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**QUIVERFULL REALITY AND RHETORIC: READING PRACTICES IN  
THE BIBLICAL PATRIARCHY MOVEMENT**

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by

**Bethany E. Sweeney**

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The Dissertation of Bethany E. Sweeney is  
approved:

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Professor Wlad Godzich, chair

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Professor H. Marshall Leicester, Jr.

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Professor Neda Atanasoski

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Tyrus Miller  
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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## Abstract

### Quiverfull Reality and Rhetoric: Reading Practices in the Biblical Patriarchy Movement

Bethany E. Sweeney

This dissertation analyzes the Christian Quiverfull movement, focusing on its underlying ideology, how that ideology is created and disseminated, and its similarity with certain aspects of broader U.S. culture. In doing so, it examines the written and visual texts produced and distributed by the movement. Though the dissertation covers a wide range of materials, including sermons, books, blog posts, films, and educational materials, its most significant focus is on the reality TV shows on which Quiverfull adherents appear, as those provide the most conspicuous example of Quiverfull belief and practice. To respond effectively to the Quiverfull use of this and other platforms, the dissertation combines techniques based in both literature and ethnography. This allows it to establish the broad boundaries of Quiverfull community as demonstrated by its textual production, to engage directly with the self-representation that the Quiverfull community practices, to situate that community within its larger cultural context, and to document and evaluate the textual practices that the Quiverfull movement uses to engage public audiences and attract them to its ideology. By using such methods, the dissertation documents not only the parameters of the worldview to which the Quiverfull movement adheres but also the methods by which they devise those parameters. It argues that the Quiverfull movement employs a model of reading that involves first establishing fundamental principles and then instructing its adherents to learn its worldview by teaching them to approach Scripture and other key texts as though engaging in a scavenger hunt. Using this model, readers discover the clues that lead to the

construction of essential truths, verifying them and coming to embrace them through a process of identifying and understanding all items given on the scavenger hunt list, with the process ultimately leading to full membership in the community. Finally, the dissertation discusses how echoes of the Quiverfull method of approaching texts can be seen in broader U.S. culture, suggesting that the Quiverfull movement is not nearly as aberrant to dominant culture as it is often treated in public discourse.

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My mother, Gail Sweeney, my father, Mike Sweeney, and my sister, Leah Sweeney have all played an instrumental role in my development as a scholar. They were with me all the way, encouraging me to pursue my doctorate, fostering my love of reading and learning, challenging me to be a better thinker and a better person, and offering me emotional support when I needed it most. I love and thank all three of you.

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## Introduction

### Section 1: Quiverfull: An Overview

The impetus for this dissertation came about initially as a result of personal reflection. I don't remember the specific context in which I first encountered the *TLC* reality TV show *19 Kids and Counting*, but I do remember being struck by how many elements of the lives of the family it showcased, the Duggar family, reminded me of elements from my own upbringing. The Duggars were strict Christian conservatives who taught their homeschooled children rigid gender roles, a strong belief in Creationism, and the idea that mainstream society was in the midst of a process of decline; the school I attended as a child was affiliated with a church that wouldn't allow women to direct the Sunday School program because that would put them in authority over men, taught that evolution was a scientific conspiracy to discredit Creationism and Christianity in general, and believed that the end of the world was imminent. Watching the daily lives of the Duggar family reminded me of the daily lives of my friends and peers at my conservative grammar school. Watching the Duggars also made me realize how significantly my life—in terms of personal beliefs, but also in terms of social circles of engagement—had diverged from the culture in which I had grown up. When I told current friends and colleagues about my upbringing, they were almost always surprised to learn that such ideology was so openly taught in educational institutions in 1990s New York State. As I watched *19 Kids and Counting* and reflected on this reaction, I began to slowly realize that the worldview I had been immersed in as a child was invisible to most people who hadn't directly experienced it. To them, people like the Duggars were almost characters from a fictional narrative. I began, then, to wonder about the extent to which they right about the rarity of



people like the Duggars and my childhood peers. I began to ask just how pervasive Duggar values were in society and how large of an effect they had on broader U.S. culture.

As I pursued research—casual at first, as I was then planning to write a dissertation on 17th century British literature—I soon realized that the Duggars, while they did indeed share many of the values on which I had been raised, were participants in a further-reaching ideological system than I had realized. Soon, I had encountered the term “Quiverfull” and realized that it was the term most suited to describing the Duggars’ overall worldview. As I continued to research the Duggars’ beliefs, I found that many of them had origins in the Protestant Reformation and its aftermath, an area I had studied closely. Almost before I knew it, I had decided to shift my research to the study of the Quiverfull movement, incorporating my academic training and my personal experience in a project that aimed to understand how the Quiverfull movement derived its ideological convictions and to begin to chart the effects that resulted from those convictions.

How Quiverfull ideology is structured and derived is, then, the central question of this project; before that can be explored, some definitional and contextual information is required. People who adhere to Quiverfull ideology follow a generally consistent set of principles that derive from a strict, ostensibly literal, Protestant interpretation of Christianity. Those principles include a belief in the headship (read, dominance: the nuances of this will be discussed in several of the following chapters) of the male head of household; the submission of the female head of household to the male head of household; the autonomy of the family and the subsequent practice of homeschooling; the importance of sexual modesty, purity, and chastity; the danger of exposure to non-Quiverfull culture; the duty of good Christians to win the world over for God; and, most famously, the acceptance of the principle that because

“children are a blessing from the Lord” who are to be used in the process of establishing God’s dominion over the world, birth control should not be used for any reason.<sup>1</sup> Quiverfull adherents strictly control the access their children have to culture or ideas outside of their own worldview, and becoming part of Quiverfull community is a multi-step process that requires significant vetting by other adherents. Quiverfull ideology is not confined to a specific Christian denomination—it has adherents who are Presbyterian, Baptist, Southern Baptist, Christian Reformed, and non-denominational in their theological affiliations—and prioritizes Christian lifestyle values over many (though not all) theological issues that separate Protestant and related denominations.<sup>2</sup> Because of this structure, there is no single institutional authority that oversees Quiverfull ideology, though, as will be seen below, there are several institutions that have exerted much influence within the community.

Determining the historical origins of the Quiverfull movement—in other words, identifying when the set of ideas that compose the Quiverfull movement coalesced into a discrete phenomenon—is difficult in large part because the movement and its self-naming practices are so diffuse. According to Kathryn Joyce, an investigative journalist for *The Nation* and author of the book *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchal Movement*, which is the only book-length study of the Quiverfull movement, “Quiverfull, as a contemporary movement, began with the publication of Rick and Jan Hess’s 1989 book, *A Full Quiver: Family Planning and the Lordship of Christ*, in which the Hesses, a Nebraska couple encouraged to

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<sup>1</sup> This idea derives from the Quiverfull interpretation of Psalm 127:3-5; the nuances of that interpretation will be discussed in detail in the body of the dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> Baptists, for example, do not always consider themselves to be Protestant; indeed, many people who would academically be considered Protestants reject the term because of its reactionary, rather than originary, connotations.

write by Mary Pride, argue that God, as the ‘Great Physician,’ and sole ‘Birth Controller,’ is in charge of opening and closing the womb on a case-by-case basis” (134). Though it is clear that the Hesses’ book catapulted the term “Quiverfull” into much broader familiarity than it had previously employed, its moment of inaugural use is not entirely clear, as earlier references to the term have been documented.<sup>3</sup> Adding to that complication is the fact that the term “Quiverfull” is a term with which, despite its origins within the community, many of the people who follow its ideological principles choose not to identify. In large part, this is because the ideals and beliefs associated with the Quiverfull movement have existed in a variety of different Christian communities and denominations and in different combinations for centuries, and many adherents to Quiverfull ideals see themselves as maintaining the true beliefs of Christianity that have been passed down through Scripture and divine inspiration. To accept a label that indicates that their particular constellation of ideas is relatively new would directly contradict their self-constructed narrative of being the only members of the true and uncorrupted Christian church.

Despite such opposition to the term by some within the Quiverfull movement, I have chosen to use it throughout this dissertation because it is the most concise way of referring to people who embrace these ideals within a modern U.S. Christian context, because it has growing adherence in popular culture and is thus recognizable, and because it was coined by people who support its ideology and is not, therefore, designed to function disparagingly. Periodically, I also use the term “Biblical Patriarchy”; it, too, is a term that refers to the same

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<sup>3</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary contains two references to the term “Quiverful” referring to a family with a large number of children, one dating from 1869 and another from 1932. Neither is explicitly associated with the modern-day Quiverfull movement.

broad ideology as the term “Quiverfull,” though there are those who admit their adherence to the principles of Biblical Patriarchy who do not entirely eschew the use of birth control. Some of those people I still count as falling within the boundaries of the label “Quiverfull,” because of their strong adherence to the idea of children being a blessing from the Lord; some, I do not, because their lack of focus on the importance of children excludes them from the most cherished of Quiverfull ideals--that of Dominion through reproduction.

Locating the origins of the Quiverfull movement means, as mentioned above, looking for signs of its ideology before its label coalesced. Perhaps the most relevant moment of origin, if only one is to be found, is the establishment by Bill Gothard of the Institute in Basic Life Principles in 1961.<sup>4</sup> According to the IBLP’s website, Gothard’s organization, which was designed to teach young people “true” godly principles, began to grow in 1964 when “Bill’s alma mater, Wheaton College, invited him to design and teach a course based on his work with youth. The course was given the name ‘Basic Youth Conflicts’ ...In the years that followed, Basic Youth Conflicts was offered in several new locations...Soon seminar attendance averaged between 10,000 and 20,000 youth and adults” (IBLP website). By the 1970s and 1980s, Gothard’s seminars, especially his “Basic Seminar” and “Advanced Seminar,” were

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<sup>4</sup> It is not entirely clear what organizations, institutions, or thinkers influenced Bill Gothard. Many of his teachings are, for example, in line with those of the Chalcedon Foundation, founded by Christian theologian R.J. Rushdoony--Rushdoony, however, paid much more attention to specific theological concerns than did Gothard, and as a Calvinist, his teachings were not as strongly adopted by non-Calvinist Christians, such as Southern Baptists, who received Gothard’s teaching favorably in much larger numbers, and Gothard himself. Earlier thinkers, such as Charles Spurgeon, the famed English Baptist preacher, are cited as inspiration by families like the Duggars; it is not clear how early in the development of the Quiverfull movement he was considered an important figure, as part of the process of Quiverfull coalescence involved looking to the past to find thinking that reinforced its principles. Gothard also very clearly took advantage of the proliferation of self-help seminars that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s--one only needs watch the taped versions of the seminars, available for a subscription fee on [embassymedia.com](http://embassymedia.com), to observe that structure in action.

reaching families like the Duggars and spreading many of the values now associated with the Quiverfull movement (IBLP website). As the IBLP's website indicates, seminars were often advertised in churches and other Christian organizations (and, sometimes, in secular ones as well) by word of mouth, so the process of seminar expansion is not publically well-documented. Many Quiverfull adherents, however, such as the Duggars and the Bates, explain that the seminars were the event that placed them on the Quiverfull path.<sup>5</sup>

Gothard's organization and widespread reach helped to create the impetus for the founding of new organizations that taught or promoted Quiverfull principles and to strengthen churches and other institutions that had similar priorities. Indeed, many such organizations were founded in part because they followed Calvinist theology, which Gothard did not: Vision Forum Ministries, for example, had ties to R.J. Rushdoony through association and through Calvinist theology, but crafted an approach that was much more in keeping with the Christian lifestyle and self-help approach Gothard employed (Joyce 25-28). It appears, however, that many Quiverfull adherents came to embrace the institution's principles through contact with other adherents on an individual basis or through local churches or Christian ministries (Joyce 106-110).

Quiverfull publications began to multiply in the 1990s and early 2000s; around and shortly after the time the Hesses' book was published, many other books that are now Quiverfull standards also saw first exposure to the market--including Mary Pride's *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality*, which was written before the Hesses' book and helped establish a foundation for their message, but also Martha Peace's *The Excellent Wife*,

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Brian Smith's 2016 *Chicago Magazine* article "The Cult Next Door," as well as the Duggars' published books and numerous episodes of *19 Kids and Counting*.

Debi Pearl's *Created To Be His Help Meet*, Anna Sofia and Elizabeth Botkins' *So Much More: The Remarkable Influence of Visionary Daughters on the Kingdom of God*, and Sarah Mally's *Before You Meet Prince Charming: A Guide to Radiant Purity*, among many others. As is clear from the list, most Quiverfull books were focused on family and sexual life, were authored by women, and were marketed to audiences that included people who were not fully within the grasp of Quiverfull ideology. Other forms of textual production, such as sermons, devotional texts, homeschooling curriculum materials, and seminar messages with corresponding handouts, were directed at the already or soon-to-be initiated. Blogs also began to proliferate; the most common form of the Quiverfull blog was the wife-and-mother blog, in which Quiverfull women documented what it was like to be the woman of a household with a Quiverfull vision.<sup>6</sup> Quiverfull organizations, such as Vision Forum Ministries, Above Rubies Ministries, and the Advanced Training Institute, increased their visibility and programming (Joyce 47).<sup>7</sup> Quiverfull films, such as *The Monstrous Regiment of Women* and *Fireproof*, garnered enough attention to be shown at a Quiverfull film festival, sponsored by Vision Forum, called the San Antonio Independent Christian Film Festival (Joyce 99).

The Quiverfull movement had become a significant cultural force, particularly in conservative religious circles, by the 2000s, with possibly over a million adherents (Joyce ix). The movement saw its biggest public presence emerge in 2004, when TLC's first hour-long special profiling the Duggars, *14 Children and Pregnant Again*, aired; that presence expanded in September 2008, when the first episode of *17 Kids and Counting*, TLC's regular reality TV

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the blogs of Stacy McDonald, Jennie Chancey, and Nancy Campbell, cited throughout this dissertation and in its bibliography.

<sup>7</sup> Joyce documents the increase in influence of Above Rubies; one needs only watch *19 Kids and Counting* to witness the extensive influence of Vision Forum and ATI.

show featuring the Duggars aired (IMDb). *17 Kids and Counting* changed first into *18 Kids and Counting*, then into *19 Kids and Counting* as the Duggars had more children; *19 Kids and Counting* was on the air through mid-2015, when a scandal involving the family's oldest son, Josh, emerged, and the show was cancelled (IMDb). TLC quickly developed a spin-off, *Counting On*, which chronicles the lives of the older Duggar children; that show remains on the air as of November 2017 (IMDb).

