not accept the Quiverfull premise that the family constitutes a church. Certainly, there is a fundamental relationship between the two in Christian theology and practice, but the two are not (indeed, cannot be) equivalent. Rather, I agree with Jana Bennett’s contention that Christian families (“households”) are completely reconfigured in light of the church (“the Household of God”). In the church’s liturgy, “we are all children of God and brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, of each other because we have been baptized” (131). In the end, she says, “The very idea of family expands because of Christ’s Body” (132). Much more could be said about this, of course. For a fuller discussion, see Jana Bennett, *Water is Thicker Than Blood: An Augustinian Theology of Marriage and Singleness* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
At base, much of Quiverfull discourse involves the pursuit of purity: purity in theology and purity in practice. Quiverfull families are seeking to be the most committed and most faithful Christians they can be. Many of them see in their practices of pronatalism, homeschooling, and gender hierarchy a commitment to biblical truth not shared by other Christians. Although the intensity of the rhetoric varies on this point, most see other American Christians implicated in a pattern of compromise and capitulation with the surrounding culture. In this respect, Quiverfull represents a discourse of reform or protest within American Christianity (more about this below) and American culture as a whole. They are pointing the way to a purer, more focused practice of evangelical Christianity, as well as a more faithful, socially beneficial way of life for the U.S. Of course, this perspective has significant influence on the way they view and interact with churches, especially evangelical churches. If the family is seen as the location of God’s reforming work in America, then it makes sense that the family would come to eclipse the church and ecclesiology would fall by the wayside.

At the level of Quiverfull elites, the nuclear family is consistently prioritized over the church. In terms of biblical theology, Quiverfull teachers tend to read the Bible through the lens of the nuclear family, seeing the family—and the godly patriarch at its head—as the key to God’s salvation of the world. In Baucham’s words, “From Genesis to Revelation, we see a clear picture of the role of the family in redemptive history, and the role of the father in the family.”665 One pastor of a family integrated church in the Midwest put it concisely: “The family is God’s plan for revealing himself to the world. He had to create family in order for us to understand God as Father. The married couple

665 Baucham, Family Shepherds, 25. I would contest Baucham’s assertion that the family is central in the New Testament, something I discuss in more detail in note 632 above. Perhaps the patriarchal family is central from Genesis to Malachi, but certainly not from Matthew to Revelation.
is a picture of Christ and the church. The unity of the two becoming one is ultimately a picture of Christ and the Church to the world. [What we see in America today is that] one of the most important pictures of God to the world is breaking up.\textsuperscript{666} \textit{The family is God’s plan for revealing himself to the world}. In this perspective, the family is central both to God’s revelation and salvation. But, this is not just the way of God in the past; Quiverfull teachers believe it is the way God continues to work today. At the end of \textit{Family Driven Faith}, Baucham says it this way: “We will either win the culture one family at a time or will continue to lose the culture one family at a time. Either way the family is the key.”\textsuperscript{667}

It is hard to see what, if any, role the church has to play in this radically family-centric vision of revelation, salvation, and mission.

On the one hand, the prioritization of the family isn’t entirely without biblical precedent. The Old Testament, especially the stories of the patriarchs and God’s covenant relationship with David, is filled with accounts of God establishing a relationship with patriarchs and using his descendents to bring about God’s purposes. The Lord is “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” after all. In these stories, little attention is given to “the village” or the assembly of God’s people, apart from the patriarch’s family. And yet, the New Testament does not maintain this patriarch-driven, family-focused perspective on God’s work. In the Gospels, loyalty and apprenticeship to Jesus takes priority over family ties and, at the very least, relativizes the authority of the patriarch. “Whoever does God’s will is my mother and sister and brother,” Jesus says in Mark 3:34. Also, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).

\textsuperscript{666} Joshua Lenon, Pastor of Red Door Church, Cincinnati, OH, phone interview, August 28, 2013.
\textsuperscript{667} Baucham, \textit{Family Driven Faith}, 214.
Clearly, the call to join Jesus in his Kingdom is a call that ultimately trumps all other calls. Later, in the Pauline epistles, the centrality of the church, in implied contrast to the family, becomes clearer. Ephesians 3:7-11 reads as follow:

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In this passage, the gospel of God’s “eternal purpose” and “boundless riches of Christ” is made manifest through “the church.” It is the church through which God is making known “the manifold wisdom of God.” Evidently, the family is no longer the primary locus of God’s saving activity in the world. This is not to say, of course, that the family does not have a key role in the education and formation of children. Certainly, it does. But, that is a different matter from seeing the family as “God’s plan for revealing himself to the world.” Whereas the biblical story begins with God’s command to humankind to “be fruitful and multiply” and “rule” over the earth (Gen. 1:28), the story of Jesus culminates with his proclamation that “all authority” has been given to him, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:18-20). In the kingdom of God, “be fruitful and multiply” has been elevated and fulfilled by “make disciples of all nations.” In this way, theologian Jana Bennett is correct: water—the water of baptism—is indeed thicker than blood. But, this is not the
point of view of Quiverfull elites. For them, the replication of the family blueprint remains the key to Christian faithfulness and the triumph of God’s kingdom.⁶⁶⁸

Yet, when Quiverfull elites do talk about church, what do they have to say? In Voddie Baucham’s book, *Family Shepherd*, he is adamant about the significance of the church to the life of the family, even devoting an entire chapter to it. He says, “[T]he most important thing for a family shepherd to do…is to ensure that they’re healthy members of a healthy church.”⁶⁶⁹ Later, he elaborates:

I’ve had conversation after conversation with fathers and mothers who are committed to family discipleship, but who are struggling tremendously as they either attended an unhealthy church or no church at all. These families don’t testify of overwhelming joy and fulfillment because “family is enough.” On the contrary, they testify to struggle, strain, loneliness, fear, isolation, and despair. Family discipleship is absolutely crucial, but there’s no substitute for healthy membership in a healthy local church.⁶⁷⁰

It is good that Baucham acknowledges here the struggle of isolation, fear, and despair that many Quiverfull families face. And it is good that he is promoting church involvement as one way of mitigating those challenges. Yet, the phrase “healthy church,” which he uses repeatedly throughout the chapter, makes things unintentionally tricky. What qualifies as a “healthy church”? In one place he uses the phrase “healthy, theologically sound local bodies,”⁶⁷¹ but never explains what this phrase means. Clearly, it is up to the family shepherd to determine the theological fitness of a given church and make his decision accordingly. Moreover, the equation of “healthy” and “theologically

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⁶⁶⁸ Baucham argues in *Family Shepherds*, “there’s nothing in the New Testament to support any approach that would undermine, redefine, or abandon the family discipleship model in the Old Testament” (23). For Baucham, the family remains the central institution in the propagation and preservation of the Christian faith. Even though he says, “The church/family dynamic is not an either/or scenario,” he certainly envisions a conflict between the two institutions and makes clear that the family is most important. As he says in *Family Driven Faith*, “the family is the key” (214).


⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 154.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., 149.
sound” raises the problematic pursuit of purity. Is it better for a family shepherd to avoid church entirely if he can’t find one that is healthy and theologically sound? Or, is something better than nothing? Baucham never says. Also, despite his insistence on “church membership,” the reasons Baucham gives for it are entirely family-oriented. He offers four—including “identification with Christ and the church,” edification, cooperation, and accountability—but each explanation is focused on how church participation benefits the family. There is no sense that the church constitutes a vital, enduring institution in its own right that the Christian family requires to understand itself. The relationship between church and family goes no deeper than utility. Within Baucham’s vision, the church is a simple voluntary association that the family shepherd can opt in and out of depending upon his biblical convictions. The crucial authority figure remains the family patriarch and the primary locus of God’s activity is the nuclear family. Familial privatization and autonomy remains.

In other Quiverfull sources, the family is seen as an institution in opposition to the church. In these instances, the Quiverfull family is assumed to stand for God’s truth in a godless age, while the church is, by and large, a weak, spineless, capitulating institution in need of reformation. In these caricatures, it is good and right for Quiverfull families to resist the influence of such misguided, sub-Christian bodies and strike out on their own. A few examples of this perspective are in order. In her book, *Birthing God’s Mighty Warriors*, Quiverfull mother Rachel Scott consistently speaks of the church and church members as antagonistic critics of godly families. She speaks of church members as people who have been tricked by Satan into limiting their family size through birth
control and sterilization. She claims, “[T]he devil confused church leadership about the issues so that our pastors stopped preaching and following what the Scriptures said about birth control and sterilization.” Indeed, the way Scott describes the church today, almost everyone has been led astray by Satan. From Scott’s point of view, Quiverfull families represent a very small, faithful remnant that is often, if not always, standing in opposition to the church.

The same theme is present in many other Quiverfull writings. Mary Pride’s first chapter in The Way Home is titled, “The Great Con Game.” She begins by asking rhetorically, “What would you say if I could prove that modern Christian women are being duped into becoming devotees of a false religion…?” While Scott focuses exclusively on birth control and sterilization, Pride has her sights set on feminism, which she believes is an anti-Christian “religion” that has fully infiltrated American churches. Speaking of self-described “biblical feminists,” Pride concludes alarmingly: “We are being asked to kill our babies, endorse homosexuality (and perhaps become lesbians), nag our husbands to do our job so we can do theirs—under the threat of divorce—and all in the name of Christ!” For Pride, the willingness of many Christian women to embrace careers outside the home is a symptom of “a massive loss of Christian perspective” in the American church. If her starting point is to assume that most churches have been led astray by the “false religion” of feminism, then it makes sense that ecclesiology would fall by the wayside. The church is a major part of the problem! Thus, Pride looks to

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672 Scott, Birthing God’s Mighty Warriors, 219, 282.
673 Ibid., 218.
674 “Today, most people in our churches…are on the pill, sterilized, or planning to be sterilized, and everybody is justifying their decisions” (Ibid., 235).
676 Ibid., 4-13.
677 Ibid., 11.
678 Ibid., 12.
individual families to right the wrongs of American Christianity. Through the practices of pronatalism, gender hierarchy, homeschooling, and what she calls “homeworking,” she believes Christian families will be able to transform America for Christ.⁶⁷⁹

In his book, *Family Driven Faith*, Baucham adopts a similar perspective on the church. Unlike Pride’s focus on feminism, Baucham’s chief concern is the education and formation of children, which he seeks to “take back” from the state and church, respectively. In his account, most American churches are not teaching the right things about family and not conducting ministry among families correctly. His book is intended to persuade parents into a “complete lifestyle and worldview overhaul” and in the final chapters he calls the church “to aid and not hinder families in this process.”⁶⁸⁰ In fact, Baucham understands himself to be leading a revival: “I believe that the recent rise in parental awareness, desperation over the future of our families, churches, and communities, the homeschool movement, and the family-integrated church movement constitutes a modern revival on the American landscape.”⁶⁸¹ Baucham believes that “the church must change” and adopt the methods promoted by leaders like him in this modern revival.⁶⁸² And he encourages families who read his book to be “a catalyst to wake the sleeping giant and move your church toward family integration.”⁶⁸³ Baucham claims, “The harsh reality is that unless we radically change the way we view the church and the family, we will not see an end to the decimation of both institutions in our culture.”⁶⁸⁴ Once again, the assumption is that most American churches (and families) are failing

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miserably and Quiverfull families, through their faithfulness, hold the key to getting everything back on track.