Despite several recent scandals involving leading Quiverfull figures—the Josh Duggar scandal mentioned above, but also large scandals involving both Doug Phillips, the founder of Vision Forum Ministries, and Bill Gothard, the founder of the IBLP, as well as a set of smaller scandals—the Quiverfull movement has maintained a significant cultural presence in conservative Christian circles. In addition, the spate of scandals has caused its awareness in broader American cultural circles to increase, as is evidenced by the increased returns in Google searches that query “Quiverfull” and a number of recent articles in mainstream news outlets that detail the basic beliefs of the Quiverfull movement and call attention to some of its potential roles in American society.<sup>8</sup> The Quiverfull movement continues to play an important role in U.S. society in culture; this dissertation seeks to more thoroughly document its belief structure and marketing strategies and to begin to consider the question of just how that role is structured and implemented.

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<sup>8</sup> For examples of such articles, please see the Works Cited page at the end of this dissertation.

## **Section 2: Methodology:**

The methodology employed in this project is hybrid in nature. Throughout the dissertation, I use approaches based in both literary scholarship and ethnography to engage with Quiverfull texts. There are several reasons for this interdisciplinary approach. First, I am looking to establish the broad boundaries of Quiverfull community as expressed through its textual production. That process that involves careful study and “thick description” of the cultural production of Quiverfull adherents, with particular attention paid to the structure and function of the texts, written, visual, and otherwise that they produce and the way in which those texts represent Quiverfull community.<sup>9</sup> This project benefits from examination that takes cues from ethnography because it seeks to understand the large scale cultural structures and functions that inform the Quiverfull movement and to determine its parameters. What is more, the nature of Quiverfull proselytizing lends itself to examination through an ethnographic lens, because it seeks to put the culture of its community on display for the purpose of inviting people outside of the community to consider joining it. What it means to be a member of the larger Quiverfull community is, therefore, an essential question to understanding how Quiverfull texts operate as a distinct body when engaging with larger contexts. However, the project also benefits from literary scholarship, which offers the tools and language needed for understanding textual practices and the ways in which audiences of variety of kinds engage with them. Since my examination of Quiverfull culture is so broad, I do not rely on a distinct group of literary scholars; instead, I bring common threads and themes of literary scholarship to bear, often implicitly, on the texts that I study.

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the concept of thick description, see Clifford Geertz’s seminal 1973 article, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture.”



Because my training is primarily in literature and not in anthropology, I have chosen not to apply my partially ethnographic approach to in-person interactions; rather, I have chosen to apply it to the written and visual texts produced by Quiverfull adherents and disseminated to both the Quiverfull faithful and to larger public audiences. In doing so, I have also chosen to look not only at the external works produced by Quiverfull adherents as important texts, but also at the representations of individual people and families that exist within those works as texts in their own right. Literary theory has very clearly established the way that material objects function as texts, and human beings, too, are material objects.<sup>10</sup> While it is not possible for me to access the inner workings of the Quiverfull adherents under study—such access is afforded by neither literary nor ethnographic techniques—it is quite possible for me to engage with the representations that are publically presented and negotiated by the multiple parties that engage with them and to engage with those representations as texts.

Ultimately, my methodology is structured so as to provide as comprehensive an understanding of Quiverfull ideology as is possible given the constraints imposed by a lack of direct community participation, a participation that would not be possible under any conditions that were not authentically felt. The extent of that understanding is bolstered by an interdisciplinary method that draws on the strengths of multiple academic approaches. The chapter overviews below establish both the scope and the focus of the project.

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the work of Roland Barthes.

### **Section 3: Overview of Chapters:**

Chapter 1, *Quiverfull Modesty: Being and Appearing in the World*, examines the ways in which the Duggar family exemplifies the Quiverfull ideal of modesty in dress and appearance. By detailing both the principles behind the Duggar practice of modesty and the way in which those principles are implemented, I call attention to the fact that, rather than trying to diminish the extent to which they are noticed by dressing and behaving modestly, the Duggars actively seek to make themselves more noticeable to viewers, both within and without the context of their reality TV show. By making their modesty noticeable, the Duggars force viewers to actively engage with its meaning and, in doing so, use it as an introduction to Quiverfull values and principles. In Chapter 1, therefore, I demonstrate that modesty serves Quiverfull adherents as a way to model the way of being and appearing in the world that they deem appropriate, in the hopes that they will attract people not to themselves as individuals but to their lifestyle and set of religious convictions.

Chapter 2, *Quiverfull Authority: The Divine Chain of Jurisdictions*, examines the structure of those religious convictions and lifestyle constraints, demonstrating how Quiverfull ideology is deeply rooted in immutable spheres of authority that Quiverfull adherents believe derive from Biblical command. The chapter discusses the three central jurisdictions of delegated authority that the Quiverfull movement recognizes: the family, the church, and the state, explaining how the three work in concert while operating distinct realms and fulfilling distinct functions. Finally, the chapter examines the general way in which the members of the Quiverfull movement use their particular reading of the Bible as the basis for their understanding of the way in which human beings are to implement God's authority structures.

Chapter 3, *Quiverfull Ontology: Reading the Self as an Agent of Dominion*, examines Quiverfull understandings of what it means to be a human being in a corrupted, fallen world. To Quiverfull adherents, all human beings are incomplete, lacking the oneness with God that was lost in the originary moment of the fall from the Garden of Eden. Not all Quiverfull adherents are incomplete in the same way, however: the Quiverfull understanding of the Bible posits that men, women, and children are fallen in ways that made them distinct. Those distinctions result in specifically gendered way of being in the world that both reflect God's intention for human beings and work to restore his vision for and, ultimately, his dominion over, the world. Quiverfull ontology is therefore both past and future oriented: it looks to an idealized past in which human beings functioned as the perfect creation of God and to an idealized future in which God will restore human perfection by returning humans to his immediate presence. In believing that human being is centered on re-instantiating the past by working to build God's future, Quiverfull ontology comes to be about a pageant of reproduction, meant to ultimately result in a cessation of production that leaves human beings in the fixed state of God's unchanging eternity.

Chapter 4, *Quiverfull History: Establishing the Unbroken Path of Righteousness through Reading*, examines how the Quiverfull movement constructs its understanding of history, arguing that it adopts a practice that looks much more like Walter Benjamin's concept of revolutionary history (and therefore introducing some reservations about that concept) than it does a traditional approach to history as a chain of causation. To demonstrate the Quiverfull approach, I engage in a speculative approach that imagines how a complete version of a Quiverfull-directed history of Quiverfull ideology might differ from an academic history of the Quiverfull movement. My speculative approach offers the reader a broad outline of the

underlying principles and themes that direct those two approaches; to attempt to provide a detailed history using both models and to do them justice would be to take on a second dissertation project entirely. My current approach is, instead, meant to demonstrate the way that differing starting premises and priorities can produce significantly different interpretations and, in so doing, demonstrate how Quiverfull practices of reading history are in keeping with Quiverfull practices of reading other, more easily delimitable texts.

Chapter 5, *Quiverfull Community: Inviting the Many, Including the Few*, explores how the Quiverfull movement determines and maintains the boundaries of its own community. In this chapter, I argue that, despite the movement's insistence on the importance of hospitality and fellowship, those terms are truly only extended to people who are already considered part of the community. The extensive, sometimes aggressive outreach to those outside its bounds in which the Quiverfull movement participates is ultimately part of an imperialist project meant to conquer and reform; without undergoing the grueling process of Quiverfull initiation, participation in Quiverfull community is not possible. At the core of the Quiverfull movement, then, is a violence that seeks to remake the world outside its bounds, because those who are in that world are inevitably corrupt, and only by entering into the worldview espoused by the Quiverfull movement can one truly be saved.

Finally, my conclusion examines the ramifications of the Quiverfull project, arguing that the Quiverfull movement needs to be understood as an important force in contemporary American society, not only because it is more extensive and more influential than it appears on the surface, but because the violence at its core is a violence that is shared by many current American cultural narratives, even when the surface of those narratives clouds their

underlying structures much the same way that the Duggar family's reality TV franchise clouds the ideology that it seeks to promote.

## Chapter 1

### Quiverfull Modesty: Being and Appearing in the World

*“A given significative unit may be replaced by other more explicit signs of the same code, whereby its general meaning is revealed, while its contextual meaning is determined by its connection with other signs within the same sequence.” -Roman Jakobson<sup>11</sup>*

#### Introduction

*19 Kids and Counting* operated as a successful reality TV show for almost a decade, garnering a wide fan base and producing a popular spin-off show. The Quiverfull Duggar family, through this show and the spin-off show *Counting On*, has managed to infiltrate American popular awareness widely; the movement that structures their lives, however, has not.<sup>12</sup> This chapter will look at one of the specific behaviors in which the Duggars engage—the practice of dressing modestly—to examine how they make themselves stand out to audiences. Having established how modesty can function as a spectacle—a fact which is seemingly, though perhaps not actually, ironic—the chapter will turn to an examination of how modesty functions to create the possibility of several interpretations at once, some overlapping, some contradictory, but all pointing to the importance that context and worldview have in the establishment of interpretative practice. Ultimately, the chapter will

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<sup>11</sup> “Two Aspects of Language,” 74.

<sup>12</sup> Since a sex-related scandal surrounding the eldest Duggar child, Josh, occurred in 2015, awareness of the Quiverfull movement has been growing, and several articles have been published in the mainstream news media discussing its belief structure and its social impact. Despite that fact, the individuals I discuss my work with are only rarely familiar with the term Quiverfull, and that infrequent awareness is something that is reflected in the comments of the articles that detail Quiverfull beliefs (see, for example, the comment section of Kieryn Darkwater’s “I Was Trained for the Culture Wars in Home School, Awaiting Someone Like Mike Pence as a Messiah”).

uncover the intent behind the Duggars' modesty, will evaluate the extent to which that intent is successfully employed, and will set the stage for a more detailed discussion of the movement that structures the Duggars' lives.

It is a common supposition that the purpose of modesty is to erase notice. Though this is certainly sometimes how individuals engage with modesty as a practice, and although that is how it is often understood within interpretive contexts, this is not always the way it is framed by communities who promote modesty as a core principle for organizing dress, action, and demeanor.<sup>13</sup> Modesty is, in these contexts, rarely about erasing all notice; instead, it is about effacing the individual in service of the cause that he or she serves. Modesty is meant to actively promote a specific way of being in the world; it is supposed to be noticed, even when the person performing it is not, because it is explicitly designed to direct the viewer's attention to an alternative way of seeing and engaging with the world.

Modesty has certainly been deployed in such a way by the Quiverfull Duggar family. When the Duggars first made an appearance on the national scene, it was in large part because of the somewhat startling way that they dressed. An AP photographer snapped a photograph of the entire Duggar clan going to the polls in Arkansas, where wife Michelle and husband Jim Bob were about to vote in Jim Bob's ultimately unsuccessful race for U.S. Senate.<sup>14</sup> With the exception of Jim Bob, who was wearing a suit, the entire family was dressed in matching outfits: khakis and red polo shirts for the boys, and red jumper dresses

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<sup>13</sup> The latter is the case for the Quiverfull movement, which focuses on the role modesty plays in making its followers' Christian lifestyle manifest. See, for example, the 2014 book written by the four eldest Duggar daughters, *Growing Up Duggar: It's All About Relationships*.

<sup>14</sup> For more information about the process that occurred, see "Chapter 7: Your Relationship with Your Country," pp. 165-182, in *Growing Up Duggar*.

with huge white collars for the girls and Michelle.<sup>15</sup> The family's style of dress, as well as the size of their family and the way the family walked in an orderly line of pairs, stood out enough for the picture to grab a national headline, which eventually led to the TLC show that brought the Duggars to wider fame (*Growing Up Duggar* 194-195).

Before *19 Kids and Counting* became a regular feature on TLC, the network ran a set of five TV specials. Those specials focused on a blend of Michelle's childbirth experiences—the first special, which according to IMDb aired on September 6, 2004, was called *14 Children and Pregnant Again!*—and the daily challenges of managing such a large family. Though the primary draw that was used in those TV specials and in the subsequent reality TV show was family size, the show also presented aspects of the Duggars' lives that demonstrated their difference from mainstream life in ways that did more than appeal to logistics. One such aspect was the atypical clothing choices made by the family. On all of their early television specials, and in the first several seasons of their regular reality TV show, the Duggars consistently dressed in similar clothing: boys in khakis and polos or button-down shirts, girls in loose-fitting, old-fashioned, clearly homemade dresses. Their clothing clearly made them stand out in a crowd.

In the Duggars' initial public phase, their clothing very clearly proclaimed that the family was “not a typical family,” something that was explicitly expressed in the opening sequence of their show.<sup>16</sup> The extent to which the Duggar family expected this work to be

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<sup>15</sup> The photo can easily be seen in online articles about the Duggars; see, for example, Aaron Homer's May 11, 2017 *Inquisitr* article, “The Duggars [sic] Religion: What Brand of Christianity Requires Such Strict Rules?”

<sup>16</sup> In Season 1, Episode 1 (or S1E1, which will be the main style of documentation for specific episodes throughout the remainder of the dissertation, since this method of noting specific episodes from specific seasons is both convenient and clear) of *17 Kids and Counting*, for example, the show includes the following information, after all members of the family are introduced by name: “We are not a



impactful on their television audience is unclear; Jim Bob and Michelle repeatedly claim surprise that they attracted the notice that they did. Regardless, they capitalized heavily on that notice: early on in their TV franchise, the Duggars went out of their way to make sure that the people watching their show were aware of their alternative value system, explaining explicitly through both their show's introduction and through interview opportunities within the show's content that they were different not just because of their family size, but because of their conservative values and Christian faith, their abstention from viewing mainstream media, and their homeschooling practices.<sup>17</sup> At this phase in their public engagement, the Duggars aggressively asserted the fact that they stood out, both through the clothing choices they made and through the way they narrated those choices.

In some cases, the Duggars provided explicitly stated explanations of their modesty-related principles. Those were most extensively elaborated upon in their books and will be discussed below.<sup>18</sup> Viewers of their reality TV show and specials did, however, receive some context about how modesty works for the Duggar family in the course of watching. That

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typical family. And it's not just because of our enormous size. We have very conservative values. Our children watch very little television, and we closely monitor their access to the internet, among other things. As for school, that happens around the dining room table. To make ends meet, we own several commercial properties that we rent out. Even though we're nine times the size of an average family, we somehow make it all work." This information is narrated by Michelle, Jim Bob, and several of their (unnamed) children.

<sup>17</sup> See the opening sequence of the show in S1E1; see also S3E17 and S8E10 for episodes in which the Duggar family answers viewers' questions and discusses their family values and practices.

<sup>18</sup> In both earlier and more recent explanations aimed at the public, the Duggars have been careful to keep their explanations of their modesty practices straightforward and relatively simple. For example, while they have made it clear that modesty is a value that ties into their particular Christian faith, they have not offered extensive religious explanations to their viewers. Such explanations are certainly offered within contexts that are clearly Quiverfull, but rarely by the Duggars, who are asked to speak publicly on experiences that not all Quiverfull families directly share.

context tended to be delivered in short bursts, often through the younger members of the Duggar family.

A particularly illustrative example occurs in S2E2 of the Duggars' reality TV show, in which most of the Duggar siblings gather in their living room to watch their parents appear on *The View*.<sup>19</sup> In this segment, viewers are first presented with the "atypical" structure of the Duggar family's lives when they are shown John-David, the second eldest son and third Duggar child, taking a small TV out of a closet. His younger sister, Joy-Anna, the 5th daughter and 9th child in the lineup, explains that the family almost never watches TV. As viewers continue to watch, another sibling, Josiah, the 4th son and 8th child in the lineup, explains that the family does not have cable or any other broadcast television service. At this point, the camera shows John-David propping the TV up on a chair.<sup>20</sup>

It is at this point that the issue of modesty comes into play. Shortly after John-David finishes setting up the television, Joy-Anna reaches out and covers the body of a woman who is being displayed on screen. The producer asks the Duggars' grandmother, who is watching them in their parents' absence, what she is doing, and she explains that "she's covering up the immodest dress...she's been trying to do that for the boys." Joy-Anna then chimes in, "because they have low cuts." In a subsequent interview session, the producer asks Joy-Anna directly about her actions, and she explains her reason as "because it was defrauding." A pop-up box then appears on screen, which reads "**Duggar Dictionary**: de-fraud-ing: stirring up

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<sup>19</sup> As noted previously, S2E3 stands for Season 2, Episode 3. This will be the designation used to indicate specific episodes from the show throughout the rest of this dissertation.

<sup>20</sup> Altogether, the Duggars have 19 children; in order from eldest to youngest, these are Josh, Jana, John-David, Jill, Jessa, Jinger, Joseph, Josiah, Joy-Anna (Joy), Jeremiah, Jedidiah, Jason, James, Justin, Jackson, Johannah, Jennifer, Jordyn, and Josie.

sensual desires that cannot be righteously fulfilled.”<sup>21</sup> Shortly thereafter, the show switches to an interview sequence with Michelle Duggar, in which she explains, “in our home, modesty was an important issue and we really tried to encourage them to be modest, to stay covered, and when you use the restroom you always go in, shut the door, and lock the door so nobody walks in on you.”<sup>22</sup> Immediately following this clip, viewers are shown a casual interview with oldest daughter and second child, Jana, which occurred around time Joy-Anna was covering the TV; Jana explains that some of her younger siblings take the family’s modesty standards “to the extreme,” even covering up a woman if she is wearing a sleeveless top. There is another short clip from Joy-Anna, explaining that defrauding is bad, and then Michelle is back on camera: “especially for the older boys, as they’re growing into manhood, they need to learn self-control, and I think our eyes, especially for men, their eyes are the door to their heart, and if they can’t control their eyes, they’re going to struggle with other things.” The focus then shifts back to Jana, who is asked what the family does when they encounter a woman in public whom they believe is not attired in a modest way. She responds, “if we’re walking past a girl who is immodestly dressed, they’ll call out “Nike,” and all the boys will immediately put their heads down and just walk past, and then we’ll say all done...it’s our

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<sup>21</sup>The bolded title reflects the format used on the show. The Duggar family’s use of the word “defrauding” can be traced primarily back to the King James Version of the Bible’s translation of 1 Corinthians 7:4-5, which reads “the wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud you not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer, and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.” Their understanding of the husband and wife bodily belonging to each other will be discussed in the following chapter on the Quiverfull movement and authority.

<sup>22</sup> Michelle’s comments emphasize the fact that modesty is not only about physical appearance and dress but also about behavior.

code word.”<sup>23</sup> The show then turns away from the issue of modesty and back to the family watching their parents’ talk show appearance.

A viewer watching this clip without any background information on the Duggars or their belief system would be fairly hard pressed to fully understand their position on modesty. They would be able to gather that the family disapproved of revealing clothing, especially in women, and they would learn that their concern was at least partially based on concern about their older sons being exposed to sexual temptation. They might take note of the fact that the family’s definition of what is sexually tempting is quite stringent, and they would very likely find the description of the Duggars’ method for dealing with encounters with women who are, in their view, immodestly dressed to be outside mainstream, or “normal,” behavior. Indeed, the last piece of information included might serve to emphasize the way in which the Duggars often present as a spectacle.

This strategy of presenting limited information—one in which both the show’s producers and its subjects are involved—though their motivations are likely different—works to pique viewer interest by leaving the “story” of the Duggars incomplete: they remain different in the eyes of mainstream viewers, and that difference remains something that needs to be figured out. This, in turn, keeps the audience interested in the show, which allows TLC to continue to generate revenue from the Duggars and the Duggars to continue to share

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<sup>23</sup> The code word—Nike—that the Duggars use is Greek and translates to “victory” (see, for example, the entry on “Nike” in the Oxford English Dictionary). This word is a reference to the Duggar’s understanding of the relationship between followers of God and sin—Quiverfull adherents often discuss how to achieve “victory” over temptation. This way of relating to temptation is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

bits and pieces of their worldview with their audience.<sup>24</sup> The Duggars are able to successfully convey that they are, indeed, “not your typical family.”

The Duggars complicate what it means to be “not your typical family” in their book, *The Duggars: 20 and Counting!: Raising One of America’s Largest Families--How They Do It*, which was Michelle and Jim Bob Duggar’s first major publication. In the book, the Duggars include pages devoted to answering questions that have been sent to them by viewers of their reality TV show. One of those questions is posed in the following way: “seeing how you all dress so much alike, I’m wondering how the children in your family are allowed to express their individuality.” Jessa Duggar, sixteen at the time, provides the family’s answer:

We always laugh when a question like that comes in! As one of my sisters said, “mom, when we go out to an event somewhere, we often see groups of teenagers who are all dressed alike—sometimes they're all in black, or they're all wearing jeans, or they're all wearing the same kind of T-shirt. Sometimes they all have nose rings and tattoos!” We're just like them; all of us Duggars wear similar kinds of clothes. But instead of being influenced by peer pressure, we're guided by our family's standards of modesty and what we read in the Bible. (103)

At first read, Jessa Duggar’s response might seem somewhat trite and naive, but in fact, she is providing an answer that is steeped in public relationship knowledge, her seeming naivety a veil covering a well-rehearsed underlying message. The Duggars’ following is very much

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<sup>24</sup> It is, of course, also true that the Duggars gain substantial revenue from each episode of the show that airs. This dissertation is not interested in ferreting out the extent to which the Duggars are sincere about their convictions or in determining a formula that could explain their “true” motivations for performing in a reality TV show that features their daily lives. It is, however, interested in the story that they are telling about themselves and how that story is constructed.

built on the fascination that their viewership feels with a family that is both alike and different from them, and Jessa capitalizes on that fascination.<sup>25</sup> She draws clear parallels: she reminds the reader that she and her sisters are teenagers, and that as teenagers they pay attention to the dress of their peers; she also uses a cliché likely to stick in the minds of her readers—“we’re just like them.” Nodding to her generally right-of-center fan base, she embeds critiques of contemporary teenage dress. Her mention of teenagers being “all in black” evokes images of young adults dressing to match “goth” style; she adds what for that audience might well be just the right touch of snarkiness when she notes “sometimes they all have nose rings and tattoos.” Really, she suggests to her audience by implication, can you imagine the crazy lengths that people will go to in order to deceive themselves that they’re not being part of the herd? In this moment, Jessa identifies herself as someone who participates in mainstream culture to an extent that allows her to analyze it, asserts a particular, and therefore arguable, definition of who falls into the mainstream and who does not, and indicates that she is a person who rejects mainstream values and opts for modest ones instead. She makes the case—without ever explicitly stating that case—that she and her family are much like mainstream families, but with an intriguing, morally superior twist.

In this answer, Jessa Duggar also addresses the issue of the spectacle of modesty, though again, her method of addressing this question is largely implicit. It is not, she argues, dressing similarly that makes her family stand out; it is, instead, the particular manner in

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, comments on the various posts on *The Original Duggar Family Fan Blog*, a blog that is purportedly by Duggar family friends. This fascination with the Duggars is not necessarily true of viewers who watch the show with the explicit intention of critiquing the Duggar family and their worldview/way of life; it is, however, usually the case among hardcore fans of the show, as is evidenced by the many comments on the above mentioned blog.

which they dress. They have bucked worldly trends for Biblical values, and it is Biblical values that stand out in the modern world. Their modesty stands out as a moral example and as an indictment of worldly values at the same time that it serves its function in shifting attention away from the particular bodies the Duggars inhabit, functioning to make the moral aspect of their modest clothing that much more effective.

As Jessa articulates the fact that her family stands out together, she also points to a core Quiverfull value: the fact that it isn't being part of a herd that's a problem. In fact, being part of a large group of people acting with a similar purpose is highly desirable. The important criteria is the herd to which you belong. This is not an idea that the Duggars often address directly, at least not within the confines of the secular venue provided them by their TLC show and its related book deals. They are consistent about letting their viewers know that they are not articulating their choice as universal; in *20 Kids and Counting*, they offer the following statement in response to a question they received via email about why their daughters always wear long dresses: "First, we want to stress that this is our family's practice. We don't put our conditions on other people or tell others what they should wear. Our standards of modesty are based on personal prayer and Bible study" (102). The Duggars make their decision for themselves, based on their engagement with their religious views.

At first glance, this might not seem particularly striking, but a closer look at the above quote highlights the centrality of the reference to a practice engaged in by the entire family. It is clear to even the casual viewer of *19 Kids and Counting* that family is a key organizing principle of Duggar daily life. What is not necessarily apparent, however, is the depth of importance attributed to that family unit. Within the Quiverfull context, the family, rather

than the individual, is the central unit of social organization.<sup>26</sup> Just as membership in the body of Christ is instrumental for salvation, so membership in the family is necessary to remain godly and to follow God's plan for humanity. Being individually convicted of belief is important, but that belief always joins a believer to the larger Christian community.<sup>27</sup> For Quiverfull adherents, the core of that community is the nuclear family. Being individually convicted of beliefs that match the family's is therefore essential: without obeying the convictions that the family shares, the member risks being cast out of the family, and within Quiverfull circles, being cast out of the earthly family signifies, almost certainly, being cast out of the heavenly one because it indicates rebellion against the authority structures that God has put into place to govern human affairs.<sup>28</sup>

For the Duggars and other Quiverfull families, modesty is therefore a value that can attain clear meaning only in response to the demands of the community. The overarching principles of modesty are agreed upon by Quiverfull leaders; the specifics are adjudicated within a family setting over which the father, though he may be open to suggestion and "wise

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<sup>26</sup> For example, Anna Sofia and Elizabeth Botkin argue in their book *So Much More: The Remarkable Influence of Visionary Daughters on the Kingdom of God*, "When God created man, He...created three separate institutions: the Family, the Church, and the State (the civil government)...The family was for bearing, nurturing, and bringing up the future generations in the admonition of the Lord. The family is the heart of society; the condition of the family will determine the condition of civilization" (172). The ramifications of a worldview that is structured around the family will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

<sup>27</sup> The issue of being convicted of belief—specifically, the importance of the juridical term "convicted"—will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

<sup>28</sup> This structure becomes more complicated in a situation in which a single member of the family is a Quiverfull adherent. In such cases, Quiverfull adherents are expected to obey the authority structure of the family in cases in which that authority structure does not actively encourage them to go against their beliefs.



appeal,” ultimately reigns supreme.<sup>29</sup> Once the father has made a decision, the rest of the family must strive to obey his dictates, even if those dictates are potentially flawed.<sup>30</sup> Obedience to authority—an authority determined by one’s role in a hierarchy that matches the heavenly hierarchy—is one of the principles that Quiverfull modesty is based on and, when read carefully, begins to make legible.<sup>31</sup>

Modesty’s ability to display Quiverfull principles, both explicitly and implicitly, is one of the main functions it serves; it is certainly the function most relevant to the Duggars’ reality TV show franchise. The Duggars clearly indicate that their motivation for pursuing the show is that it allows them to share their faith with viewers, both as an encouragement to believers and as an outreach to non-believers.<sup>32</sup> Modesty, with the associated benefits the Duggars believe it brings, is a way of modeling the Quiverfull lifestyle subtly and consistently: the commitment to modest dress that the Duggars demonstrate reinforces their investment in their belief system and allows them to share that investment with their viewers without directly discussing that system. The Duggars do not shy away from articulating their faith—in

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Bill Gothard’s “Basic Seminar, Session 5: How to Make a Wise Appeal,” which details how those in subordinate roles, such as wives and children, are to approach disagreements with those in superior roles, such as husbands and fathers.

<sup>30</sup> For more details on this principle, see Debi Pearl’s *Created To Be His Help Meet*, p. 258.

<sup>31</sup> The authority structure of the family is examined in detail in the subsequent chapter on authority and the Quiverfull movement. It should be noted, however, that this is one of the reasons that the Duggars do not explicitly encourage their audience to dress as they do. To do so might be to challenge the authority of another family’s father, something that Quiverfull adherents avoid doing whenever possible.