In light of how badly the church is portrayed in the writings of Quiverfull elites, it makes sense that ecclesiology and ecclesial involvement is often lacking (or non-existent) in the Quiverfull movement. If most American churches are apostate, or nearly so, then what is the point of being concerned with them at all? Elite writings by and large portray Quiverfull families as self-sufficient units, capable on their own to bring about revival and cultural transformation. Who needs the church, anyway?

Still, we must admit that the tendency to dismiss established churches as flawed and superfluous is not unique to Quiverfull but an impulse inherent within Protestant Christianity. As Alister McGrath points out, once Protestant reformers accepted the Bible alone, apart from church and tradition, as the authority for Christian faith and practice, they created an inherently unstable and adaptable movement in which division was an ever-present possibility. Protestant churches have been dividing over the pursuit of “biblical” truth and purity ever since. Among American evangelicals, this Protestant instability has led to rapid expansion and entrepreneurial innovation unchecked by any centralized authority. This phenomenon has some major challenges that I will refrain from exploring here. But, the point for our purposes is that, in their highly critical posture toward the church, the Quiverfull movement demonstrates the Protestant impulse to protest and divide. Their low view of the church is not necessarily new to Protestantism or American Christianity, but the intensification of a longstanding tendency.

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686 McGrath, Christianity’s Dangerous Idea, 471-473.
The eclipse of the church by the family is evident in Quiverfull elite discourse, but also obvious at the lay level. This ecclesiological problem emerged in different ways among my research subjects. In Chapters 3 and 4, I detailed in a significant way the church struggles faced by the Tanners, so I won’t revisit those stories here. Instead, I will focus on the experiences of the Millers and Olsons. Dave and Carley Miller, whose story of baptism begins this chapter, have a general preference for home-based churches. Carley says, “House church is something that’s a passion of ours,” but she admits that they’ve had trouble implementing it in the past. The problems they encountered involved a lack of consensus on the inclusion of children (something the Millers strongly support) and a lack of teamwork on helping clean the house after a meeting. The Millers conducted house church for a few years, supplemented by occasional Sunday attendance at a nearby church. But, after a falling out over Carley’s violation of unspoken gender norms (detailed in Chapter 4), the Millers’ house church was discontinued. For now, the Millers attend a Baptist church within driving distance of their home. They feel that their way of life is respected and that the pastoral staff shares their convictions about children’s education and formation. They’ve been there for over a year and plan to continue.

Deborah and Dan Olson have had a somewhat different experience. Although they were raised in a charismatic tradition, the Olsons decided they could not longer support their tradition and left to find another church. The Olson’s attended a house church for a significant period of time, but they never felt like that was sufficient. Deborah protests the lack of accountability in that setting and she believes “worshipping in public is what the Lord wanted.” “There are so many things that can be offered in the
home,” Deborah says, “but I wouldn’t want to lose the diligence of leaving the home and seeking out fellowship with other believers at this point in time.” Then, after several months of exhausting “church shopping,” the Olsons decided that approach to church involvement is also “against the word of God.” So, what did they do? Deborah explains,

We decided, OK, what are the three most important things to get us back into church? We hadn’t been attending in like a year, maybe… We decided the style of worship didn’t matter. As long as Jesus was central—cross and blood, you know. As long as preaching was central. We decided that proximity was extremely important because traveling to church was a really hard thing to get back into after not participating in so long. And it was really heavy on our hearts that the early church was only separated by proximity… So, we made a list of five churches in a three mile proximity to us. Basically, what we decided was if those important things were all there—I think the other one was safety—once the check marks were all there, there would be no discussion of anything else. We just needed to get into the place of being faithful in our attendance. And that just lifted a huge burden off of us. So, it’s now been two years.

Even though the Olsons have committed to remain and serve in their current church for the foreseeable future, it’s fair to say that they have a love-hate relationship with it. For example, in a later interview, Deborah shares,

We kind of feel a lack of passion there. It’s just an older country church and very comfortable. There’s some nostalgia [in a country church] and that’s kind of nice, but then there’s some other stuff: not enough progressive thinking about how to reach a newer culture. And that makes us concerned. And the other thing is that we are not like the other families there. Should we find a place where we are like more people?

Deborah, especially, struggles with the desire to worship and serve with people who share their convictions and lifestyle. As the only Quiverfull, homeschooling family in the church, the Olsons often feel isolated and alone. So, they confess a pull toward so-called “homeschooling churches,” which are made up of likeminded families all committed to the same way of life. Still, Deborah says,

The church body in the NT was designed and separated only by proximity. Not by color or style. I know I can’t fix the world and what’s already broken. The body
[of Christ] has disintegrated into a million different parts that aren’t working cohesively. But, am I contributing to that by shopping for something better? Or, do I just stick to where they aren’t teaching false doctrine and contribute to my community where I can best serve? I am really convicted by that. So, sometimes that takes precedence over feeling lonely.

So, even in times when church is “a big challenge,” the Olsons continue to try to be faithful to attend their local church. And yet, it is telling that as the Olsons plan for the baptism of their oldest son, they are strongly considering not baptizing him in their church. The Olsons object to the fact that their Baptist church connects baptism to church membership. That is to say, following the ritual of baptism, the church body then votes on including the newly baptized person as a member of the church. The Olsons have not yet officially joined the church and, therefore, are not voting members. It seems the most important reason for this lack of official commitment is their inability to give financially to the church. Until they can contribute in that way, they don’t feel that they can be members. So, they are currently in discussion about what to do with their son. He desperately wants to be baptized, but they do not agree with the way their church performs baptisms. At the same time, Dan is uncomfortable with the thought of baptizing his son on his own terms. As of now, the issue remains unresolved, but it will be interesting to see how the Olsons resolve this dilemma.

What I see in my informants is a struggle to reconcile their familial convictions with existing church structures. Although they affirm the significance of the church in theory, the practice of church presents many complications for Quivefull families who believe that what they are doing stands against the norm in American churches. What should a family do when the church doesn’t support their way of life? The Tanners responded to conflict with their church leadership by leaving for several years. The
Olsons remain in a church that is tolerant of their practices, but doesn’t overtly support them. If there is no church that embodies a family’s views on the sacraments, should they simply administer them privately? The Millers are happy to celebrate baptism and communion as a family, apart from any established church. The Olsons are willing to do the same, but have yet to do so, feeling somewhat uncomfortable with the idea of performing Christian rites outside the church. Is the purpose of the church to be in community with the likeminded or to be in community with one’s Christian neighbors? The Millers have found a church that seems to provide both, while the Olsons have chosen to content themselves with neighborly fellowship apart from ideological likeness.

Of all the families in my study, the Tanners have participated in the most varied forms of church life. They have worshipped in house churches exclusively with other Quiverfull families, they have attended small rural churches with no other families like them, and they have belonged to a larger traditional church where there were some, but not many, who shared their convictions. Renee says of their experience with church, “There have been many times when our church was our church but our community was our homeschool group. We had more community and support among the homeschoolers than at our own church.” In this way, Renee differentiates between their church, where the family worships with a variety of Christians, and their “community,” where the family receives support and encouragement in their chosen way of life. In this dichotomy, it appears that “church” comes to represent a superficial and unessential add-on to family life while the “community” (found in fellow homeschoolers) represents a vital supportive institution. Renee characterizes this state of affairs as “kind of sad,” but seems resigned to it.
All of my informants share the elite Quiverfull view that most American churches are in the wrong (about gender roles, the family, and childrearing, at the very least) and in desperate need of reform. But, they also know that church participation is important and seek, in various ways, to maintain ecclesial involvement. Still, it seems clear that, at the end of the day, the family is the focus of God’s activity in the world. The family is tasked with the oversight of Christian instruction, regulation of proper Christian worship, and, when necessary, administration of the sacraments. The church is well and good if you can find one that is sufficiently healthy and theologically sound—or, consonant with the Quiverfull way of life. If not, perhaps it is better to retreat to the house church or focus on family worship only so as not to risk the negative, sub-Christian influences of less-than-healthy American churches. As the framed verse on the Olson’s living room wall says defiantly, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15).

Of course, one reason for the ecclesiological lack in the Quiverfull subculture is that evangelicalism as a whole has something of an ecclesiology problem. The free church tradition in the U.S., with its inherent individualism (or me-and-Jesus approach to spirituality), offers little by way of theology and practice to help Quiverfull families resist the pull into family-focused isolation. Within the evangelical tradition, church is a voluntary organization that may or may not be necessary to one’s direct, unmediated, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Like their evangelical neighbors, Quiverfull

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687 Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger say as much in the introduction to their book, Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Perspective (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009). They call evangelical ecclesiology “problematic yet promising” due, in part, to the fact that evangelicalism is not a denomination but “a movement.” This has resulted in what they call “a lack of ecclesial distinctives” as well as “a lack of loyalty to any particular ecclesial tradition” (15). Indeed, they assert that most evangelicals have a “weak ecclesiology” characterized by a “minimalist view of God’s role for the church in his plan of salvation,” an emphasis on the individual Christian, a view of the church as a vehicle for nurturing the individual, and an emphasis on the “universal” and “invisible” nature of the church to the detriment of the “local” and “visible” church (295, n. 11).
families imagine that they have direct, unmediated access to Christ and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. (Recall Carley’s story in the introduction to this chapter.) For some, there seems to be no need for a church because they, as a family, are a church. In this context, it is easy to see how Quiverfull families can come to prioritize their family’s pursuit of holiness in the home over the necessity of communion with other Christians. The church only exists as a conglomeration of individual Christians and has no existence or significance apart from that collective identity. It is, therefore, a more or less optional aspect of Christian life.  

Another contributing factor to the eclipse of the church in Quiverfull theology and practice can be traced to the “culture war” mentality that has been pervasive in American evangelicalism over the past several decades. As we discussed in Chapter 1, as evangelicals face the dissolution of their power in the cultural and political centers of American life, many have responded by retreating into the nuclear family. When all institutions, even the churches, are viewed as having capitulated to secularism, feminism, and a variety of other –isms, then the private family is all that remains for Christians to control and reform. In this way, for many evangelicals, especially those in the Quiverfull movement, the nuclear family has become the bastion of resistance against the onslaught of secularism in America. Christian Smith has noted that many evangelicals have adopted a kind of lifestyle evangelism approach to American culture. Rather than seek to change culture from the top-down through institutions, they look to the witness of the family and

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face-to-face encounters, trusting in the witness of individual Christians to transform America. Both the focus on family and trust in individual encounters have been tendencies within evangelical life for some time, but the Quiverfull movement has intensified them in significant ways.