<sup>32</sup> Critics are quick to point out that finances are an obvious motivation that the Duggars do not discuss. While ministry and money might seem to be at odds to some viewers, to the Duggars they are not: the financial benefits associated by the show are both signs of God’s blessing and materials with which to further their ministry. Indeed, the fact that the show has been as successful as it has been despite a number of highly publicized controversies is likely read by the Duggars as a sign of God’s ongoing favoring of the family. See, for example, Bill Gothard’s “Advanced Seminar, Session 05: Financial Freedom.”

fact, they have often mentioned that the ability to openly discuss their religious beliefs was one of the conditions they insisted on before agreeing to the reality TV specials and shows on which they have appeared—but the show does not consist solely of such articulations.<sup>33</sup> Behaviors such as modest dress allow the Duggars to broadcast their belief system regardless of whether they are explicitly discussing it in any given moment.

Despite specifically wanting their mode of dress to serve as a noticeable indication of their religious principles, and despite the expansion of possible viewers that occurred once their reality TV show became regular, the Duggars have not maintained their counterculture style of dress at the same level of noticeability in recent years. Once their TV series, first called *17 Kids and Counting* and ultimately called *19 Kids and Counting*, was well underway, the family began to slowly change their style of dress.<sup>34</sup> In the first several seasons of the show, they continued to dress notably conservatively, slowly shedding the big collars and (for the most part) matching outfits that had characterized their earliest public dress, but still wearing clothing that clearly reflected stringent modesty standards and that caused them to be appear significantly outdated in their fashion choices. By the final seasons, however, family dress had changed significantly.<sup>35</sup> The boys still eschewed wearing shorts and the girls still wore skirts that covered their knees, but the specific ensembles of dress they put together both reflected

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<sup>33</sup> For more details on the assertion, please see the Duggars' published books, including *A Love That Multiplies* and *Growing Up Duggar*.

<sup>34</sup> Throughout the rest of this dissertation, the show will be referred to as *19 Kids and Counting*, as that is the name it had for the majority of seasons and because that is how it is best known to the American public.

<sup>35</sup> *19 Kids and Counting* had a total run of 15 seasons, in addition to five TV specials whose popularity caused the creation of the regular reality TV show and several additional specials that aired during the period when *19 Kids and Counting* was on the air. Those seasons aired from 2008 to 2015 (IMDb, "17 Kids and Counting."). Since *19 Kids and Counting* went off the air, it has been replaced by *Counting On*, which primarily features the adult children of Michelle and Jim Bob Duggar and their families, and as of October 2017 is in its sixth season.

individual style preferences and projected a much more modern look. Fifteen years ago, you couldn't miss a Duggar passing you on the street; today, if you'd never heard of the Duggars, you might not know from looking at one of the members of the family that he or she was wearing clothing meant to set them off from the mainstream.<sup>36</sup>

Despite this change in approach, the Duggars did not change their assertion that modesty was an important value; they did, however, change the way in which they framed their family's modesty practice. As the Duggars began to dress in clothing that was available in mainstream clothing shops—again, keeping to certain modesty principles such as no pants for Duggar girls or women, no revealing necklines for women, no revealed shoulders or knees for either women or men—they began to explicitly assert differences in style preferences.<sup>37</sup> In earlier seasons of the show, all same-sex clothing was stored in a common closet, without separate sections for each child. By the time *Counting On* began to air, each older Duggar daughter referred to particular articles of clothing as belonging specifically to her.<sup>38</sup> None of the daughters broke her commitment to the family's modesty principles—individual preferences did not extend to breaking with the family's authority structure—but all began to differentiate themselves from their sisters in their manner of dress. A certain amount of individuality that had previously been effaced by what was practically a family uniform was

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<sup>36</sup> The only case in which this might not be true is witnessing the family all together: the patterns in their mode of dress (women, for example, all wearing skirts) tend to become more noticeable in large numbers.

<sup>37</sup> For example, in S2E6 of *Counting On*, the five oldest Duggar sisters and sister-in-law Anna discuss style differences among the women, noting that Anna and Jinger are far more likely to wear heels than the others and that Joy has a more casual, "comfy" style that involves a desire to avoid wearing dresses.

<sup>38</sup> In an explanatory video posted on YouTube on 10/22/13 by *TLC*, Jessa and Jinger Duggar explain that the family has two main clothing closets where all of the children's clothing is stored; despite the common closet arrangement, Duggar daughters claiming individual ownership over items of clothing can be observed in S4E5 of *Counting On*.

now being demonstrated, though that individuality still fell clearly within family-wide standards.

Though viewers of *19 Kids and Counting* and *Counting On* could not know it simply from watching the shows, this change in Duggar approach to both modesty and individuality reflects a larger change in Quiverfull culture. In the early 2000s, most Quiverfull families wore clothing that was very similar to the clothing that the Duggars wore: in addition to the early photographs and TV specials that capture the Duggars' appearance, older photographs of the Bates family, the Botkin family, and other prominent Quiverfull families demonstrate this trend clearly. At about the same time that the Duggar clothing shift began, however, a clear change in interpretations of what it means to be modest occurred among Quiverfull adherents, as all families shifted from a model of wearing clothing that reflected a distinctly Quiverfull style to one of wearing a more diverse set of clothing that often appeared to be sourced from mainstream clothing brands and stores.<sup>39</sup>

It is not entirely clear why this shift took place; a cynical observer might suggest that it was done to increase ratings by making the family more aesthetically pleasing to viewers. There is likely some truth to that reading, but that reading is not necessarily incompatible with religiously based values. After all, the Duggars maintain that they consider their show a ministry opportunity through which they can share their faith—if they believed that changing their style of dress without undercutting the underlying principle would help them to bring

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<sup>39</sup> This is seen on both *19 Kids and Counting* and *Counting On* in a variety of contexts. When Michelle shops for a dress to wear for her wedding vow renewal, for example, she goes to a famous bridal boutique in New York City (*19 Kids and Counting*, S3E14). When Jessa shops for bridesmaids' dresses, she does so online; though the retailer is not specified, it is clear that it is a mainstream retailer by the inventory it provides and the way the family discusses needing to alter any dress they purchase so that their modesty standards are met (*19 Kids and Counting*, S15E1). When Jessa and Jill help joy find an outfit for a date with Austin, they shop at a mainstream retail boutique (*Counting On*, S5E2).

more people under their umbrella, they might well decide to change their style. It might even be possible that the example of the Duggars, and the possibilities that their visibility opened up for Quiverfull families and organizations, spread throughout the rest of their culture, causing the Quiverfull movement to re-evaluate its rather hardline view of modesty.

This shift in Quiverfull modesty culture may also be related to concerns about maintaining the authority structure of the family. Quiverfull adherents expect that all families involved in the movement will abide by certain standards, of which modesty is one. However, as noted above, significant authority is given to individual families, largely through the agency of the father. Families participate in the Quiverfull movement because their fathers have identified its principles to accord with his own; within the context of shared principles, however, families are given significant leeway in the manner in which they apply principles to their daily lives. Perhaps the Quiverfull “uniform” was seen as removing too much autonomy from the father, and community-wide expectations were relaxed to return the primacy of his authority.<sup>40</sup> If this is the case, it is likely that concerns about the authority of families extended to a broader range of issues than modesty alone.

Though the Quiverfull hierarchy structure has recently allowed for some variance in the practice of modesty within Quiverfull contexts, that allowance does not remove the

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<sup>40</sup> There is no available documentation on what caused this shift to occur within Quiverfull families, so the above paragraph is only speculation. However, when contemporary Quiverfull conferences or gatherings are visually documented, a variety of dress styles are seen: some families have made the shift to more modern styles of clothing, while others clearly have not. This suggests a loosening of the structure at the community level and a shift to decisions about clothing being made primarily at the family level. It is also possible that returning some authority over how the principles of modesty were established within families to fathers was a strategic decision. After all, it better reflects the idealized authority structure that Quiverfull families promote. And as mentioned above, as long as those clothing choices lived up to the principle of modesty, Quiverfull adherents may well have calculated that they were likely to have a more positive identificatory effect on viewers to whom other aspects of Quiverfull life already appealed.

anxiety around modesty (or about the application of other key Quiverfull principles) that exists within those contexts. For example, in a lecture entitled “The High Road to Failure,” given at an annual Quiverfull conference in 2014, Jenny Speed, a frequent speaker at Quiverfull events and a co-partner with her husband in a Christian ministry aimed at marriage and family vitality, explains the relationship her family has developed regarding the issue of modesty. She explains that her family is currently a “pants-wearing family,” in part because of the way that they had attempted to institute skirt-only dress codes among their girl children.<sup>41</sup> Noting that it had been important to her to be recognized as having a perfect family by her Quiverfull peers, Speed recounts deciding that they needed to look as much as possible as those families who had strong reputations at the numerous yearly conferences held by ATI and other well-respected Quiverfull organizations. Without discussing this decision with her children, she returned home and immediately threw out all of the pants that her girls owned, forcing them to suddenly begin wearing only skirts. In her lecture, Speed explains that this approach caused her kid’s hearts to be “shut down,” which in turn caused them to resent their parents.<sup>42</sup> Much later, the family switched back to including pants as an option for females, after undergoing an experience in which, they believe, God demonstrated to them the importance of prioritizing him as a goal, rather than themselves and their appearance.

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<sup>41</sup> The ministry organization that the Speeds run is called “Whatever It Takes (WIT) Ministries.” See <https://witministries.com/> for more details.

<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Speed notes in her speech that her oldest child is no longer following the Christian principles taught to her by her Quiverfull parents, something considered to be a clear indictment of family effectiveness in Quiverfull circles.

In recounting her story to her audience, a group of Quiverfull women (at conferences sponsored by the IBLP/ATI, women are not typically seen addressing men without their husbands by their sides), Jenny Speed demonstrates a significant level of anxiety, despite her professed desire to follow the convictions that God had put in her (and her husband's) heart.<sup>43</sup> She notes that she is aware that many families disagree with her family's decision, and she indirectly brings in the Duggars as support. She notes that she was discussing the issue with Anna Duggar, the wife of the eldest Duggar child, Josh, who explained to her, "Mrs. Speed, it's our preference." It is clear that the line between family autonomy and broader submission to a core set of beliefs is a line under constant negotiation—Anna Duggar was not willing to offer a direct critique to Jenny Speed, even though her own family's interpretation of modesty is more stringent than the Speeds—and that some families within Quiverfull circles are considered to be more influential than others, since in Jenny Speed's anecdote, the approval of a Duggar clearly held significant weight.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to revealing ongoing tension around the parameters of modesty, Jenny Speed's speech on the topic is an important reminder that there isn't a singular audience at which Quiverfull modesty standards are aimed. As discussed above, Quiverfull adherents often dress and behave in ways that make them stand out in mainstream contexts, making them recognizable as participants in alternative communities and systems of valuation. That

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<sup>43</sup> This information comes from a review of the online lectures that have been uploaded on the IBLP's online media site, Embassy Media.

<sup>44</sup> Speed's comments hint at a hierarchy of families that exist within the Quiverfull movement, with some families' decisions, actions, and words being accorded more weight than others'. This is backed up by the interaction filmed between Jim Bob and a young girl from another family at a Big Sandy Family Conference. In the interaction, captured on S2E12, the girl asks Jim Bob to sign her hairspray bottle. While Jim Bob's television celebrity is obviously a factor in this autograph request, the request itself suggests that family celebrity carries some weight within Quiverfull circles.

very act of making them stand out enables them to be identified by, and therefore to exert influence on, the community around them. However, modesty also serves a way to engage directly with the communities in which one participates: in the case of the Speeds and the Duggars, modesty not only provides a model for non-Quiverfull families but also serves as a way of both signifying belonging in and exerting influence on the Quiverfull community itself.

Demonstrating modesty is simultaneously beneficial and dangerous within the Quiverfull community. Modesty is a way of asserting one's belonging within the community: modest dress and comportment demonstrate to other Quiverfull adherents one's commitment to a lifestyle that endorses the importance of the social role (wife, mother, father, son, etc.) that one fills over the importance of one's individual desires.<sup>45</sup> Relatedly, demonstrations of modesty indicate that the person engaged in them has adopted similar ideas of purity as have other Quiverfull adherents; purity, in its turn, indicates prioritizing a set of community-based relationship guidelines over one's own selfish desires.<sup>46</sup> Modesty therefore signals acceptance of group parameters, which establishes belonging in said group. Modesty also serves as a way to minister to other Quiverfull members; if a young woman is known to be modest, for example, she is looked up to as a model by younger girls seeking to emulate her and by men, such as her brothers, who are looking for a spouse with similar values. Successfully modeling modesty allows an individual to encourage other individuals to

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<sup>45</sup> The extent to which Quiverfull families' privilege set social roles for their members will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

<sup>46</sup> For example, as discussed in the following chapter, Quiverfull adherents believe that God has intended each of them for a particular spouse, and they are exhorted to resist any kind of sexual engagement, no matter how limited, with a person other than that intended spouse.



fill the same social roles and expectations, and it allows the individual to firmly establish that they are operating within the boundaries considered proper for them.<sup>47</sup>

Such an emphasis on modeling modesty, however, means that Quiverfull adherents are under constant scrutiny. A misinterpretation—on one’s own part, on the part of the authority figures to which one owes obedience, or even on the part of the community itself—can result in one’s commitment to that community, or even one’s rightful membership in it, being questioned.<sup>48</sup> This is the anxiety that Jenny Speed evidences, and simultaneously warns against, in her 2014 speech; this is a situation which regularly threatens the Duggars, as they broadcast much of their private and public activities for members of their community to observe.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> It is important to read the modestly-related choices made by the Duggars—many of them clothing choices, but also choices related in other ways to appearance and proper behavior—as textual, as a way of inscribing meaning on a given body in such a way that it can be read, even as it is simultaneously effaced. Each clothing choice can be replaced with “more explicit signs of the same code, whereby its general meaning is revealed;” in other words, the individual items of clothing are always in some way substituted for by the words used to describe them (Jakobson 74). This effect is cumulative: when a consistent clothing choice, such as a skirt always covering the wearer’s knees, is made, that choice takes on a copulative function. In such a case, the clothing itself *is* modest, and modesty becomes in part defined by the particular clothing choice. This joining of two signifiers, both textual although one is visual and one is verbal, is always partially determined by contextual meaning. Put somewhat differently, the joining itself is subject to the conditions in which it occurs. The choosing of a skirt to signify one’s positioning as modest can create multiple meanings, depending on the circumstances and systems within which that choice is made. The choice itself engages metaphoric substitution that is also metonymic because it is proximity-based: the covering of the body becomes the primary way of understanding the body, which means that individual bodies come to be read more for their similarity than for their difference.

<sup>48</sup> Within Quiverfull circles, misinterpretations are particularly hard to identify, as the way in which principles are demonstrated inevitably varies based on the authority figure doing the interpretation. Authority figures must carefully balance their own understandings with those of their communities and must therefore constantly negotiate the boundaries of their authority.

<sup>49</sup> The extent to which the Duggars’ actions on their reality TV show can be considered “authentic” representations of their non-public actions will be discussed in a later chapter. Even if they are not acting “authentically,” however, they are always acting as public representatives of their community, which means the extent to which their visible actions reflect community standards is under constant monitoring.

This fraught combination of flexibility and rigidity that inheres in modesty—flexibility in that different families might dress and act differently than their peers, in some ways decentralizing traits that identify community involvement, rigidity in that those decisions are made in hierarchical, authoritarian contexts within each family—provides a context not likely to be easily recognized by the Duggars’ mainstream audience. Within it, choice is not something made on an individual level, with a number of possibly positive options presenting themselves and requiring judgment. In most cases, and especially when the person making the choice is not in a specifically defined position of authority, the choice being made is a choice between good and evil. The person choosing can decide to follow the path of righteousness and submit to the laws of the family, the church, and the Bible, or he can choose the path of sin—independence and disobedience.<sup>50</sup> The choice to follow righteousness, consistently made, is the strongest unit of agency that the individual has, because it aligns her with the family and community of believers or indicates her exclusion. Inclusion in or exclusion from the community of believers is a direct indication of the status of her salvation. When the Duggars say that their choice is one they have made for their family, they are using outward language implying non-judgment and personal liberty to cover over the fact that the choice they are making directly rejects the values of being non-judgmental and pursuing individual liberty.<sup>51</sup> Practicing modesty is a sign of visible sainthood, whereas refusing to practice it is a

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<sup>50</sup> This mindset explains the extent of the anxiety that can be observed among Quiverfull families attempting to live up to the principles to which they have committed themselves. Since the structure differentiates fulfilling a principle from the *way* in which one fulfills a principle, families and individuals deal with constant anxiety about whether their decisions about how to fulfill a principle are crossing over the blurry line of the principle itself. They must constantly ask themselves whether their decisions within the principle appropriately reflect and fulfill that principle.

<sup>51</sup> In fact, the Duggars and other Quiverfull families have a different standard of liberty, which they refer to as Christian Liberty—it will be discussed further in a subsequent chapter.

sign of visible sin, though the precise boundary between those states remains tenuous as best for Quiverfull practitioners.<sup>52</sup>

The process of practicing modesty is made difficult by the complex set of connotations that modesty carries with it. As a signifier, modesty has a variety of connotations, making its meaning heavily dependent on context, both external to the person observing it and internal to that person as well: it matters in what context modesty is referenced or deployed, and it matters what set of understandings its observer brings with him or her to the process of observing. Quiverfull adherents almost always share more context with each other on the question of modesty than they do with non-Quiverfull individuals and families, but their own contexts and knowledge still differs. What counts as “appropriate” or “non-revealing” can differ significantly even among like-minded individuals.

Modesty therefore provides a screen for those individuals and communities deploying it, because it contains within it specific meanings that cannot be recognized without a certain level of community context.<sup>53</sup> It thus signifies belonging, but it is never fully capable

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<sup>52</sup> Indeed, in giving up a rigid interpretation of what counts as modern dress, Quiverfull adherents have given up a certain extent of their surety regarding their status as visible saints. See Chapter 5, which focuses on community, for a more detailed discussion of this issue.

<sup>53</sup> It must be noted that each reader who engages with examples of modesty introduces new contextual material in the very act of reading them. As Jacques Lacan explains, “the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates meaning by deploying its dimensions in some sense before it” (419). Each time a reader interacts with a signifier, in this case modesty or any of the actions, behaviors, or modes of dress that stand in for it, that reader brings not only his or her own understandings and experiences of modesty to the act of reading (a function that we might consider to be of a metaphoric nature), but also the associations that are connected to modesty within that reader’s textual lexicon (a function that we might consider to be of a metonymic nature). Though those associations vary from one reader to the next, they are also collective associations in that they both locate the reader as having bonds of affinity with particular communities of knowledge and contribute to the level of accessibility with which other readers might access particular associations. This is the ground on which multiple legibilities are made to simultaneously register, but it is also the ground on which certain meanings become established. The more a viewer engages with the Duggar’s ideas and practices surrounding modesty, the more their context comes to inflect that viewer’s understanding of modesty as an overall concept.

of demonstrating exactly what that belonging indicates. This structure is, perhaps seemingly paradoxically, at least in part responsible for sustaining the intensity of in-group feeling, as it at once gives group members a common base of knowledge and stance vis-à-vis the world and forces them to actively question and articulate that shared understanding.<sup>54</sup>

The structure is also responsible for Quiverfull adherents' understanding of the way that modesty impacts people outside of their movement. The ultimate uncertainty of the meaning of modesty makes it a relatively sophisticated tool of ministry. Outside observers of Quiverfull modesty see only limited aspects of its functioning; the more one is drawn to learn about the functioning, the more one becomes familiar with underlying Quiverfull principles. Observers are gradually introduced to modesty and the meaning behind it, hooked at the outset enough to be curious, but not overwhelmed by being presented with the differences in Quiverfull worldview all at once. As Quiverfull adherents have shifted to a more subtle display of modesty, the process of induction into its meaning has become all the more subtle, and the ability to arrive at the certainty of a "complete" understanding of modesty has become less and less possible. Those drawn into the Quiverfull movement are thus in a state of questing for meaning no matter how deeply embedded they are within the group.

For the Quiverfull movement, then, modesty functions as spectacle, but not as spectacle that focuses on the individual engaged in the practice of modesty. Instead, is about calling attention to the specific role a person plays in their family, faith, and community. Modesty is about fitting in; it is designed to broadcast that the fitting in one should be doing

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<sup>54</sup>Put differently, this uncertainty causes people to fight more fiercely for certainty that they "rightfully" belong within the Quiverfull community. Such anxiety can be seen, for example, in the talk given by Jenny Speed referenced above.

is different than the fitting in that worldly culture demands. At the same time, modesty practices vary to an extent that is significant enough to render their meaning somewhat unclear, even within the fairly constrained environment of the Quiverfull movement, so that how and with whom one fits in is always possibly in a state of flux. That flexibility allows for modesty to be used as a subtle proselytization tool, broadcasting Quiverfull values in a way that maintains their openness and that lures the viewer in to learn more.

In the next chapter, I will explain the fundamental principles to which Quiverfull audiences are being slowly introduced and that structure the Quiverfull worldview, offering my own readers more context through which to understand that worldview. I will also begin to explore how Quiverfull adherents derive those principles through their own practices of reading and how they seek to export their reading practices to the people to whom they minister.

## Chapter 2

### Quiverfull Authority: The Divine Chain of Jurisdictions

*“All authority is derived from God and must answer to him, but he has delegated some authority to angels, some to government, some to the church, some to husbands, and some to wives. Angels have authority that prophets don’t have, and husbands have authority that governments don’t have. Likewise, governments have authority that neither angels nor husbands have. God has defined the jurisdiction of each authority” --Michael Pearl<sup>55</sup>*

The lives of Quiverfull adherents follow a carefully orchestrated model of authority. The Michael Pearl quote above provides a general understanding of the spheres of authority that Quiverfull followers recognize; in the pages below, I elaborate on those jurisdictions of delegated authority on which Quiverfull adherents focus most: the family, including both husbands and wives; the church; and the government. Though they all serve a different purpose, each fulfills a distinct function within the Quiverfull worldview. After discussing each jurisdiction in detail, I discuss the underlying principles that structure Quiverfull authority and the way that authority is communicated to audiences both within and without the Quiverfull worldview using a variety of media including reality TV.

#### Section 1: The Quiverfull Family

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<sup>55</sup> This quote is taken from Pearl’s section in Debi Pearl’s *Created To Be His Help Meet*, page 259.

For Quiverfull adherents, the family is the central unit of authority. As the Botkin sisters explain it in *So Much More*,

Many people believe that we have blown the importance of the family unit way out of proportion. However, it is impossible to over-emphasize [sic] the Biblical importance of a unit that is based on God's nature itself. The family is an intrinsic part of God's nature, because it is based on God's own being. He is Father and Son. Christ and His Church are the foundation for marriage. Believers are referred to as brothers and sisters in Christ. The greatest celebration of history will take place as the Eternal Groom is finally united with His bride (169).

This explanation offers a rationale for the primacy of—and ignore—Biblical ambiguity. The Botkins note that the family “is based on God's nature itself” and then make references to marriage relationships, parental relationships, and sibling relationships as all stemming from that nature. Not all of these relationships are considered equal within Quiverfull thought, however: it is marriage that the Quiverfull movement considers to be the central, organizing role of society, and to understand Quiverfull marriage, we need to understand what the Botkin sisters mean by “Christ and His Church are the foundation for marriage.” To that end, it is important to consider both the apostle Paul's writing in Ephesians 5 and the creation myth in Genesis 1-3, as those are two of the primary Biblical texts that structure this worldview.<sup>56</sup>

Once the marriage relationship is outlined, the remaining relationships fall into place.

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<sup>56</sup> There are other New Testament texts that address this relationship, such as I Corinthians 11:3, which reads “I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (NIV). This passage clearly demonstrates a hierarchy of authority that matches the one to which Quiverfull adherents ascribe; at the same time, it offers up an analogical complexity that Quiverfull readers tend to avoid, by putting Christ in the position of both the man (in relationship to the man) and the woman (in relationship to God). Quiverfull adherents tend to focus much more heavily on less ambiguous passages such as Ephesians 5.

In Ephesians 5, Paul writes the following: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.” (Ephesians 5: 22-24, KJV). Quiverfull adherents read Paul’s analogy to indicate that husband and wife together are not only a mirror image of the relationship that Christ has with the Church, but the closest thing to the realization of that relationship on earth. Through the Christian marriage relationship, husbands and wives model the salvation that Christ offers his Church to unbelievers, with the husband serving the role of Christ and the wife serving the role of the Church.<sup>57</sup> This is the reference the Botkins are making when they explain that “Christ and His Church are the foundation for marriage.”

It is Genesis 1-3 that offers an explanation for what the Botkin sisters mean when they assert that “the family is an intrinsic part of God’s nature, because it is based on God’s own being.” In the first account of creation in Genesis, the creation of humans is explained as follows: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27 NIV). For Quiverfull adherents, this verse is understood to indicate that God’s nature contains both male and female elements.<sup>58</sup> This is

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<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Jennie Chancey and Stacy McDonald’s *Passionate Housewives. Desperate for God*, in which the authors explain, “There is an element of mystery in the way God joins a man and a woman, and yet within this covenant God provides a vivid picture of Christ and His beloved Bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:23-33), and reveals to us volumes about the husband-wife relationship” (32).

<sup>58</sup> Consider, for example, the following explanation: “There is a beautiful purpose in our femininity, and once we start to see how our traits complete--not compete with--the traits of masculinity, we should rejoice to fill the position God has called us to: helpers with a mighty role to play in the Kingdom of God” (Chancey and McDonald 32). In this quote, the authors make a case for femininity as completing masculinity--masculinity is not sufficient alone, but needs femininity in order to be whole, as the image of God is whole. Quiverfull adherents rarely go as far as to argue that single men and single women do not reflect the image of God--ultimately, they believe that “the essential natures of both men and



not, however, an excuse to understand God as female, or to use gender-neutral pronouns for understanding God; quite the contrary is true. Quiverfull adherents read this verse against Genesis 2:20-23, in which God's creation of Eve from Adam's rib is elaborated. Eve's creation from Adam's rib is taken to mean that she is subordinate to Adam: she is a part of Adam that he needs, and a part that he can no longer fulfill by himself, because it has been taken from him. When a husband and wife marry, the husband's missing part is returned to him, and the missing part that is the woman is completed by finding the framework to which she belongs. Though all individual humans reflect God's image, it is only when man and woman are joined together in marriage that they reflect that image in its full glory, because it is only when they are joined together that Quiverfull adherents consider men and women to be whole. Furthermore, as the masculine part of the couple is considered to be the larger and more primary part, God's nature is held up as predominantly masculine.<sup>59</sup>

Quiverfull adherents draw on the explanation of marriage that Paul gives in a later section of Ephesians 5, in which he draws an explicit connection between his message and the creation story of Genesis:

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women are the same"--but they do hold the marriage relationship to be the norm, and the most common place in which God's vision for humanity is fulfilled (Peace 49). For example, Martha Peace explains that both men and women "were created in God's image, but each one was created to carry out a different role" and proceeds to explain this through the analogy of the Trinity, in which God maintains his role as the Father, the husband takes on the role of the Son, and the wife takes on the role of the Holy Spirit (49-50). In this analogy, each element of the Trinity is its own, distinct being and also inextricably linked to the others. Their wholeness is expressed through their relationship to each other.

<sup>59</sup> It is important to note that this understanding of God goes a long way in explaining why Quiverfull adherents place so much emphasis on God the Father, with only secondary emphasis on Jesus despite the fact that they consider Jesus the key to their salvation, and minor emphasis on the Holy Spirit. For Quiverfull adherents, the Trinity is set up on hierarchical terms, and those terms both structure how human relationships work and how humans relate to God.

So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

(Ephesians 5: 28-33, KJV)

In their acceptance of this analogical connection, Quiverfull adherents tend to eschew examination of the ways in which Christ's relationship to the Church differs from the husband's relationship to the wife in favor of seeing the marriage relationship as a perfect (if not for the fallen nature of humanity) emulation and fulfillment of the spiritual relationship between Christ and his followers.<sup>60</sup> In the marriage relationship, wives become a part of their husband's spiritual and physical being, inseparable from him until death.<sup>61</sup> It is only when they are in harmony with their husbands that the relationship between Christ and Church is being properly reflected.

The Quiverfull movement provides a significant amount of teaching to its young people on this issue, but nowhere is it more apparent than in the marriage vows and marriage

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<sup>60</sup> Indeed, because they prioritize similarity in the way that they understand this analogy, they often understand the difference between the husband-wife relationship and the Christ-Church relationship as attributable to humanity's fallen state and the sin that results (see, for example, Chapters 4 and 5 of Martha Peace's *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective*).