Another contributing factor to the eclipse of the church can be traced to the second chapter’s characterization of the Quiverfull movement as a trans-denominational special purpose group. As Robert Wuthnow’s research has discovered, SPGs tend to weaken existing churches and denominations because they pull loyalty away from these established institutions and toward the special interest of the group. In my research, I did not encounter any official SPG organizations that forward the Quiverfull cause. But there was plenty of evidence that the practices of Quiverfull families often draw them into friendships and associations that take the place of the community that churches would typically provide. In these cases, affinity based on Quiverfull practice is far more important than affinity based on tradition, neighborhood, or parish. Moreover, most Quiverfull families recognize that their lived religion sets them apart from their neighbors—even their evangelical Christian neighbors. Because they see themselves as different, perhaps they are more likely to see conflict between their way of life and the churches they attend. At the Family Driven Faith conference, for example, Baucham warned those in attendance against causing unnecessary division in their churches. This suggests a strong awareness that promoting Quiverfull tenets could lead to ecclesial and denominational division. This is not to say that some families don’t defy Wuthnow’s observations and Baucham’s expectation of conflict. We saw evidence of this in the lives

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of the Olsons, especially, who continue to worship patiently within a church where their practice stands out. But, the dynamic of SPGs remains. The desire to take a purist, counter-cultural stand for truth is always in tension with the desire to co-exist harmoniously and persuasively with their fellow Christians.

A final factor that must be considered in the Quiverfull eclipse of the church is the practical concern of many families that their children be welcome in worship. Many churches unfamiliar with Quiverfull convictions and practice have difficulty welcoming their many children and desire to include them as much as possible in the life of the church. So, many Quiverfull families have a deficit of ecclesiology that discourages them from prioritizing church participation. And, at the same time, many of the churches the Quiverfull families encounter struggle to welcome children in a meaningful way. This is especially true of churches where preaching—prolonged exposition of scripture aimed at adults—is central to worship. When Quiverfull families feel that their children aren’t welcomed or included in church, such families often withdraw from church. This further weakens their ecclesiology and sacramental theology. Some families can come to believe that they have no need for church beyond their homes. Established churches, meanwhile, don’t work harder to include children in their worship life because children aren’t there.

Therefore, in place of the church, which is often considered unhealthy or unbiblical for various reasons, Quiverfull families seek to remake the home into a church. In *The Way Home*, Mary Pride calls women to view the home as their church and primary place of Christian service. She says,

> Christians have a wide-open market for the genuine, unadulterated product of a truly Christian home. Those agitating for ordination for women are throwing away with both hands the biggest ministry we could ever have in favor of a mere
second-rate shadow… What a day it will be when all God’s women return to homeworking and every wife has a church in her home.690

Carley explicitly says that this is their aim: “I think [the purpose of the family] is to model the relationship between Christ and the church and also to be the church. I think we can glorify the Lord together as a family… I guess kind of like a mini-church. We want to serve the Lord as a family.” In pursuit of a “mini-church” in the home, Quiverfull families use practices that we have already reviewed in some depth. Homeschooling allows them to pursue their children’s education from within an explicitly Christian worldview and incorporate instruction in Bible and spiritual disciplines (like prayer and memorizing scripture) into their curriculum. Family worship, which is usually conducted three to five times a week, brings the family together under the father’s leadership to sing, pray, read Scripture, and receive instruction. In addition to these major practices, there are a variety of other, smaller things that help to make the home into sacred space. The Olsons and Millers often have worship music playing in the home throughout the day. And all three families have decorative crosses and Christian themed art hanging in their homes, usually accompanied by Bible verses. Also, the Millers try to regularly include their children in service to the community, like helping to serve meals at a soup kitchen.

Still, as we saw in Chapter 1, this is not the first time in history that evangelicals have sought to create a domestic church. In fact, the sacralization of the home and family has been a theme of American evangelical religion for some time. What’s different about this instantiation of the home-as-church endeavor is the central role played by the father—at least in Quiverfull literature, if not in practice. Whereas Victorian era attempts

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to create a domestic church were overseen by the virtuous mother, the contemporary Quiverfull movement seeks to create a family church led by the virtuous father (or “family shepherd”). So, at the same time that Quiverfull discourse seeks to make the family home into sacred space, they are also seeking to solidify the authority of the father within that traditionally feminine space. (Whether they succeed at that endeavor is a matter of some dispute, as our discussion of gender roles in Chapter 4 makes clear.) Nevertheless, the point is that as Quiverfull families seek to make their families into mini-churches, they do so with some significant historical precedent.

This section has shown that one problematic result of the Quiverfull family blueprint is the disconnection of the family from the church. Indeed, like their evangelical neighbors, Quiverfull families are seriously lacking in ecclesiology and sacramental theology. Their individualism makes the church into a voluntary organization that may or may not be useful to the primary work of the Christian family. It remains up to the family leader to determine what, if any, church is right for them. In Quiverfull elite literature, the nuclear family is the central player in God’s providence and the key to the salvation of the world. Moreover, the church is often portrayed as a weak, capitulating, and even apostate institution that is in direct conflict with the goals of the Quiverfull family. With this assumed conflict in mind, it is no wonder that many families find themselves alienated and disinclined to take an active role within existing churches. They see family faithfulness as the most important task before American Christians and church often has very little to do with that vision. As a result, Quiverfull families usually seek to make the family into what Carley called a “mini-church,” led by the authoritative pastor-father. In their tendency to emphasize individual autonomy over communal responsibility,
privatization over community, and family over church, the Quiverfull movement shows itself to be very much apart of the American evangelical milieu.

iii. The Home as Sinless Space and the Concealment of Abuse

As we saw above, the Quiverfull family blueprint results in increased privatization and isolation of the family. Although this problem is evident in the lives of most American families, it seems that the Quiverfull discourse—especially their commitment to homeschooling and pronatalism—exacerbates this broader American tendency. While most Americans struggle to see beyond the bounds of their private family home, Quiverfull families experience this isolation even more acutely. Very often, this privatization and isolation has an impact on their connectedness to the church. Already given to a weak ecclesiology and sacramental theology because of their evangelical heritage, Quiverfull families easily find themselves without good reason for church participation. Theologically and practically, for reasons we outlined above, the nuclear family comes to replace the church.

But, there are more problematic consequences to the Quiverfull vision of the family. Another result of Quiverfull family theology and practice is that the home is often imagined as a sinless space. When the family is filled with great theological and eschatological import, idealized beyond the on-the-ground reality, and then isolated from surrounding people and institutions, it can be hard to recognize the family as a potentially sinful and even dangerous place.\(^{691}\) The home is imagined a holy haven from the sin and temptation, which is located “out there” in the world. Certainly, Quiverfull families cannot be faulted for seeking personal holiness or an integrated Christian life in the

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\(^{691}\) Thanks to Susan Trollinger for helping me think through the Quiverfull construction of the home as a sinless space in a conversation in the spring of 2012.
home. But, what about sin within the family home? What about the ways that spouses sin against each other and parents sin against their children?

On the one hand, there are the daily—we might even call them ordinary—ways that family members sin against each other. Husbands and wives can be insensitive to each other’s hurts and neglect each other’s needs, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Pride and defensiveness can make spouses quick to be offended and slow to apologize. Parents can be impatient, harsh, and unkind to their children, treating them as annoyances to be tolerated rather than gifts to be treasured. Children can speak heartbreaking words to their parents and take advantage of their provision and care. Families as a whole can participate in daily practices that perpetuate these patterns of unkindness and disrespect. Indeed, because they are composed of flawed human beings, families are often the places where we are hurt in the deepest and most lasting ways. Yet, even though these kinds of ordinary hurts constitute real violations of human dignity, they would not necessarily be considered abusive. All families encounter these regular failures to love.

Domestic violence and child abuse, on the other hand, are more extreme instances of failure in the family. Domestic violence, also called intimate partner violence (IPV), is “a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors including physical, sexual and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion used by adults or adolescents against their current or former intimate partners.” Examples of physical abuse include slapping, shaking, beating with fist or object, strangulation, burning, kicking, and threats with a knife. Sexual abuse includes coerced sex through threats or intimidation or through physical force, and forcing unwanted sexual acts. Psychological abuse involves isolation
from others, excessive jealousy, control of activities, verbal aggression, intimidation through harassment or stalking, threats of violence, and constant belittling and humiliation.\textsuperscript{692} Child abuse is “any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.”\textsuperscript{693} The definition of child abuse includes physical abuse (typically defined as “any nonaccidental injury to a child”), neglect\textsuperscript{694}, sexual abuse or exploitation, emotional abuse\textsuperscript{695}, parental substance abuse, and abandonment. Despite the severity of these descriptions, we must not give the false impression that either domestic violence or child abuse are rare. Nearly one in four American women between the ages of 18 and 65 has experienced domestic violence.\textsuperscript{696} On average, more than three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends every day.\textsuperscript{697} And up to 10 million children are exposed


\textsuperscript{694} Child neglect is defined as “the failure of a parent or other person with responsibility for the child to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child’s health, safety, and well-being are threatened with harm.” Twenty-five states also include failure to educate the child as part of child neglect. See, the Child Welfare Information Gateway, \textit{Child Maltreatment 2012: Summary of Key Findings} (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau, 2014), accessed December 14, 2014, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cm2012.pdf.

\textsuperscript{695} Most states use the following language to describe emotional abuse of a child: “injury to the psychological capacity or emotional stability of the child as evidenced by an observable or substantial change in behavior, emotional response, or cognition” and injury as evidenced by “anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or aggressive behavior.” See, the Child Welfare Information Gateway, \textit{Child Maltreatment 2012}.


to domestic violence annually. In the case of child abuse, as of 2012, an estimated 686,000 children were victims of abuse and neglect nationwide. An estimated 1,640 children died due to abuse or neglect. And more than 80 percent (80.3 percent) of child abuse perpetrators are parents. It is important to remember that these statistics only encompass reported cases of abuse. Many more cases go unreported.

But, from the work of Quiverfull elites, you would never know that domestic violence or child abuse constitute prevalent problems worthy of serious consideration. In Quiverfull materials, the family is idealized in such a way that it appears that if Christian couples would only surrender their fertility to the Lord, their home would immediately become a virtuous refuge from the sinful world. Mother and father are almost always imagined in ideal terms: an always patient, always gentle, educator-mother working in perfect harmony with the always supportive, always godly father-leader. Indeed, “A family shepherd would never abuse his children,” Baucham says. And children, blessings given directly by God, are never understood to be burdensome. If you’re doing family the “right” way, the reasoning goes, you won’t have any serious problems. But, the truth is, mothers and fathers are often deeply flawed and children, particularly in their more dependent years, are often difficult. Moreover, the work of organizing and running a household is laborious and demanding, taxing even the most earnest and faithful Christians. Altogether, these challenges are hard on any family, but for a large, lower income homeschooling family, often living in isolation, they can become unbearable. In their neglect of the real weaknesses at work within the nuclear family and the threats

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700 Baucham, Family Shepherds, 144.
these weaknesses pose to women and children, Quiverfull elites fail to reckon with the lived experiences of the families they claim to support.