<sup>61</sup> It is no wonder, then, that right before he walks Joy-Anna down the aisle at her wedding, Jim Bob tells her that "this is the most important moment of your life." He is not only telling Joy that he is happy for her; he is commenting the fact that, according to his belief system, she is about to fulfill the primary purpose that God has intended for her life.

practices the Duggar family demonstrates on *19 Kids and Counting*. In Joy-Anna Duggar's 2017 wedding to Austin Forsyth, the words of the pastor and the wedding vows they exchanged were particularly instructive in understanding how Quiverfull adherents understand marriage to reflect and fulfill the relationship between Christ and the Church. At the beginning of the ceremony, the pastor explained several symbols involved in the wedding. Of Jim Bob giving away Joy, he explained that "though it's a sad time for the father, it is a joyous time. It pictures when God brought Adam his wife in the garden." Here, the audience—both in the church during the wedding and the viewing audience on TV—is reminded that the father performs many of the functions that God provides to his people for his daughter, including the ability to grant the right to marry to a potential husband. The father is a delegate of God's authority on earth, and the way that authority is applied to women reflects the Quiverfull belief that women are to be guarded, protected, and carefully kept where, and to whom, they belong. Of the white dress worn by the bride, Joy and Austin's pastor relayed that "the white dress is a picture of robes of righteousness, the purity of the church that one receives upon salvation." In this analogy, the bride is the church, and she receives her righteousness and purity from the saving act of marrying her husband.<sup>62</sup> Finally, of what the pastor calls "the taking of the name," the audience is told that it symbolizes "entering into a new family from an old family, being born again—the Bible uses that term." Joy enters into spiritual fulfillment and salvation

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<sup>62</sup> Similar language was used in Jinger Duggar's marriage to Jeremy Vuolo. Before Jim Bob was asked who gave Jinger to be married, Jeremy and Jinger's pastor, who is also Jeremy's father, asked both Jeremy and Jinger a set of questions about the extent to which they took the marriage covenant seriously; the questions were identical save one asked to Jeremy, which was, "Will you love her as Christ loved the Church, giving yourself for her?" (*Counting On* S4E6).

by marrying Austin. Before her wedding, she was in a state of spiritual waiting; now that she is married, she is spiritually awakened. Austin does not require a similar kind of rebirth.

The vows that Austin and Joy exchanged further demonstrate the Quiverfull understanding of marriage, reinforcing the way in which marriage is believed to reflect the relationship between Christ and the church and also hinting at the different responsibilities each marriage partner is consequently required to fulfill. In his vows to Joy, Austin said the following: “Joy, I love you, and I know that this love is from God. Because of this, I want to be your husband so that we might serve Jesus Christ together. Through all the uncertainties and trials of the present and the future, I promise to guide and protect you as Christ does his Church, as long as we both shall live.” Austin’s responsibilities to Joy involve love, leadership, and protection. Joy’s vows reflect largely different expectations: “Austin, I love you. Through the pressures of the present and uncertainties of the future, I promise my faithfulness to follow you through all of life’s journeys as you follow God, that together we may grow in the likeness of Jesus Christ and our home be a praise to him.” Joy’s responsibilities to Austin also involve love, but instead of leadership and protection she promises obedience and the keeping of the home. What is more, she makes it clear that she believes it is her responsibility to follow Austin’s interpretation of God’s will, the way that the church is responsible for following Christ so that they might please God.

Beliefs that see husband and wife together functioning as the reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church, with wives in a subordinate role to husbands who act as mediators between them and the divine, hold true for all Duggar-involved weddings. When each Duggar daughter has married, the wedding ceremony has begun with Jim Bob walking her down the aisle to meet her groom. Once at the altar, he is asked who gives the

bride to be married, and he consistently replies, “Her mother and I.”<sup>63</sup> All of the daughters wear traditional dresses, all take their new husband’s name, and all are introduced at the end of the ceremony as Mrs. [husband’s first and last name]. Though some of the symbols differ, all of the weddings have involved a symbolic representation—the lighting of a “unity candle,” the pouring of different colored sand into a single bottle—of the Quiverfull belief that, when they marry, a man and a woman “come together to fulfill one another and to make one another complete,” or, more starkly phrased by Derick Dillard, “before God, as married couple, we’re one person.”<sup>64</sup>

In the marriage ceremonies described above, the metaphor of embodiment that Paul offers in Ephesians 5 of both Christ and the Church together forming a single body and husband and wife doing the same becomes literalized. For the Quiverfull, marriage almost seems as if it functions as a kind of transubstantiation, for the wife if not for both marriage partners. Ultimately, however, marriage is better understood as a transference of authority than as an ontological shift: it is the movement of a woman from the guardianship of her father, who has held her in a protective state of waiting, to the rightful authority of her husband, with whom she will be able to fulfill her life’s purpose. This understanding of women’s place in the authority hierarchy has several implications for both Quiverfull conduct within marriage relationships and for Quiverfull understandings of the role of the daughter.

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<sup>63</sup> At first, it might seem like this is an egalitarian move on Jim Bob’s part; another, more contextually plausible reading is to understand it as an affirmation of the unity that Jim Bob and Michelle have in their marriage, a reflection of the principle that they are about to celebrate in the marriage of their child.

<sup>64</sup> Dillard speaks these words during an interview sequence during the episode of *19 Kids and Counting* in which his marriage to Jill is aired (S14E13). The previous quote in the same sentence is from the pastor who married Jill and Derick; he is not named in the episode.

The former will be discussed presently; the latter will be addressed in the subsequent section on parent-child relationships.

The first consequence for Quiverfull conduct within marriage relationship is that proper conduct begins well before a wedding. In the Quiverfull model, God has intended a certain man and a certain woman to enter a marriage relationship long before the intended couple meets each other. Because one is destined for a particular future spouse, future spouses are understood to belong to one another in advance of meeting. As Sarah Mally explains it to girls and young women in her book *Before You Meet Prince Charming: A Guide to Radiant Purity*, “Being reserved for one includes not only physical purity but emotional purity as well. This requires guarding our hearts, our minds, our thoughts, our words, our emotions, and our eyes. It means saving that close, intimate friendship for one man only...staying free from the intimate bonds that can form so easily, but are then painful to dissolve” (185). It is not just premarital sexual contact that is to be avoided: when a person forms too close a bond with a member of the other sex, they are “giving away pieces of their hearts,” which is cheating their future spouse from having access to the wholeness of their person.<sup>65</sup>

It is this model of the marriage relationship that undergirds the Quiverfull focus on the virtue of purity, something that is required of both men and women but is treated as especially important for women. The modesty practices discussed in the opening chapter

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<sup>65</sup>Sarah Mally explains this principle the following way: “A Proverbs 31 woman will do her husband good, not evil, **all** the days of her life (Prov. 31:12). One of the best ways that you can do good to your future husband today, even if you don’t know him yet, is by protecting your heart so that it will be completely his. Your heart is a priceless treasure that you are saving for one. How will your future husband feel if you have already give pieces of your heart to others...?” (185, emphasis in original).

introduced the concept of desires needing to be righteously fulfilled and offered the example of the Duggar girls shielding the Duggar boys from sexual temptation by letting them know when an immodestly clad woman was nearby, so that they could avoid looking at her and therefore being tempted into sexual sin. Such practices are ubiquitous, because they are part of a complex cultural apparatus meant to both supervise and romanticize the purity protection process.

The development of a culture of purity balls and purity rings has been important to the Christian right in general and is especially prevalent within evangelical circles.<sup>66</sup> Quiverfull adherents generally tend to emphasize this culture heavily, as is seen on both *Counting On* and *Bringing Up Bates*.<sup>67</sup> Exposure to the culture begins from the time that Quiverfull children are quite young: several episodes of both *Counting On* and *19 Kids and Counting* involve interview segments with the younger girls of the family, who around age five are already beginning to be able to articulate an understanding of the concept of modesty. Around age eight, Duggar children are able to express their familiarity of the concept of “defrauding,” or the ability of a woman’s revealing clothing to elicit immoral sexual desire and temptation in the heart of a man who sees her.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> For more information on this topic, see *Our Lives: The Virgin Daughters*, a Real Stories documentary produced in 2008, which highlights one of the most well-known evangelical purity balls, created and sponsored by a family with deep ties to the right-wing Christian advocacy group, the Family Research Council.

<sup>67</sup> Sometimes without the presence of purity balls, as many Quiverfull adherents maintain that dancing simulates sexuality and is therefore obscene and inappropriate. This is a worldview that the Duggars express during S3E17 of *19 Kids and Counting*, during which they answer questions from fans. When asked about dancing, Jim Bob explains that it is a “personal family conviction” that “dancing can stir up sensual desires, especially in guys, that cannot be righteously fulfilled when girls are shaking their, parts of their bodies around, and so we just don’t believe it’s something that our family wants to get involved in doing.”

<sup>68</sup> This is seen, for example, in S2E3, in which Joy-Anna describes the concept of defrauding to *19 Kids and Counting* producers.

As children reach what their parents believe to be the age at which they will express significant interest in romantic relationships, parents begin to add additional strictures on their children's engagement with peers who are not of the same sex. Such strictures focus on carefully regulating the extent and depth of contact a young woman has with a young man: "in order to save your heart for one and not give it away to the wrong person, friendships with young men need to stay at the acquaintance or casual level. It doesn't take long for a relationship with a guy to move from a casual friendship to something more than that" (52). Parents take on an active role in ensuring that their daughters' relationships with young men remain appropriate in this way, because Quiverfull adherents believe in "the tremendous protection the Lord has given [the daughter] through her parents. God is the One who has set in place all human authority, and He works through it to accomplish His good purposes in each of our lives" (Mally 129).<sup>69</sup> A detailed example of how this culture of protection functions can be found in the S1E10 of UP TV's series *Bringing Up Bates*, entitled "The Purity Ring," in which Carlin Bates, child number 9 and 16 years old at the time the episode airs, receives the gift of a purity ring—a ring meant to signify her commitment to remain sexually, physically, and emotionally pure until marriage—from her parents.

As the episode in question opens, Carlin is surprised by the arrival of flowers and a dress, which are delivered to her family's front door.<sup>70</sup> The gift is from her parents, with a

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<sup>69</sup> For a detailed discussion of why this protection focuses primarily on young women rather than on young men, see either *Created To Be His Help Meet* or *So Much More*, both of which discuss in detail the Quiverfull belief that women are more susceptible to being misled than are men.

<sup>70</sup> Carlin expresses surprise, though of course we do not know if this is an act designed to make the event stand out in front of the camera. After all, the gift of a purity ring is expected for each daughter of the family, and because they are given at similar ages (in the Bates family, the late teens seem to apply; in the Duggar family, the purity ring seems to come a little earlier), Carlin must have expected the imminent arrival of her ring.



card that announces that Carlin will be going on “a dinner date with mom and dad.” The romantic tenor of the event remains consistent; when Carlin is filmed coming downstairs from her room wearing her new dress just before dinner, her mom tells her she looks beautiful, and her dad announces that he has “two of the prettiest girls in the whole world.” The viewer stumbling across these scene without having seen the lead-up to it might expect that Carlin is about to be picked up by a young suitor, as she has clearly gone through the process of readying herself for a romantic date; instead, she leaves with her parents.

Interspersed between these two moments in the episode are interviews with the family. Sitting on a couch with Gil, Kelly explains, “For us, a purity ring is something we have given our girls just as a symbol for them and a reminder for them to keep their heart pure and to put God first in their life and to save themselves for marriage. The poor guys have kind of gotten left out on doing a specific thing or getting a gift. We talk to them frequently and we ask them to make a commitment.” Here, we learn that the boys in the family, while encouraged to maintain sexual chastity, are not treated as objects of purity in the same way in which the girls of the family are. Kelly is aware of the imbalance here, and her tone suggests a certain ruefulness, but the boys themselves express a certain disinterest in the process. In an interview segment, the Bates’s son Lawson explains, “having a symbol is a great thing, but the main thing is your heart.” The boys appear to have little investment in the romantic structure of the purity protection process.

The romantic investment involved in Carlin’s purity protection process, on the other hand, is very heavily emphasized. While at dinner, Gil gives her the Quiverfull version of “the talk,” explaining that “when you’re young and you get older, you begin to sometimes question ‘well I wonder what—is purity really the important thing? And bein’ pure, till you’re married,

stayin’—saving yourself just for your husband alone, that’s God’s design: one woman, one man for life.” Gil then tells Carlin that the subject is on the verge of making him cry, “Because you already have lived such a Godly life, I mean, and I’m so happy.”<sup>71</sup> When Gil and Kelly present Carlin with the ring, Gil does on to explain that it is “valuable, but what you are is way more valuable than any gift we could give you and what God’s given you is a wholesome, pure life, and I want you to keep it ‘till the day that I hand you off to some fine young man that loves God and he’ll begin to take care of you. So, we love you, and we think you’re the best.” Through her father’s words, Carlin is explicitly told that she is both valued and valuable. The implication behind the words, however, is that to compromise one’s purity is to become less valuable, to lessen one’s worth. A daughter who “saves her heart” for her husband is of the highest value and is, subsequently, most likely to remain sufficiently protected and whole.

Kelly explains the way that the purity protection process plays out during her and Gil’s dinner conversation with Carlin in a way that reflects the Quiverfull values discussed above: “So we give our children a purity ring when they get to that age that they’re noticing the opposite gender and then the next step is they usually form friendships, and a very special friendship could lead to courtship.” What Kelly does not add is that parental involvement in their daughter purity involves all aspects of her life and extends throughout the process of courtship and engagement, until the moments that she is “given away” by her father to her husband-to-be at the marriage altar.

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<sup>71</sup> The language used by Quiverfull families to discuss each life stage experience of each child in a family is consistently sentimentalized, though the Bates have either assimilated more or act it out better than the Duggars seem capable of doing.