At this point, it is important to make it clear that my informants did not indicate any sign of abuse at the hands of their husbands, nor did I perceive any signs of abuse in their children. Of course, I cannot be certain that abuse has not occurred in their homes. But, after meeting in person multiple times and talking, on average, once a month for two years, I would expect some evidence of abuse to arise, whether mental, emotional, economic, or physical. So far, nothing has emerged. But, it was clear to me in the course of our interviews that my informants mostly perceive threats to children’s welfare existing beyond the bounds of the home. That is to say, none of the women in my research were keen to recognize the home as a potentially dangerous place for women and children. The concern for familial autonomy and “parental rights” seemed to constrain their ability to imagine families as potentially harmful places.

Still, the lack of evidence in my limited scope of research does not translate into a generalizable principle about Quiverfull families as a whole. In fact, every person I have interviewed from Quiverfull families, whether mothers or adult children, could point to at least one family where they know abuse is taking place—some more than one. Elizabeth, the daughter of a Quiverfull family already quoted above, shared the following from her experience:

[The church we attended] got weirder and weirder over the years. It attracted more and more dysfunctional people. At first the families were pretty healthy but the ideas attracted people who were really sick and had sick relationships. I saw that those ideas attracted those kinds of people. And we had a family that looked perfect on the outside but then the wife just disappeared and went into hiding from her husband. And it turns out that the guy all of us thought was mild mannered was actually a verbal and physical abuser. And my church was trying to deal with the problem but it was all very much in the church. But, I felt like that
was a pattern: people would look fine on the outside and then everything would fall apart and they’d be nothing like they appeared.

Indeed, over the past several years an increasing number of stories have emerged, reported both by journalists and amateur journalist-bloggers, detailing numerous instances of abusive behavior in Quiverfull homes. Many such stories involve spousal abuse of wives by their patriarch husbands. For example, Natalie Klejwa runs the popular blog, Visionary Womanhood, and also edited the book for Quiverfull mothers, *Three Decades of Fertility*, from which we have quoted at length in previous chapters. On January 1, 2015 she announced on her blog that her husband has been living apart from their family since September 2014. His departure was at Natalie’s request following 22 years of abusive behavior. Since that announcement, Natalie has offered numerous posts aimed at helping Christian women identify and address various forms of abuse in their relationships. Natalie’s story is not an isolated incident, however. She references Vyckie Garrison’s important blog, No Longer Quivering, which has numerous contributors who tell similar stories of abuse within Quiverfull families. Natalie comments frankly, “[T]here’s definitely a stench in Denmark. I’m glad they are raising

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701 *No Longer Quivering* is a prominent blog on the Patheos Network run by former Quiverfull mother, Vyckie Garrison, who was a victim of abuse. Her blog has numerous ex-Quiverfull contributors with similar stories (http://www.patheos.com/blogs/nolongerquivering/).


703 Natalie has also written sympathetically of the *No Longer Quivering* blog, which is typically anathema in Quiverfull circles. In a post dated February 2, 2015, she says, “First of all, I want to be clear that I get what is being communicated over at No Longer Quivering. I understand the anger directed at spiritual abuse and the passion to rescue women and children who have been hidden targets of abuse in their homes and churches. I am uncomfortable with the sweeping generalizations about ‘quiverfull’ families (they’d hate me – I’ve got seven too many), but there’s definitely a stench in Denmark. I’m glad they are raising awareness, where it is warranted, of an insidious evil disguised as holiness and righteousness. It’s disgusting. It should make us all want to vomit. That’s the truth. That’s reality.” See, Natalie Klejwa, “Escaping Duggarville with my Faith in Tact,” *Visionary Womanhood*, February 2, 2015, accessed March 3, 2015, http://visionarywomanhood.com/escaping-duggerville-with-my-faith-intact/.

awareness, where it is warranted, of an insidious evil disguised as holiness and righteousness. It’s disgusting. It should make us all want to vomit. That’s the truth. That’s reality.”

In addition to stories of spousal abuse are cases of child abuse. Because of the lack of centralized leadership and formal organization, there is no way to know in concrete terms the number of child abuse cases within Quiverfull families. It’s hard to quantify Quiverfull families as a whole, let alone the cases of abuse among them. The Coalition for Responsible Home Education (CRHE) runs a website, Homeschooling’s Invisible Children (HIC), that tracks cases of extreme child abuse and neglect in the homeschooling community. To date, the site has reported 306 such cases dating back to 1986. The site is devoted to abuse in all homeschooling families, regardless of their religious or ideological motives for homeschooling. Certainly not all the cases reported by HIC involve Quiverfull families, but many do.

The most extreme examples have made national news, detailing horrific stories of child neglect and physical abuse at the hands of both parents. At least three children have died. For example, Hana Williams, the daughter of Larry and Carri Williams, was

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705 See, Klejwa, “Escaping Duggarville with my Faith in Tact.”
adopted from Ethiopia when she was 13 years old. One of nine children in the Williams’
Quiverfull family, she was homeschooled exclusively with the intention of “training” her
in Christlikeness. On May 11, 2011, Hana died of hypothermia face down in the mud in
the family’s backyard after spending several hours outside in the cold Seattle rain. The
coronor determined that because she was regularly denied food as punishment for
misbehavior, her abnormally low weight prevented her from retaining heat in the cold.

By their own admission, the Williams were attempting to “train” their adopted daughter
with practices based on the book To Train Up a Child by Michael and Debi Pearl, which
we explored in some detail in Chapter 5. 708 In the end, Larry Williams was convicted of
manslaughter, with a 28-year sentence, and Carri Williams of homicide by abuse with a
37-year sentence.

On top of incidences of wife and child abuse, two high profile Quiverfull leaders
have been exposed as abusers in the past few years. Bill Gothard, noted in Chapter 1 and
2 as one of the earliest proponents of homeschooling, pronatalism, and patriarchy among
evangelicals, has been accused of habitual harassment and molestation by 34 different
women over the 40 years of his ministry’s operation. 709 While Gothard admits to some
“wrong” behavior that “crossed the boundaries of discretion,” he denies charges of

after his mother swaddled him too tightly in a blanket for several hours (Amanda Lamb, “Adoptive mother
convicted in boy’s death,” WRAL.com, June 12, 2008, accessed March 3, 2015,

708 In each case of child death referenced above, the parents were using the Pearls’ book To Train
Up and Child. The Pearls, for their part, deny that their teachings lead to child abuse and say that the
parents in each of these cases were not properly following their instructions. See, Michael Pearl, “Hana

709 The operators of the website and blog, Recovering Grace, carried out most of the work of
exposing Gothard’s ongoing abuse. Their files on Gothard, along with the stories of his 34 accusers, can be
found in “The Gothard Files: A Case for Disqualification,” February 3, 2014, accessed March 5, 2015,
http://www.recoveringgrace.org/2014/02/the-gothard-files-a-case-for-disqualification-x2/.
harassment and molestation.\textsuperscript{710} As a result of the accusations, Gothard resigned from leadership of his ministry on March 6, 2014. In addition, in the fall of 2013, Douglas Phillips, head of Vision Forum, Inc. and Vision Forum Ministries and prominent homeschooling leader, was forced to resign and close his organizations due to what he called a “lengthy, inappropriate relationship” with a young woman who worked for his family.\textsuperscript{711} The woman in question, Lourdes Torres, has since filed a lawsuit against Phillips accusing him of sexual battery, fraud, and sexual exploitation, claiming that he used her as his “personal sex object” beginning in 1999 and continuing until 2012.\textsuperscript{712} She also claims that Phillips manipulated her and abused his authority over her. In the words of the civil suit:

Phillips was the dominant authority figure in Ms. Torres’s life and family. He made himself her spiritual father. He was her authority figure with regard to where she lived, where she worked, where and how she worshipped, her education, her interpersonal relationships, her time and schedule, and even acted as her counselor. In other words, Phillips was the pastor of her church, her boss, her landlord, and the controller of all aspects of her life—obedience to Phillips was as obedience to God.\textsuperscript{713}

Needless to say, the public downfall of both Gothard and Phillips has been a source of much controversy and soul-searching among Quiverfull and homeschooling

\textsuperscript{710} Gothard says, “My actions of holding of hands, hugs, and touching of feet or hair with young ladies crossed the boundaries of discretion and were wrong. They demonstrated a double-standard and violated a trust. Because of the claims about me I do want to state that I have never kissed a girl nor have I touched a girl immorally or with sexual intent” (Bill Gothard, “A Statement from Bill Gothard,” BillGothard.com, April 17, 2014, accessed March 25, 2015, http://www.billgothard.com/content/statement-bill-gothard.


\textsuperscript{713} “Facts” in the Civil Case Information Sheet for “Lourdes Torres-Manteufel v. Douglas Phillips et al”, 5.18. Of course, Phillips denies these allegations, saying that their relationship was mutual and consensual and that she is trying to destroy him and his family.
communities. Still, Quiverfull elites have been quick to distance themselves from Gothard and Phillips and there is little sense that the behavior of these men represents anything more than a lamentable exception.\textsuperscript{714}

Of course, as I said above, we must not assume that the cases of abuse detailed above are indicative of the Quiverfull movement as a whole. I would never want to give the impression that all Quiverfull families are abusive to women and children. In fact, I would venture to guess that most are not. Domestic abuse in the U.S. is a problem that crosses the categories of religion, race, and class. Even so, there is no doubt that in all of the above cases, including those of Gothard and Phillips, both patriarchal ideology and social isolation played a major part in the perpetuation of abuse. Numerous studies show that instances of spousal and child abuse are closely connected to social isolation.\textsuperscript{715} The social isolation of a family can be the result of a lack of social skills, poor contact with others, the avoidance of contact, or the lack of transportation or methods of

\textsuperscript{714} In recent days, yet another person associated with the Quiverfull movement has been exposed as a perpetrator of abuse. According to the police report, Joshua Duggar, the oldest child of Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar, sexually molested five young girls when he was a teenager (four sisters and a babysitter). The Duggars attempted to handle the wrong doing within the family and, when that didn’t work, they went to their church elders. After a year of multiple incidences, the Duggars finally consulted a police officer who was also a family friend. Although the police interviewed the victims, they did nothing further with the accusations and Joshua was sent to do manual labor for three months with a family associate. As these past crimes came to light, Josh confessed and apologized publicly for his wrongdoing, even resigning from his post with the Family Research Council. Meanwhile, Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar have repeatedly downplayed Joshua’s actions, saying Joshua was “just curious about girls” (Abby Olheiser, “Josh Duggar molested four of his sisters and a babysitter,” \textit{Washington Post}, June 4, 2015, accessed July 2, 2015: http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/06/03/what-to-expect-from-the-fox-news-interview-with-josh-duggars-parents/).