Parental reinforcement of their daughters' purity is punctuated by events like the giving of purity rings—something in which the Duggar family also participates—but tends to operate much more practically on a day-to-day level, and some of these practical applications are applied to sons as well. For example, throughout the majority of their TLC show *19 Kids and Counting*, the Duggars clearly followed a policy that whenever one of their children would leave the house, whether to run an errand or to pursue a career track they would be accompanied by a sibling.<sup>72</sup> Older male children who had begun to pursue their career paths seemed to be exempted from this requirement at least when they were working on tasks related to their careers, but in almost all other cases, the rule applied. When Jill Duggar decided to train to be a midwife, Jana Duggar joined the program with her, even though she was not interested in becoming a midwife. When Joseph Duggar decided to join the volunteer fire department, his two oldest sisters tagged along.<sup>73</sup>

For girls and young women, then, there is often little to no respite from such surveillance within Quiverfull families. The reasoning for this is that all slips are seen as monumental: giving a heart away might happen in small pieces, but once that giving away begins, the heart can never be fully pure again. This belief is seen in Sarah Mally's explanation

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<sup>72</sup> See *Growing Up Duggar*. The Duggar daughters explain the following four reasons behind purity rings: "To each of us, the ring has a fourfold purpose. First, it's a symbol of our commitment to keep ourselves physically pure as we wait for the one God intends for us to marry. Second, it symbolizes our desire to involve our parents in our decision of a life partner. Third, our ring reminds us to pray for the man God would have us marry and to guard our own heart so that one day we can share it fully with him. Fourth (and most important), it's a reminder that God is the true fulfiller of all our desires and also a reminder to cherish our relationship with Him and live purposefully between now and the time He sees fit to bring that man into our lives" (114).

<sup>73</sup> This emphasizes the lack of priority the individual is given within the Quiverfull framework: it is not individual desires that are given pride of place, but ideas and activities that serve the larger family. This does not seem to be something that the Bates currently practices as extensively, though the behavior pattern does seem to come out for larger events, like courtship proposals (see *Bringing Up Bates*).

of the “gift” that all our women give to their husbands: “It is ‘the first time.’ It is all the many different assortments of ‘first times’ that are part of a romantic love relationship that God brings together for marriage. ‘First times’ are special, but a ‘first time’ occurs only once. This gift is also called *purity*. Purity is destroyed by the premature use of ‘first times,’ and with it is lost the very best gift one can ever give to a spouse” (188). Here, Mally is certainly referring to sexual intercourse, but she does not restrict her idea of the “first time” merely to sex. She also includes the

first expression of interest, first words of affection or love, first gift given or received, first romantic look into his eyes, first trip together, first special song, place, event or memory, first ring, first dinner date, first personal letter expressing emotions, first ‘I love you,’ first piece of your heart given, first serious or ongoing correspondence with a young man, first special affectionate nicknames or actions, first kiss. (186)

For Mally, all aspects of romantic interaction with young men are possible places where purity can slip away; once the process is begun, the young woman never has access to complete purity again.

With stakes as high as these, the purity of a daughter’s heart is often protected in the context of what is sometimes called Biblical Daughterhood, sometimes the Stay-at-Home Daughter Movement. The defining feature of Biblical Daughterhood is that a daughter should live in her father’s home until the point when she marries, after which she should live with her husband. Not only should a daughter live in her family home until marriage, but she should devote their time to acting as a helpmeet to her father, assisting him in his work and mission as a way of training herself for her future role as a helpmeet to her husband. In this way, she is exposed only to the lifestyle for which she is intended, and her experiences and motivations

are not soiled by outside influences that can draw her away from what her family believes her purpose to be.<sup>74</sup>

Among the most vocal spokeswomen for this practice are Anna Sofia and Elizabeth Botkin, women who live with their father, mother, and several unmarried brothers, and who have written the books *So Much More: The Remarkable Influence of Visionary Daughters on the Kingdom of God* and *It's (Not That) Complicated: How to Relate to Guys in a Healthy, Sane, and Biblical Way* and, with their father, produced the film *The Return of the Daughters*. Like the Duggar children, the Botkin women were raised in a Quiverfull family that first enforced a rigid set of behavioral rules that included strict, old-fashioned seeming dress codes that were meant to ensure modesty. The family later relaxed those rules, allowing their daughters to use makeup, style their hair, and wear a range of clothing, but the necessity of guarding their daughters' purity until the moment of marriage remained a priority for the family.<sup>75</sup>

The Biblical Daughterhood movement demonstrates two important aspects of Quiverfull authority. The first aspect—and the one most relevant to the current discussion—

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<sup>74</sup> Not all Quiverfull adherents endorse this practice. The Pearls, for example, explain in an article called "Trusting and Supporting Our Children's Choices," which they posted on their ministry website, [nogreaterjoy.org](http://nogreaterjoy.org), that they allowed their daughter, Rebekah, to live alone as a missionary in Papua New Guinea when she was in her early 20s.

<sup>75</sup> An explanation for the change in behavioral enforcement can be pieced together from the Botkin sisters' blog, *Botkin Sisters: Thoughts on Womanhood, Christianity, and Culture*. On September 18, 2002, Elizabeth Botkin posted a picture of herself, her older sister, and her mother as the introduction to her blog post "Mothers, Daughters, and the Beauty Subject." That photo was captioned as follows: *Us with our mother in 2001, ages 16 and 14... before the days of hairstyling, makeup, or clothes that fit*. In a July 22, 2014 audio message, entitled "It's Not About Staying At Home: And Nine Other things [sic] Christian Young Womanhood is Not About," the Botkin sisters explain that "it's not about narrow applications, it's about principles." They argue that there is a difference between principals, such as "I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly," and applications, such as "women should wear tiered, floor-length, calico prairie skirts or denim jumpers." It should be noted, however, that this shift in the application of the modesty principle seems to have occurred among many Quiverfull families at the same time, in the early-to-mid 2000s. One possible explanation for this is that more modern clothing was seen as a more effective modality for ministry.

is that authority is seen as a form of protection and propriety. Quiverfull women submit to authority as a way to keep them safe from the physically, emotional, and spiritual dangers of the world. Protective authority is vested in males, so Quiverfull women's submission to first father and then husband are both considered important. The second aspect is the role that children are meant to play in the family, which is very particular among Quiverfull adherents. That aspect will be discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter.

For a Quiverfull daughter, the transition from young woman who is protecting her heart for her future husband and woman who is joined in marriage to that husband is a gradual one that involves many protective hurdles. Most Quiverfull adherents follow a model in which the first step of a possible relationship is that the young man interested in a young woman speaks to her father and asks if it is alright for him to get to know the young woman better. The young woman's job is to "direct any young men who express interest in them to their dads first" (Mally 130). If the father gives his permission, the young man then spends time with her strictly in the context of her family. As the four oldest Duggar girls explain it, "If Mom and Dad agree that the young man has a heart for the Lord and a potential as a future spouse, then we will invite him to visit our family so we can get to know each other in our normal life (group) setting. And we'll also hope to visit him in his family setting as well" (125). Getting to know a potential romantic partner in the context of the family ensures that the acquaintance process does not compromise either partner's purity and that each potential partner can observe the way they act in an authentic, rather than a contrived, environment.

Getting to know one another within the context of the family also gives the young woman's parents a chance to get to vet the prospective suitor as extensively as possible. In many cases, this involves intense questioning about all aspects of his life history and his

worldview. On S3E10 of *Counting On*, for example, Jeremy Vuolo reveals during an interview session that when he expressed interest in getting to know Jinger, Jim Bob sent him a 50-page questionnaire to fill out so that he could get to know Jeremy better; the interview participants (Jill, Derick, Ben, Jessa, and Jinger, along with Jeremy) indicated that those questions covered matters of finance and faith, among others. This practice is not limited to the Duggars: Stacy McDonald, a Quiverfull adherent and pastor's wife in Peoria, IL, discusses the questionnaire her husband used to get to know his daughter's suitors on her blog *Your Sacred Calling: Inspiration for the Passionate Housewife*. Her 2010 post entitled "Courtship Questions for Potential Suitors" included well over 100 questions that ranged from theological questions such as "What are the evidences of your salvation" and "What is the present day application of Mosaic law" to political questions such as "Can you tell me your thoughts on how a man should protect a wife and children? How do you feel about guns?" to moral questions such as "Have you ever been exposed to pornography? If so, explain the extent and the circumstances" to more mundane questions such as "What are your habits regarding sleeping? Are you lethargic? Are your sleep habit irregular?" and "What do you tend to do in your spare time?" (McDonald). With such questionnaires, an interested young man must be serious about the girl he wants to get to know, and he must be well prepared to fulfill the expectations of her parents. For parents as for daughters, after all, the stakes are high: once their daughter is married to a young man, she must submit to him for the rest of their lives.

Once the young man has determined that he is interested in pursuing the young woman, he asks her father if he can pursue a courtship with her.<sup>76</sup> As the Duggar daughters

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<sup>76</sup> In some cases, young men's parents put restrictions on when they can begin pursuing courtships and marriage as well. As Season 5 of *Counting On* has documented, that was the case with Joy-Anna

explain it, “courtship is a serious commitment and should only be carried out by those for whom marriage is a realistic possibility” (130). For a young woman’s father to approve of a potential courtship, he must believe that the young man would make a suitable husband for his daughter, and the daughter herself must consent to the relationship.<sup>77</sup> Quiverfull families often assert that while all courtships share the value of evaluating a relationship for its potential for marriage, there is no specific formula for courtship; the Duggars, for example, all insist that each courting couple sets their own standards for how they will interact, physically and otherwise, with their significant other.

Despite such insistence, there is clearly some tension around this issue, which manifests itself in two ways. First, according to what is presented on *19 Kids and Counting and Counting On*, all Duggar children who have engaged in the courtship process have highly

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Duggar’s now husband, Austin Forsyth. When he was 17, his father told him that he could get married once he had bought, flipped, and sold 5 houses; he subsequently let him know that he could pursue courtship after completing the process with 4 houses (*Counting On*, S5E3).

<sup>77</sup> There are Quiverfull adherents who follow the practice of arranged marriages. The case for arranged marriages is laid out in detail in Vaughn Ohlman’s book *What Are You Doing?: A Conversation about Marriage and Courtship*, and his daughter-in-law, Laura Ohlman, who married her husband Josh through the arranged marriage structure, also discusses that practice on her blog, *Diapers, Dishes, and Prince Charming*. The Ohlman family expresses their opposition to the mantra often heard among courtship advocates that “true love waits” (see, for example, p. 116 of *Growing Up Duggar*), arguing instead that the Bible calls for young people to marry as soon as they are ready to avoid the temptation of lust and that parents should find spouses for both male and female. The Ohlman family received significant criticism in both Christian and mainstream media when their planned “Let Them Marry” conference in Kansas was cancelled due to concerns that they were encouraging child marriage. While the Ohlmans emphatically deny this and advocate that people wait until they’ve reached the legal age to marry, it is clear from their published materials that they believe morally acceptable ages of marriage can fall well below legally acceptable ones. For more information on “Let Them Marry,” see Vyckie Garrison’s *RawStory.com* article, “Salvation Army bans Duggar cult’s ‘retreat’ that promoted arranged marriages for teenage girls” and Ohlman’s statement on his blog *Let Them Marry*, now mostly shut down. This practice—especially marriage below the age legally set by the government—appears to be relatively rare among Quiverfull adherents and is certainly not promoted by the key institutions, such as the IBLP, associated with the Quiverfull worldview. It is, however, somewhat common for Quiverfull parents to match make for the children, even to the point of initiating contact with another family to discuss the possibility of the children marrying. See, for example, the film *To Be One*, produced by Peter Telian, which follows three families who were involved in strict, parent-driven courtship practices.



similar standards: they have chaperones accompany them wherever they go (at least within line of sight) so that they are never fully alone and are held accountable for their courtship standards, which general follow a scheme in which the courting couple permits themselves side hugs (hugs in which the two people involved are careful to avoid letting the fronts of their bodies touch) during the courting process, hand-holding upon engagement, and save all other physical aspects of their relationship, including kissing, until marriage. Couples often commit to their parents participating in their text-based and phone-based conversations, though the regularity of this seems to lessen as the relationship between the couple grows more clearly serious. Jinger and Jeremy Duggar deviated somewhat from this formula—they openly engaged in more conventional hugs even before engagement, for example, and they sat next to each other on dates even when quarters were close, whereas other couples have had chaperones between them—but those deviations are relatively minor.<sup>78</sup> Second, Jim Bob and Michelle indicate some tension around the extent to which their children conform to the same standards; when Jinger and Michelle are filmed returning from the trip during which Jeremy proposed marriage to Jinger, Jim Bob questions Michelle about her ability to enforce courtship standards in a rather anxious tone of voice, asking particularly about side hugs, even though viewers have seen a number of instances in which Jinger and Jeremy have clearly eschewed limiting themselves to only partial hugs (*Counting On*, S3E8).<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> For example, during S13E1, Jessa and her mother visit Ben and his family, who live several hours away from them. When Ben picks them up from the airport with his pickup truck, Michelle insists on sitting between Ben and Jessa so they will not be squished together during the drive.

<sup>79</sup> Similar standards are demonstrated by the Bates family on *Bringing Up Bates*. They have an approach that in some ways appears more casual—they use the terms “boyfriend” and “girlfriend” relatively freely, for example—but the children of the Bates family also have courtship chaperones and plan to save their first kiss until their wedding days.

When a couple has reached the point where an engagement seems likely—which is usually something the couple appears to have openly discussed—the young man once again speaks to the young woman’s father to ask for her hand in marriage. Once permission is granted, he plans and executes a marriage proposal. At that point, Quiverfull advice often encourages couples to marry quickly—Jill and Derick explicitly give this advice to couples that get engaged after their marriage, and wedding dates are set only two-three months after the engagement is established. The Duggars explicitly indicate that once the engagement commitment is made, it’s best to have marriage quickly follow so that purity standards can be (relatively) easily maintained; as Jill Dillard explains it, “You may not wanna push the wedding date out too far, as those natural God-given desires with too much time between engagement and marriage can make it harder to remain pure. If you are financially ready, and things are in place...we believe an engagement should only be long enough to plan a wedding!” (Kupfer).