As of the completion of this chapter, the Josh Duggar story is still unfolding. As more details emerge, however, I think two things are especially notable. First, the Duggars treated Josh’s actions as personal sins to be corrected rather than crimes against the young girls in their care. Thus, it took them over a year to act decisively to end the abuse. Moreover, when they did act, they sent Joshua for three months of manual labor, too worried that counseling or therapy for sex offenders would be a detrimental influence on Joshua. So, not only did they focus on Joshua’s sin rather than the girls’ victimization, they also remained convinced that the “real” evil and sin is located “out there,” beyond the bounds of the home. Despite the fact that Josh was the one molesting young girls, his parents were primarily concerned that he not be polluted by the negative influences of outsiders.

communication (i.e., Internet and telephone). And, in Quiverfull families, the isolation of mother and children can be the indirect consequence of the pronatalist and homeschooling practices.\textsuperscript{716} But, no matter the source, scholars agree: “Social isolation is a risk factor for domestic violence, especially because it entails a lack of social support.”\textsuperscript{717}

We discussed in Chapter 4 that the isolation of Quiverfull mothers serves to exacerbate their vulnerability, leaving them open to abuse. The same is true of children. In particular, children need advocates outside the immediate family because, among other things, they can provide “protected channels” through which children can make complaints and contact the right institutions for intervention when abuse is occurring.\textsuperscript{718} At the very least, children who attend public schools or participate in church or other outside activities, come into contact with people not related to them who can potentially serve as advocates. Quiverfull families who have succumbed to isolation do not provide children with these opportunities. So, the tendency in Quiverfull discourse to encourage strict separation from “the world,” resulting in isolation from broader networks of support, is deeply problematic. And it makes the Quiverfull movement’s unwillingness to deal seriously with the reality of abuse within the home potentially destructive. As

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{716} In a recent report from Homeschooling’s Invisible Children (HIC), the following claim is made: “Our preliminary research suggests that homeschooled children are at a greater risk of dying from child abuse than are traditionally schooled children. This preliminary finding is based on an analysis of the cases in our Homeschooling’s Invisible Children (HIC) database and on national government reports on child maltreatment. When we compare the rate of child abuse fatalities among homeschooled families to the rate of child abuse fatalities overall, we see a higher rate of death due to abuse or neglect among homeschooled students than we do among children of the same age overall” (HIC, “Some Preliminary Data on Homeschool Child Fatalities,” undated, accessed July 25, 2015, http://hsinvisiblechildren.org/commentary/some-preliminary-data-on-homeschool-child-fatalities/).
\item \textsuperscript{717} Annemie Dillen, “Domestic Violence and an Integral Family Ethic,” in \textit{When ‘Love’ Strikes}, 349.
\item \textsuperscript{718} Anderson and Johnson, \textit{Regarding Children}, 59-60.
\end{itemize}
theologian Adrian Thatcher warns: “Families can be pernicious, evil places for children. … The family…cannot be isolated from wider, caring influences.”719

Moreover, Quiverfull elites never entertain the possibility that the nuclear family, a thoroughly modern invention, might be ill equipped to handle the pressures that their religious practice entails in contemporary America. Theologian Don Browning has written at length about the problems that modernization pose for marriage and the nuclear family in general. In his words,

[T]he forces of modernity themselves may help cause domestic violence. … [T]echnical rationality tend[s] to reduce parts of life to efficient means toward short-term satisfactions and function to undermine the cohesion producing interdependence of families, civil societies, and communities of faith. Under the impact of modernization, the regulation of sexual, marital, and family life decreases as communities of tradition deteriorate. Sexual exploitation and violence tend to increase throughout society. … But modernity also creates dramatic divisions in society between the rich and poor, between those who are educated to handle the tools of technical reason in an increasingly digital society and those who cannot. Poverty is clearly associated with domestic violence, especially those poor who are also alienated from supportive and culture building communities of tradition.720

For all their interest in changing the way American Christians receive the gift of children, Quiverfull teachers generally ignore the ways that the family as we have imagined it over the past 100 years may not be conducive to their religious practice. The truth is, the nuclear family is not the only or even best way to “be a family.” Although it has been the dominant model within American Christianity since at least the Victorian period, it has proven to be a relatively weak structure.721 As the U.S. has undergone a

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721 My advisor, Vincent Miller, rightly suggests that, in many ways, the weakness of the American nuclear family stands in stark contrast to the strength of the patriarchal family and the rules of kinship that are assumed in Josh. 24:15: “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Of course, Quiverfull proponents rarely if ever given any attention to the social and cultural differences between the context of such passages of scripture and the context of families in the present day.
plethora of social, economic, and cultural shifts over the past hundred years, the nuclear family has become less and less stable. This is not due to a lack of ideals—most Americans still view the nuclear family as the ideal family form—but because of the dissolution of broader social and institutional structures of support along with the declining economic opportunities and stability in the American workforce. And now, when the nuclear family seems to be in its weakest state, Quiverfull elites want to shore it up by making the family numerically larger, giving it more work to do, and investing it with even more theological and eschatological import. This impulse is understandable perhaps, but ultimately misguided.

I cannot presume to solve the Quiverfull movement’s tendency to imagine the home as a sinless space and thereby ignore the possibility of abuse within its walls. There are many factors that contribute to this error. The theology and practice of the Quiverfull movement combines the privatization of the family with isolation from broader networks and institutions of support. Both of these things contribute to the vulnerability of families, especially women and children. But, I would also add that the idealization of the family—what we have called the “family blueprint”—is an important part of the problem. When abiding by a particular form of the family is viewed as the key to holiness and the blessing of God, then it seems that occlusion of sin and failure is more likely to occur. Ideal appearances easily become more important that virtuous practices. In addition to rectifying the problem of privatization and isolation, I would argue that, instead of prioritizing a particular family form, a better approach is to focus on family functions. (If we recall, this was Carley’s impulse in our conversation about the family; she had a lot to say about practices or character traits like communication, compassion,
vulnerability, and pitching-in, but little concern for well-defined roles.) The words of Anderson and Johnson are particularly apt at this point:

The family has endured in part because it has adapted to changing needs and circumstances. Moreover, structures of the family have changed over centuries and will continue to change while its purposes have remained more constant. We assume that a family is what it does. This idea that form follows function is a theological reality as well as an architectural principle. Christian teaching as more to say about what families must do than what they should look like.722

But, what is the purpose of the family? What does the family do for its members? Assuming the presence of children, Anderson and Johnson suggest several general things: they must feed and protect children; they must embody safety as a sign that shelter is possible; they must provide attentions for children befitting each age group; they must offer the enduring, irrational involvement of at least one adult in ongoing care; they must give developmentally appropriate expectations and behavior; they must provide role models for adulthood; and they must show respect for personal boundaries.723 But, as I suggested above, there is more that we could say from within the Christian tradition. John Paul II offers four major tasks for the family: to guard, reveal, and communicate love;724 to serve life by having children and educating them in the Christian faith;725 to participate in the development of society;726 and to be a “domestic church,” evangelizing its members, witnessing to the world, using its home as a sanctuary (rituals of prayer and sacramentals), and serving the broader community.727 (Notice that none of these functions of the family include abiding by a gender or age-based hierarchy.) But, even in the midst of this broader, others-oriented vision for the family, we must be attentive to

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722 Anderson and Johnson, Regarding Children, 48.
723 Ibid., 49-56.
724 Pope John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, no. 17.
725 Ibid., no. 37.
726 Ibid., no. 42, 44.
727 Ibid., no. 49-64.
the sin and failure that is inevitable within such families. It is foreseeable that all families will “have problems, face crises, cope with stress, struggle with illness, manage complicated situations. They may even have to endure tragedy.” But, a family “does not fail because there are deprivations or even difficult problems. Coping effectively with a crisis, or assisting a family member during a time of upheaval, is, in fact, what it means to be family. Even when outside help is needed, the family may still be a crucible of coping. A family’s success or failure is measured by its ability to cope.”

This is not meant to normalize sin or abuse—not at all. I want simply to remind us that any idealized family form, even in a more social conscious version, is prone to disruption and failure. Most families do not fail so catastrophically as to produce abuse and neglect, but fail they certainly will. As Rubio reminds us, we must “hold grace and sin together” within any conversation about the family. Indeed, there seems to be a need to speak of an “already-not yet” dynamic within the Christian family. As John Paul suggests, the family is already a community of love, a location of God’s grace simply by virtue of its existence. But, at the same time, we must acknowledge that the family is a flawed and sinful institution marked by human failings. In the Pope’s words, “There is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension and conflict violently attack and at times mortally wound its own communion: hence there arise the many and varied forms of division in family life.” Or, as Natalie Klejwa says simply, “All families sin and they do it every day in numerous ways.” Both grace and sin are present—and not

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728 Anderson and Johnson, Regarding Children, 57.
729 Rubio, Family Ethics, 73.
730 Pope John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, no. 21.
always in equal portions. Because of the inevitability of failure and what we know about the prevalence of domestic violence and child abuse in America today, it is vitally important that all who write and teach on theologies of the family do so with this context in mind.

Some Quiverfull families already know how to do this. Despite the idealized blueprint of the Quiverfull subculture, Carley has no illusions of perfection in her family. She describes their family’s life together as “a journey, a work in progress.” She says, “Since we started our family years ago, we’ve changed. We’ve stopped doing things that aren’t working and started doing things that are working. We don’t just do things because we’re part of this movement. We grow and change depending on what works.” For Carley, the most important thing is learning to love and serve God as a family. And part of pursuing that goal is reckoning with how family members fail each other. When I asked her to describe her family in three words, she said “big” (accompanied by raucous laughter), “young” (“I feel like we’re still learning” and “I hope we’re open to growth”), and “open” or “vulnerable.” Then, she added that she hopes that they are vulnerable “not just in the home” with each other, but “also with other people.” For example, she says,

Any time we get snippy with each other, I just put a stop to it. In our house, we’re going to use words that uplift each other because once we get out of this house there are a million people who won’t do that for [us]. We offer grace and forgiveness because we aren’t perfect—none of us. And as much as I forgive my kids, I hope they forgive me, because I’m flawed. And I hope that they can be open with us and ask us stuff and not be afraid to talk about what they struggle with.

As this section has shown, there is a “dark side” to the Quiverfull movement that has received more and more publicity and scrutiny in recent years. We would be wrong to assume that all or most Quiverfull families contain the kind of abuse, violence, and neglect demonstrated in recent news stories or the blog of Homeschooling’s Invisible Children. Even so, knowing the prevalence of domestic and child abuse in the American population as a whole, it should be not surprising to find that some Quiverfull families fail in such catastrophic ways. Indeed, given some of the peculiarities of the movement, there’s a sense in which incidences of both spousal and child abuse are not surprising. We know that abuse is more prevalent in families that are inwardly focused and socially isolated. And, for Quiverfull families, there is the additional pressure of fulfilling a divinely ordained family blueprint and the financial pressure of providing for many children. But, Quiverfull families are also hindered by the fact that their discourse makes the mistakes of imagining the home as a sinless space. All of the sin and temptation is located “out there,” beyond the family, which sometimes prevents parents and children from acknowledging the real problems present within their four walls. Quiverfull elites do not help, either. Like Voddie Baucham, they often trivialize or dismiss stories of abuse as beyond the pale and therefore not problematic for their theology and practice. Moreover, they seem unable to see that the modern nuclear family itself may be too weak to bear the myriad responsibilities they put upon it.

V. Conclusion

As we come to the end of this chapter, it is appropriate to review all of the ground we have covered. After clarifying the distinction between “the family” and “families,” we considered the way that the Quiverfull movement, in general, imagines the family. The
Quiverfull movement envisions a divinely ordained form of the family, organized mainly by gender and age-based roles within the home. The Quiverfull vision of the family also includes a strong sense of familial privacy and autonomy such that the family is largely disconnected from other communities and institutions. Parental authority, especially the rule of the father, is of primary importance. In addition to a particular form, Quiverfull practitioners imagine the family to have four majors functions: 1) to faithfully fulfill God’s design for family roles; 2) to bear, raise, and educate Christian children; 3) to evangelize and disciple others through the home; and 4) to advance the Kingdom of God and transform America in the long term. Although these are broad brushstrokes, together they make up the major pieces of the Quiverfull imagination of the family.

In my analysis of the Quiverfull view of the family, I suggested that their family form is helpfully described as a “blueprint.” Drawing on the work of Nicholas Healy, I described the problems with a blueprint approach to the family. Put simply, theological blueprints are systematic and theoretical models, often based on propositions, which are disconnected from local contexts and the experiences of real people. Despite protests to the contrary, the Quiverfull family blueprint is a historically and culturally conditioned model with roots in the Victorian period. Also, it is based upon a selective reading of scripture and Christian tradition. So, the Quiverfull blueprint shares with all other theological blueprints a deficit of both particularity and practicality. In addition, the Quiverfull blueprint itself has some specific problems that are both counter-productive to the movement’s stated aims and potentially detrimental to women and children. First, the excessive privatization of the Quiverfull family often leads to families that are disconnected from broader communities and institutions. In my research, isolation is a
common problem for Quiverfull mothers and their children. Second, the singular focus on the family often leads to an eclipse of ecclesiology and deficit of ecclesial involvement. For many in the Quiverfull movement, the nuclear family has replaced the church. Finally, the Quiverfull family blueprint can lead to the construction of the home as a sinless space. In cases where family isolation is acute, the inability to recognize sin in the home can contribute to the suppression of abuse and neglect.

In both my description and analysis, I have argued that Quiverfull theology of the family is not altogether unique, but very much a part of the evangelical and American milieu from which it emerged. Overall, Quiverfull families are seeking to fulfill an ideal of the Christian family constructed from a particular reading of scripture, as well as American culture. Also, they are seeking a pure and fully integrated Christian family where everything is holy and Christian formation is central. And, they are seeking a private, insulated, and autonomous family that is also able to have a broad social, cultural, and even global impact for the Kingdom of God. Despite their lofty goals, however, the Quiverfull movement has produced an idealization of the family that leads to isolation, disconnection from society, the eclipse of the church, and, in some cases, the cover-up of sin, especially the sins of husbands against wives and parents against their children.
CONCLUSION

I. Quiverfull: In the World and of the World

It is a common phrase of American evangelical religion that Christians must be “in the world but not of the world.” Although not a direct quote from Scripture, this sentiment is based upon the words of Jesus in John 17:14-19, where he prays the following for his disciples:

I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Evangelicals mean many things when they say Christians should be “in the world but not of the world.” Some mean that Christians should “fit in” among their non-Christian neighbors in minor matters like appearance and lifestyle, but they should stand out in major matters like personal morality, family, and career choices. Carley expresses this perspective when she criticizes Christian women who intentionally wear modest, outdated clothing in order to stand out from the crowd. She thinks that kind of stylistic differentiation is unnecessarily alienating to non-Christians. When she says Christians should be “in the world but not of the world,” she means that Christian women should wear fashionable, up-to-date clothing provided it doesn’t violate their conscience. At the same time, when someone of a more separatist persuasion says Christians should be “in
the world but not of the world,” they mean that even though Christians are residents of the world, they should separate themselves from the world’s pleasures and any “worldly” people who indulge in them. Renee seems to have had this point of view early on in her Quiverfull life when she chose to keep her children out of their church’s youth group so as not to risk their exposure to ungodly, corrupting influences. No matter how stringently or loosely it is interpreted, the “in the world and not of the world” trope expresses well a core tension of American evangelical religion: withdrawal from culture vs. engagement with and transformation of culture.

But, the claim that Christians must be “in the world but not of the world” is based on the faulty assumption that it is possible to refrain from being “of the world” at all. In truth, no Christian community can escape being “of the world”; that is, a product of their time and place with a way of life constructed in relationship with the surrounding culture(s). Indeed, there is no “pure,” self-contained Christian community that exists autonomously from the surrounding culture. Christian identity is inherently relational, constantly emerging at the boundaries of the community, drawing on and modifying the cultural materials and practices that they share with their non-Christian neighbors.733 In fact, in a very real sense, Christian communities need the surrounding culture from which to construct its alternative way of life, distinct in some ways and similar in other ways. In the words of Kathryn Tanner, “A Christian way of life…is essentially parasitic; it is has to establish relations with other ways of life, it has to take from them in order to be one itself.”734 This observation is no less true of American evangelicals and the Quiverfull subculture within it. As we have seen, the Quiverfull movement is a form of evangelical

733 Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 115
734 Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 113.
lived religion struggling to construct a distinctive practice of the family within the
cultural environment of 21st Century America. But, in the end, even though Quiverfull
families represent an unconventional evangelical practice of the family in some ways,
they yet remain very much embedded in the American culture they purport to challenge.
Thus, they are, despite protests to the contrary, very much “in the world and of the
world.”

II. Summary of Findings

This dissertation has offered an in-depth consideration of the American Quiverfull
movement that draws on history, cultural studies, ethnography, and theology. What I
would like to make more explicit now is that every chapter has evidenced the “in the
world and of the world” character of Quiverfull lived religion described above. This
section will review what has been said thus far with reference to this fundamental
dynamic. In Chapter 1, I told the story of American evangelicals as it pertains to gender,
the family, and education, from the Victorian period to the present day. This narrative
revealed that the Quiverfull movement did not emerge “out of nowhere,” but is part and
parcel of the story of evangelicalism in America. American evangelicals have long
looked to the regulation of the nuclear family as a key part of Christian faithfulness. In
this way, the Quiverfull movement is a contemporary intensification of longstanding
evangelical tendencies going all the way back to the 19th Century.

In Chapter 2, I offered a close examination of the Quiverfull movement as a
contemporary religious and cultural phenomenon. I concluded that the Quiverfull
phenomenon could be helpfully understood as a discourse of practices, a subculture of
evangelicalism, and, borrowing from Robert Wuthnow, a transdenominational special
purpose group. As a subculture, Quiverfull has elite and lay levels, both of which are
important to giving the Quiverfull movement its theological and practical cohesion. Also,
the Quiverfull movement, like evangelicalism in general, is characterized by constant
conflict and debate. That is to say, the Quiverfull movement is created in large part
through the work of disagreement within the subculture and the work of negotiation with
“outsiders” at the subculture’s porous borders. Socially, Quiverfull discourse is a product
of internal and external cultural negotiations and, therefore, a movement very much “in
the world and of the world.”

In Chapter 3, I presented the stories of three Quiverfull mothers based upon the
data culled through two years of ethnographic research. The mothers I chose vary in age,
class, personality, and experience, so their stories offer outsiders a better sense of the
variety within the Quiverfull subculture. While there are limitations to what can be
concluded from a focused ethnography of this sort, my informants show definitively that
Quiverfull mothers are not the programmed automatons that some journalistic accounts
have mistakenly suggested. Moreover, the insight these mothers provided into the way
Quiverfull discourse works on the ground provided vital material for the theological
reflection in the chapters that follow. Perhaps more than anything else, the stories of
Renee, Carley, and Deborah reveal the contextual give-and-take that occurs even within
the very prescribed notions of gender and Christian faithfulness present in the Quiverfull
discourse.

Drawing on the historical narrative of Chapter 1, the cultural analysis of Chapter
2, and the ethnographic data summarized in Chapter 3, Chapters 4-6 addressed from a
theological perspective the key themes of mothers/motherhood, children/childhood, and
the family. Each of these discussions revealed in its own way the extent to which Quiverfull practitioners are distinct from and similar to their American neighbors. So, Chapter 4 considered in some depth the imagination and practice of motherhood within the Quiverfull movement. We saw that their practice of motherhood is ideologically antifeminist, but displays a complicated relationship with patriarchy. Some mothers wield considerable power within their homes due to their many responsibilities, especially the vital work of homeschooling. Even so, the experiences of vulnerability and heteronomy that are a normal part of human motherhood are exacerbated in Quiverfull families, where the mother is almost perpetually pregnant, nursing, and caring for others. Although somewhat extreme in its instantiation, Quiverfull motherhood is much like American motherhood in general: privatized and isolated, lacking broader communal systems of support. These are mothers who are “in the world and of the world.”

In Chapter 5, we saw that, as in the case of motherhood, the Quiverfull view of children and childhood has much in common with American and evangelical views generally. Quiverfull families stand out due to their emphasis on children as a blessing, but that blessing status is sometimes ambiguous in the case of non-Christian children. Like many in Christian history, they see children as both sinners and innocents. But, of particular concern is the fact that they are prone to seeing children as adults-in-the-making, rather than full human beings in their own right, and the private responsibility of parents in the nuclear family. Both of these perspectives are widespread assumptions of American society and work against their desire to create an alternative way of life that is a witness to and effective transformer of, American culture. Moreover, viewing children as the private responsibility of parents exacerbates the American tendency toward the
privatization and isolation of the family. If children are the purview of parents only, the surrounding community—even the church—has little stake in the child’s wellbeing. This inadvertently results in the increased vulnerability of children within Quiverfull homes and the disconnection of child rearing practices from broader communities and systems of support.

Finally, in Chapter 6, we considered closely the Quiverfull discourse of the nuclear family. As in previous chapters, we discovered that the Quiverfull vision of the family unwittingly intensifies the general American privatization of the family. This often results in familial isolation, something that is most evident in the stories of Quiverfull mothers who spend so much time working alone with their children in the private family home. Also, because the Quiverfull movement reifies the nuclear family, they often construct it as a sinless space, which can serve to hide abuse and neglect in the home. This has sometimes-treacherous consequences for Quiverfull women and their children. Moreover, their family focused practice of Christianity often leads to the theological and practical eclipse of the church. The nuclear family, committed to Quiverfull practice, is given almost messianic status as the chosen vehicle of God’s transformation for the world. Lacking an ecclesial context for understanding the family’s purpose and work, the Quiverfull family can become an inward-looking, mostly self-interested institution that replicates the privatized pattern of life all around them. They mistakenly work against the Christian formation of their children because they lack the necessary ecclesial and social contexts for that formation. And instead of being a catalyst for change, such families simply perpetuate the isolated practices of family that dominate American culture today.
III. Thoroughly Evangelical and Thoroughly American

Now that we have reviewed the terrain covered thus far in light of the “in the world and of the world” dynamic, it might be helpful to take a step back, so to speak, and revisit some of the themes of the broad historical narrative outlined in Chapter 1. In this section, I will offer a few interpretive perspectives on the Quiverfull movement as a thoroughly American and evangelical phenomenon. Each of these interpretations involves reference to some major features of evangelical history and the particular details of how Quiverfull discourse functions on the ground. Of course, I am not suggesting that we must choose only one of these points of view, rather that each of them in their own way sheds light on Quiverfull as a both an evangelical and American lived religion.

One way to understand Quiverfull is as a kind of reforming or purifying movement within American evangelicalism. Like Amy DeRogatis suggests in her book, Saving Sex, there’s a sense in which Quiverfull practitioners are attempting a purification of evangelical practice as it pertains to sex and reproduction.\(^\text{735}\) Indeed, they take the conservative Christian pro-life commitment and put it into practice in a thoroughgoing way. Not only are they against the practice of abortion, but also any and all attempts to control reproduction. They see Quiverfull as a truly consistent practice of pro-life convictions. In support of this perspective, Quiverfull authors directly challenge mainstream evangelical writings on sex and marriage. As DeRogatis notes, they do so first by disconnecting marriage from romance and sex-for-pleasure and then by insisting on the unqualified sexual submission of wives to husbands.\(^\text{736}\) In contrast to their mainstream evangelical peers, Quiverfull practitioners believe that truly pious believers


\(^{736}\) DeRogatis, Saving Sex, 107.
“demonstrate their faith through large families and the knowledge that marriage is about self-sacrifice and not sexual pleasure.”\footnote{Ibid., 127.} I would add that their commitment to gender hierarchy and homeschooling are also part of this deeper, purer evangelical piety. Although almost all evangelical Christians espouse what could be called pro-life, pro-family, and antifeminist ideas, Quiverfull families “lean in” to this ideology and seek to embody it in a comprehensive way.

Viewed as a purist movement within American evangelicalism, we can see how Quiverfull practitioners set themselves apart from both Americans in general and evangelicals in particular. Their practice creates firm boundaries between the (perceived) faithful and unfaithful. Of course, very few families in America identify with their way of life, which leads to the perspective that they represent a divinely ordained faithful remnant. But are they really as different as they may at first appear? The answer, as we have seen, is yes and no. There are aspects of Quiverfull subculture that seem to go against the grain of American society. Certainly, they set themselves apart from American culture by their focus on “multigenerational faithfulness” (that is, the propagation of the Christian faith) and willingness to raise a large family toward that end. Most American families do not live on the father’s income alone and most American women do not have more than two children. Also, despite its growing popularity, most American families do not homeschool their children (and the ones who do homeschool only do so for a limited time period). Cultivating a large family, living on one income, and educating all their children through homeschooling—in all these ways Quiverfull families are setting themselves apart from American society through a more rigorous form of evangelical piety.
At the same time, there are ways that the Quiverfull discourse is in keeping with dominant American social norms. Americans generally value and romanticize pregnancy and motherhood. Media coverage of celebrity mothers has made it somewhat “cool” to be pregnant, breastfeed, and mother children. Parenting, in general, is becoming more and more important to marriage as a practice of ultimate focus. Americans have also come to accept homeschooling as a legitimate way of educating children such that homeschooling is no longer the strange, countercultural practice that it once was in the 1980s. Many Americans now homeschool for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with religion. Also, even though the Quiverfull focus on children’s spiritual formation sets them apart, the inward-looking concern for the success of their own children is by no means counter-cultural. Indeed, channeling the efforts of the nuclear family for the betterment of kin, even to the detriment of others, is mainstream American practice. Finally, there is no doubt that despite the advances made in a variety of sectors, gender dualism persists in American culture. Certainly, it is no longer socially acceptable to say publicly things like, “Women belong in the home,” or “Mothers should be in charge of the children.” But these ideas persist nonetheless, albeit in less explicit ways. Sexist prejudices rooted in gender dualism are evident in the persistence of unequal pay, the dearth of adequate maternity and paternity leave policies, and more. In this sense, then,

738 As long as you are beautiful, well put together, and svelte while doing so. There remains little room in the American cultural imagination for women who carry in their bodies the real physical affects of pregnancy and nursing. But, these expectations are the same in all other areas of activity. Certainly, women can do anything—mother children, run for office, head a Fortune 500 company, serve in the armed forces—as long as they are beautiful and sexy. Women who fail to adhere to dominant standards of beauty, however, are unworthy of affirmation.


Quiverfull gender ideology is an intensification of persistent ideas about gender in America today. Accordingly, Quiverfull can be viewed as a kind of reforming or purifying movement within evangelicalism that (like evangelicalism itself) creates the appearance of clear boundaries from American culture without going so far as to be genuinely countercultural.\textsuperscript{741}

Another way to view the Quiverfull movement is as a kind of evangelical monasticism of the family. That is to say, Quiverfull families are attempting to create a lived religion within the home that is unified so that all of life is lived, in their words, “under the lordship of Christ.”\textsuperscript{742} Within a Protestant religious culture that generally dichotomizes the public and private, home and work, spiritual and secular, Quiverfull families are seeking an integrated Christian existence within the home where every aspect of life is sacred and oriented toward God (at least in theory). Their practice of homeschooling is especially important in this regard. The hope is that all Quiverfull family members, but especially those spending the most time in the home, will come to see all areas of life coming under the reach of Christian faith. Rather than a sacred-secular divide, where the divine is encountered in “religious” spaces but not in others, Quiverfull families try to order all of life under God and God’s word. Thus, everything from schoolwork to ballet practice to pulling weeds is portrayed an arena over which Christ is Lord. Even the homeschooling curriculum used by Quiverfull parents seeks to order academic knowledge under Christ’s lordship so that everything from arithmetic to


zoology is connected to scripture and Christian teaching. The effect of this unification is that Quiverfull lived religion renders all things potentially sacred.

Although they do not have a “rule” like those of monastic orders, their daily lives evidence a combination of work and worship, labor and prayer, which are essential to such communities. Also, there are plentiful examples of self-denial and self-discipline as parents and children commit themselves to homeschooling and “homeworking”\textsuperscript{743} as the primary tools of their sanctification. Yet, rather than a community of celibates within an ecclesial and social context, the nuclear family in the private family home becomes the site of Christian formation and service. Viewed as a holy obligation of Christian parents and the organizing focus of family life, homeschooling inevitably leads to a version of Christianity that is domestically oriented. In this way, the domestic space is the site of religious instruction and the primary location for parents and children to live out their Christian convictions. This is especially true of Quiverfull daughters, most of whom are raised from very young to view the home as their proper area of “dominion” and the space in which they express their obedience to Christ. But, all family members are initiated into an instantiation of Christianity that is primarily domestic in orientation. And, as we have seen, this kind of domestic monasticism, focused as it is on the preservation of “multigenerational faithfulness,”\textsuperscript{744} can have detrimental consequences.

\textsuperscript{743} This is Mary Pride’s term in \textit{The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality} (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1985).

\textsuperscript{744} The concern for “multigenerational faithfulness” is another way of saying that their central concern is for the production of Christian children. This concern is rooted in studies over the past few decades that show a decreasing number of youth remaining in the church after they graduate from high school. Many such studies accuse secular state schools of being the primary problem. Based upon those concerns, Quiverfull families seek to do whatever it takes “to raise sons and daughters who walk with God,” in Voddie Baucham’s words. They devote themselves to a total lifestyle committed to biblical family values, trusting that if they do it “right,” their children will remain Christian. But, there is another factor worth mentioning here: selling “biblical family values” can be very profitable. U.S. religious publishing and products is a $6 billion industry and homeschooling curriculum and resources constitute a $1 billion
for their ecclesiology. In some cases, the church is replaced by the nuclear family, while, in other cases, the church is simply subordinated to the family. Like some monastic movements of old, many Quiverfull families believe the church is in desperate need of reform and their lived religion is the primary way to see that reform take place. Of course, just how American churches can be reformed by such family-focused efforts remains to be seen.

Yet, to view Quiverfull as a form of family monasticism may not do justice to the central place that antifeminism and “biblical womanhood” occupies in their discourse. Chapter 4 made clear that a particular interpretation of gender is key to the Quiverfull subculture, which has important consequences for women. Quiverfull discourse provides an account of womanhood that is rooted solely in wifehood and motherhood. This mother-oriented account of womanhood is evidenced in their print and Internet publications, reinforced in their cultural institutions (churches, networks, conferences), supported by their material culture (music, art, clothing), and embodied in their daily practice. Women in the “full quiver” perform this account of feminine identity through repeated pregnancies, extended breastfeeding, and a daily life organized around the care and instruction of children. To be sure, the practice of homeschooling allows some women to acquire a more professionalized identity as teacher and administrator of their

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share of that market. As of 2010, there were approximately 2 million homeschoolers in America with an increase rate of 7-15% every year (Brian D. Ray, “Homeschool Population Report 2010,” National Home Education Research Institute, January 3, 2011, accessed April 8, 2015, http://www.nheri.org/research/nheri-news/homeschool-population-report-2010.html). Estimates are that each family spends $500 on curriculum per child (Vicki Bentley, “What Does it Cost to Homeschool?” HSLDA, Fall 2013, accessed April 8, 2015, http://www.hslda.org/earlyyears/Costs.asp). Though not all families homeschool for religious reasons, a 2003 study by the National Center for Education Statistics shows that 30% of parents cite “religious or moral instruction” as their primary reason for homeschooling, while 72% cite “religious or moral instruction” as one reason for homeschooling (“Homeschooling in the United States: 2003,” National Center for Education Statistics). Clearly, there is a lot of money to be made selling curriculum and other resources to such families, especially large families with six or more children. Quiverfull families, especially, see the purchase of such resources as a worthy investment.
children’s education. But, it is a professionalized vocation that is entirely in keeping with the overarching construction of women as privatized, mothering subjects.\textsuperscript{745} Mothers in Quiverfull families often garner significant cultural capital and respect due to their perceived expertise in the care of the home and instruction of children. Even this is a double-edged sword, however, for the power and authority given to mothers in the Quiverfull discourse reinforces an already present American and evangelical tendency toward the illusion of maternal omnipotence, an unattainable ideal that is forever beckoning and condemning mothers. Moreover, cultural capital cannot make up for the lack of economic power possessed by Quiverfull mothers. Were they to suffer the death of a spouse or the break-up of their marriage, Quiverfull mothers do not have the earning potential to be able to support their many children. In this way, however Quiverfull women may negotiate with and receive cultural capital from the notion of womanhood as the teachers and “keepers of the home,” they remain complicit in and in a real sense limited by the overwhelmingly privatized, maternal character of female identity. Thus, as we consider broader perspectives on Quiverfull within American society and evangelical culture, it is possible to understand Quiverfull as an antifeminist movement, as well. In this respect, Quiverfull discourse can be viewed as a rejection of feminism (as they understand it) in both American society and evangelical religion.

A final way to view the Quiverfull movement as both thoroughly American and thoroughly evangelical is to see it as a part of the recent drift of conservative Christians into ever-increasing individualism.\textsuperscript{746} Over the past couple of decades, some elements of

\textsuperscript{745} The practice of homeschooling also reinforces the gender dualism of evangelical Christianity. See Liao, “Keeping Home,” 178-224.

\textsuperscript{746} For a fuller discussion of privatization within conservative Protestant homeschooling families, see Liao, “Keeping Home,” 126-177.
libertarian political philosophy have begun to gain ground among Americans, and especially conservative Protestants. In many ways, the American libertarian impulse to maximize autonomy and freedom of choice and protect the primacy of individual judgment blends well with the individualist impulses of evangelical Protestant Christianity. And there are a number of Quiverfull leaders today who are promoting libertarian approaches to American politics, including Voddie Baucham, Douglas Phillips, and Geoffrey Botkin. Already skeptical of American government for its perceived secular, anti-Christian posture (a narrative inculcated by the politically conservative Religious Right), the libertarian commitment to individual liberty is magnified so that it applies to all areas of life. Religion, commerce, schooling, healthcare—everything becomes a matter of individual prerogative and choice.

But, what does this have to do with Quiverfull families on the ground? Certainly, the choice to keep one’s children out of community schools and provide their education within the home is an individualistic and privatizing exercise. Most homeschooling families only have extended interaction with fellow homeschooling families within the context of co-operative events and gatherings. Put simply, they rarely interact with people not like them. The lack of cooperation with “government schools” reinforces the tendency of these conservative white evangelicals to see themselves as outsiders to American culture and people in desperate need of protecting their individual liberties. In the words of one homeschooling advocate, the rejection of public schools is an exercise of the “individual right to choose how you want to live, how and when you want to participate in ‘the mainstream’ culture, and especially how you want to raise your
children.”747 Within this perspective, the choice to opt-out of state schooling is an intentional rejection of social connectedness and obligation. But, as David Sessions has pointed out, this perspective doesn’t represent traditional political conservatism, but a new kind of anarchic ultra-individualism. In Sessions’ words, “There is no conservatism without community, without traditions, institutions, rites of passage… You can’t magically create those things inside a single household.”748 And yet, many Quiverfull families are trying to do just that. Thus, Quiverfull discourse seems to constitute further isolation of conservative Christian families from American society, retreating from public cooperation into the individual choices of the nuclear family.

Also, as we noted in Chapter 6, the ultra-individualist denunciation of social rootedness and cooperation is matched among many Quiverfull families by an anemic ecclesiology and lack of ecclesial involvement. This is something that their own leaders acknowledge in explicit and implicit ways.749 Without a developed ecclesiology or strong ecclesial cooperation, Quiverfull families see themselves as self-sufficient units, with the parents (really, fathers) as the solitary figures responsible for the propagation of the faith. This is especially the case in families that view most American churches as beyond the pale in terms of correct theology and practice. If most churches fall short of God’s ideal, then why bother participating at all? Thus, the (properly ordered) Christian family becomes the principal locus of religious observance and formation and the church.

749 In his book, Family Shepherds, Voddie Baucham is compelled to devote an entire chapter to making the case for why church cooperation is even necessary for the biblical shepherd and his family. Meanwhile, Scott Brown and the National Center for Family Integrated Churches (NCFIC) have to devote a bulk of their attention to the conflicts between families and churches and the need for families to participate in church.
becomes an optional, voluntary institution that supports the private work of individual family units.

This privatized vision of the family has a number of detrimental outcomes, but the one that most concerns me is how the privatized family names and addresses sin, something discussed in Chapter 6. The practice of Christian homeschooling, which trades in language of “protection” and views parents as the highest God-ordained spiritual authorities, can lead to the obfuscation of sin in the household (and churches, for that matter). Quiverfull families may not be well equipped to address the ways parents sin against their children or the fact that, for many women and children in American society, the family can be a dangerous place. If the family is considered a sacred, autonomous, self-sufficient haven from the sinful world, then it can become nearly impossible to address the breakdowns and failures that take place within it. Moreover, the lack of connection to the outside world leaves families with precious few resources to help when their burdens and conflicts exceed their ability to cope. Although many American families suffer in various ways from the effects of privatization and isolation, Quiverfull families represent an intensification of this larger trend, mostly due to their religious devotion to familial self-sufficiency in every respect.

This section has presented in broad strokes a number of interpretive perspectives on the Quiverfull movement as a thoroughly American and evangelical phenomenon. First, Quiverfull can be viewed as a reform movement within American evangelicalism that is seeking to purify evangelical practice of the family (particularly as it pertains to sex, reproduction, and child rearing). Second, Quiverfull can be viewed as a kind of family oriented evangelical monasticism with families pursuing a unified Christian life
through the practice of homeschooling. Third, given the centrality of their ideology of womanhood, Quiverfull can be viewed as an antifeminist movement aimed at opposing feminism in both American society and American evangelicalism. Finally, the Quiverfull movement can be viewed as one aspect of the ever-increasing individualism among conservative Christians. As I said above, an explication of these broader perspectives is not to suggest that we must choose only one of these points of view. Instead, each of these ways of framing Quiverfull helps us to see that they remain a thoroughly evangelical and American lived religion, even when viewed from different perspectives. Quiverfull families are indeed “in the world and of the world.”

IV. Conclusion

As this project comes to a close, I want to offer some final thoughts on what I think we have learned from a close examination of the Quiverfull movement. At the most basic level, I hope that this study has been sufficiently revelatory as to satisfy the curiosities of Quiverfull outsiders who view these families as cultural oddities on the American religious landscape. We have come to understand what truly sets them apart within American culture today through an examination of their practices of gender hierarchy, homeschooling, and pronatalism. The women, in particular, with their fierce commitment to male headship and eagerness to bear “as many children as God gives,” stand out as peculiarly counter-cultural. Also remarkable is the Quiverfull reorientation of the family around the Christian education and formation of children. I venture to guess that very few families today would be willing to sacrifice so much for the sake of passing on their faith to the next generation. In all of these ways and more, we are right to understand Quiverfull families as a distinct lived religion within American
evangelicalism today. I hope that this project has sufficiently and fairly rendered these
distinctions intelligible to outsiders (myself included).

Yet, at another level, I have tried do more than simply explain an eccentric
contemporary religious movement. Indeed, to view Quiverfull families merely as a
religious curiosity is to miss something vitally important. In addition to rendering their
practice intelligible, a close study of Quiverfull families reveals a way of life that
reinforces and intensifies some distinctly American and evangelical habits. In this way, if
we look closely into the lives of Quiverfull families we inevitably see ourselves staring
back. Their weaknesses are our weaknesses. Their blind spots are our blind spots. Their
failures in imagination are our failures in imagination. Rather than offer a radical,
counter-cultural vision for the Christian family, the Quiverfull movement presents a
slightly modified version of something quite commonplace: a privatized, isolated nuclear
family struggling (and often failing) to maintain their bonds to the broader community,
the church, and other systems of support.

Truth be told, the Quiverfull solution to today’s crisis of the family is a
thoroughly private one that does not take into consideration broader social and economic
factors that come to bear on American families. They, like all of us, remain caught in the
same problems that ran the advances of second wave feminism aground at the end of the
20th Century: an eclipse of the social and communal by a focus on the individual and
private. Certainly, as a society Americans love to talk about the importance of
motherhood, children, and the family. We publicly applaud those who prioritize their
family or sacrifice for their children. But, we also remain unwilling to seek solutions to
the problems of the family beyond the four walls of the private home. “As long as my
family is doing OK,” we say, “why should I worry about how the family down the street is doing?” We assume that if other families aren’t thriving in the American meritocracy, it must be due to some moral failing on their part. Never mind the problems in our common life that come to bear on individual families, including persistent inequality, lack of access to adequate childcare, crippling student loan debts, unemployment and under-employment, disproportionate minority incarceration rates, unaffordable housing, lack of access to quality healthcare, and more. All of these things play a role in the crisis of the family today but Quiverfull families, along with the rest of us, ignore them at our collective peril.

Certainly, given their history, it makes sense that evangelicals would turn to the private family as the means for social and cultural transformation. We saw in Chapter 1 that when the American government ceased to enforce the “traditional family” through government programs and public schools, evangelicals turned inward for protection. They sincerely thought that by preserving some vestige of the “traditional family” in their homes they could have a transformative effect on society. Quiverfull families remain fired by this impulse today. But, not only is the bottom-up approach to cultural transformation wrongheaded, what Quiverfull families are offering in the home is far from transformative. Lacking a broader social vision or any sense of the church as an alternative society, Quiverfull families simply cannot be the radical agents for change.

750 In his book, To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), James Davison Hunter provides a concise explanation of why the bottom-up approach to cultural change rarely if ever works. His discussion is especially helpful because he is in direct conversation with the assumptions of evangelicalism. In his words, “By themselves or even together, evangelism, politics, and social reform, then, will fail to bring about the ends hoped for and intended.” Moreover, “change does not always occur in the direction that people propose or with the effects for which people hope. There are almost always unintended consequences to human action, particularly at the macro-historical level and these are, often enough, tragic. … Culture is endlessly complex and difficult, and it is highly resistant to our passion to change it, however well intentioned and heroic our efforts may be” (47).
that they desire. Instead, they re-inscribe the norms of American individualism and privatization but with a more thoroughly religious sheen. In the end, the problem is not that the Quiverfull movement is too radical but that it is not radical enough.
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