One of the reasons that such strict courtship standards are maintained is that it is possible that courtships will end with a decision not to pursue marriage. Among the Bates and Duggar families, this has happened twice—once to Zach Bates, before he met and married his wife, Whitney, and once to Josiah Duggar, who was in a courtship that was broken off shortly after the Josh Duggar scandals became public.<sup>80</sup> Once a person is in a courtship, they are likely to have “given away pieces of their hearts,” which might complicate matters when a subsequent courtship is pursued. The stricter the courtship standards, the less purity is

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<sup>80</sup> See the blog *Free Jinger* for discussions of the dissolution of Zach Bates’s first courtship and Aurelie Corinthios’s *People.com* article “Josiah Duggar Has Ended His Courtship with Marjorie Jackson After 4 Months” for information on the timing of Josiah’s courtship ending.

compromised.<sup>81</sup> As Kelly Bates explained it in a speech to a group of young people at an ATI conference, the goal is to avoid experiences similar to the ones she's had: "I've put things in my subconscious here that I'm going to battle with for the rest of my life, because I've exposed myself to things that God never intended me to expose myself to."<sup>82</sup> She explains that "you might be able to stop and get victory one day, but there's consequences to the things you've exposed yourself to." This is the set of beliefs that causes Quiverfull parents to embark on a very cautious and thorough process of vetting potential future partners for their children, and especially for their daughters.<sup>83</sup>

Once a marriage partnership has been secured, Quiverfull daughters turn to fulfilling the role that they have explicitly been preparing for their entire lives: the role of wife and helpmeet.<sup>84</sup> That leads to the second consequence that is derived from the Quiverfull understanding of women's place in the authority hierarchy: the conduct that pertains to the roles that women and men fulfill within the marriage relationship. Paul's reference in Ephesians 5 to the husband being the head of the wife above is translated into the concept of Biblical headship, which sets up a metaphorical structure in which the husband in a marriage

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<sup>81</sup> For a detailed look at how particular the courtship process can be, see Amy Kohn's 2015 film *A Courtship*.

<sup>82</sup> In this explanation, Kelly offers up a version of the self that takes on the role of both perpetrator and victim. In this model, a person has negative experiences, even experiences in which they are misused or mistreated, largely because they have put themselves in a situation where such a thing is possible.

<sup>83</sup> This thought process all explains why Quiverfull parents are so eager to limit the activities to which their children have access to, and to convince young people that it's better to avoid encountering certain objects, ideas, and behaviors at all than to risk the mental and spiritual struggle that dealing with those things can bring, an issue that will be discussed subsequently. It is also worth noting the militaristic language that Kelly Bates uses—getting victory, battling with temptation. The battle-oriented nature of Quiverfull belief will be discussed in more detail both in this chapter and in the following chapter on Quiverfull ontology.

<sup>84</sup> Lest that sound like an exaggeration, consider the following statement by Debi Pearl: "when a woman gets old and realizes that there is no man to love and cherish her, it is sad indeed, for she has failed in the very purpose for which she was created—to be a suitable helper to a man" (58).

relationship functions as the head of that relationship and the woman as rest of the body. As reflected in the marriage vows discussed above, the head is understood to be the strategic command center, and the body is the entity that carries out the will of the head and makes the fruition of its vision possible. Headship is undergirded by the Quiverfull understanding of Genesis 2:18, which states that “And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a help meet for him’” (KJV). Women’s ultimate role, then, is to serve as helpers to husbands, who determine the goals and direction of the family.

The underlying structure of this analogical relationship is both metaphorical and metonymic in nature. On the surface, the analogy appears to be metaphorical: two different pairings (Christ and Church and husband and wife) that seem dissimilar are joined because they share a common function. At a deeper level, however, the connections that structure the analogy and allow for comparison to be made between the two pairs are metonymic. The husband and the wife are joined by their proximity, both literally in that they spend their lives side by side, and in the head/body metaphor that structures their relationship. Both parties depend on this proximity for their existence: without being linked, they cannot exist. Furthermore, in this model, the nature of the link between them is not flexible: the wife exists because she was created from the husband and the husband is not complete without the wife at his side. Their primary axis of identification is therefore metonymic, though metonymic in a way that is inevitably hierarchical. The same relationship characterizes Christ and the Church: the Church exists because of Christ, and Christ is not complete—his purpose cannot be fulfilled—without the existence of the Church. In this way, authority functions not merely as an organizational method for the Quiverfull movement; instead, it must be understood as a foundational principle. Humans are not simply obligated to follow particular authority

structures; their very nature depends upon those authority structures. It is because human beings are fallen that they resist adhering to the foundational aspects of their being.

Because they are expected to follow God’s purpose in creating them, Quiverfull wives have to submit to their husbands and help them achieve their vision extends to an expectation that they are to prioritize their husbands before anything else in their lives, with the sole exception of God. This is a lesson that Quiverfull adherents are often taught from an early age. As the IBLP explains it in their homeschooling curriculum materials, the correct order of one’s life is “personal devotion first to God, then to one’s spouse, then family, and finally to ministry” (*Wisdom Booklet 4*).<sup>85</sup> Family is seen as the dominant unit of society, and marriage is the dominant unit of the family. According to Mary Pride, a writer on women’s roles who had a strong influence on the development of Quiverfull beliefs related to marriage, “the way we young wives handle our duty to ‘love their husbands’ affects how we treat our children, how we behave in our homes, and what contribution we make to our church and our community. Husbands come before children; and homes, as the basic building-blocks, come before church and State” (15). Women’s role is to support the social hierarchy at its most basic—and, according to Quiverfull belief, most important—level.

The Quiverfull vision that Pride articulates simultaneously empowers and disempowers women. On the one hand, it invests women with a significant amount of influence: “If our men aren’t successful, it largely means that their women have not made them successful. They need our help” (Botkin and Botkin 47). Women are seen as necessary to their families and therefore as necessary to the Quiverfull project. On the other hand, it

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<sup>85</sup> Wisdom Booklets are the organizing units of ATI’s homeschooling curriculum; ATI is the educational entity subordinate to the IBLP.

gives women a lot of responsibility without a lot of reward. Women are not permitted to hold roles of authority over men in Quiverfull belief; indeed, many Quiverfull adherents believe that such roles occupied by women serve as the harbinger of disaster: “Women holding seats of authority, whether it be in business, church, family, law, or politics, is one of the distinguishing marks of a society under God’s curse” (Botkin and Botkin 124). When women’s husbands don’t hold “seats of authority,” the whole family comes under scrutiny. If a husband and father fails, the family shares in that failure fully.<sup>86</sup>

Furthermore, a woman’s ability to exert influence within her marriage often depends on the husband she has and her relationship to him. As Michael Pearl explains, “A husband has authority to tell his wife what to wear, where to go, whom to talk to, how to spend her time, when to speak and when not to, even if he is unreasonable and insensitive” ([Michael] Pearl 260).<sup>87</sup> Once a woman is married, she is bound to her husband as his subordinate. If he values her as a companion, she might wield significant influence and garner a large amount of respect. If he doesn’t, she will be forced to serve as his unvalued drudge, her only recompense being access to “a plane of blessedness known only to the obedient” ([Michael] Pearl 264). Such strictures on women elucidate why the Duggar brothers are constantly explaining how important it is to them to thoroughly check out their sisters’ prospective

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<sup>86</sup> This is demonstrated by the Josh Duggar scandal; when information about Duggar’s sexual molestation of his sisters when he was a minor and subsequent information about his use of pornography and engagement in extramarital affairs surfaced, Anna Duggar lost the financial security and family prestige that she had experienced when Josh worked for the Family Research Council. Though she could have left Josh, she followed the Quiverfull dictate that marriage is for life. It is worth noting that the Duggar family made very visible efforts to emphasize Anna’s blamelessness in her husband’s behavior (see *Counting On*, Season 1). This attempt hints at the fact that Quiverfull wives are often held partially responsible for their husbands’ failures, with the blame being attributed to them not fully or properly supporting their husbands.

<sup>87</sup> Michael Pearl authored a guest section in Debi Pearl’s *Created To Be His Help Meet*.

suitors and why both Michelle and Jim Bob invest a lot more mixed emotional energy into the marriages of their female children than they do into the marriages of their male children.

Quiverfull adherents offer only limited qualifiers to the rule of complete submission of wives to husbands. Michael Pearl offers the following explanation: “neither governments nor husbands have the right to legislate belief or morality. God retains that right. The church does not have the right to intrude into family matters, unless false doctrine or immorality is involved. A husband does not have the right to break the just laws of man or God, nor does he have the right to constrain his wife and children to do so” (259). Quiverfull wives are ultimately responsible for God: they must adhere to the principles laid out in the Bible. This means that, while a husband can rule over the day-to-day activities and behaviors of his wife, “he does not have authority to command her to view pornography with him or to assist him in the commission of a crime” ([Michael] Pearl 260). The wife is responsible for resisting her husband’s authority when it exceeds its ordained limits, but she must tread carefully in her judgment of what those limits are.<sup>88</sup>

Quiverfull adherents also address whether men’s and women’s separate spheres indicate inferiority or a lack of capability inherent in women. The answers that they tend to provide demonstrate some ambiguity on this issue. For example, in *Created To Be His Helpmeet: Discover How God Can Make Your Marriage Glorious*, Debi Pearl explains that “it is on the very grounds that women *can be* effective public ministers that God commands them

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<sup>88</sup> This does not necessarily mean she is considered blameless. Wives are often considered to be responsible parties to their husband’s sins. In the words of Debi Pearl, “Eve’s influence over Adam changed the course of history. We need to be aware of the power we have to seduce our husbands into following us into disregarding the clear, objective words of God” (111). If a husband is a regular user of pornography, Quiverfull adherents believe that it’s often in part because his wife hasn’t won his heart and his body the way that she is supposed to.

not to do so. It is not a question of being qualified; it is a matter of being authorized. God has established an order for the home, a chain of command that is consistent with the very nature of men and women” (119). This statement gets at the heart of the struggle that Quiverfull writing on women’s roles often addresses: on the one hand, women are portrayed as capable of fulfilling any role needed; on the other, they are told that when they do so, they violate the nature that God gave them.

Ultimately, this contradiction—that women can intrinsically do everything a man can do but that their nature does not make them suited to take on the roles of men—is addressed by pleas to authority. God wants women to abnegate their own desires to lead; that is the heart of submission to their husbands. Women who refuse to do so need to consider the fact that “God placed man in the position of HEAD of the family, not because he is wiser or more capable, but because it is part of God’s eternal design” (Debi Pearl 116, capitalization in original). In case women are not convinced to accept this interpretation of God’s design at face value, Quiverfull writers also use redirection as a strategy for convincing them to do so. In their audio file, “It’s Not about Staying At Home and Nine Other Things Christian Young Womanhood is Not About,” published on 07/22/14 on their website, *Botkin Sisters: Thoughts on Womanhood, Christianity, and Culture*, the Botkin sisters explain that the restrictions on the roles that women are allowed to fulfill should be not be understood to be about “narrow applications,” but about “principles.” They recommend that their listeners not focus on the things that women are forbidden to do; rather, they should focus on the things that God wants women to do. Those things primarily focus on being “man’s assistant in taking dominion over the earth.” Women are instructed to look to all the things that God wants them to do, so that



they feel that their role is important, and perhaps because filling it will keep them too busy to fall into the temptation of rejecting God's order.

In fact, the husband's role as determiner of the family's goals often takes on an explicitly military cast. As Michael Pearl explains it, "our entire lives are bound up in a chain of command. We must answer to others, who, in turn, must answer to God" (259). Wives are offered this model to understand their role: they are their husband's lieutenants in fulfilling the mission of what Quiverfull families generally refer to as Dominion. As the Botkin sisters further explain in *So Much More*, "Marriage is about dominion. It's about filling the earth and subduing it" (216). As Quiverfull adherents, the Botkins draw that principle of Dominion from Genesis 1:28: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (KJV). For Quiverfull adherents, this Biblical command serves as the basis of marriage, and indeed, of Christian life on earth itself. The Botkin sisters lay this interpretation out clearly: "Marriage is where your new ministry starts, where you become, in a sense, the queen of a little kingdom where you rule with your husband as God's vice-gerents [sic], working together extending the kingdom, subduing the earth, properly managing its resources, and discipling the nations" (216). Marriage is the purpose towards which young Quiverfull men and women aspire, because it allows them to fulfill God's purpose in their lives and to receive the authority he delegates to his agents of Dominion. To varying degrees of literalness, each Quiverfull marriage functions as a colonial outpost of God's kingdom on earth, governed by soldiers who are in exile from that kingdom, set up with the express purpose of winning just a little more territory over for

God.<sup>89</sup> In that territory, the husband rules supreme with his wife at his side, his authority derived directly from God. Their children serve as foot soldiers in the expansion of that territory, available to be ordered around at the will of their superior officers.

For Quiverfull adherents, expanding God’s territory means winning people over to their belief system, general worldview, and structuring morality.<sup>90</sup> This can be done in two primary ways--through reproduction and through actively ministering to those outside the family, including both like-minded families and people who have never heard the Quiverfull message. Reproduction is the primary model that Quiverfull families prioritize, but ministry also plays an important role. Both will be subsequently discussed.

### Reproduction

As noted above, Quiverfull organizations and writers such as the IBLP, the Pearls, the Botkin sisters, and Mary Pride teach that the family is the central unit of authority, and therefore the central unit of Dominion, on Earth. Though conversion of unbelievers and the support of believers are both important aspects of Dominion, Dominion is to be accomplished

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<sup>89</sup> This is seen, for example, in the prayer that Jim Bob offers during Joy and Austin’s wedding ceremony (S5E1). He prays, “Father, I pray you’ll use Austin and Joy together, to win more people for your Kingdom’s sake than they could apart, and Father, I pray that even through this wedding and their marriage, Father, just lead people to you.” In this, Jim Bob explicitly calls attention to the fact that he considers bringing people into Christianity to be a central purpose of his daughter and her husband’s marriage. His words also raise some doctrinal issues that are debated among Quiverfull adherents (namely, whether salvation is available to all or only to those that God has predestined for it). The extent to which the Quiverfull worldview believes in the ability of the faithful to convert unbelievers (in other words, the extent to which it is Calvinist) will be discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>90</sup> The purpose of this task is interpreted somewhat differently by different Quiverfull families, which relates to the fact that the Quiverfull movement encompasses several eschatologies and beliefs about the basis of salvation. Those differences—and the fact that they are able to coexist among Quiverfull adherents despite their rigid interpretation of other Biblical matters—will be discussed in Chapter 5.

first and foremost through the modality of raising children. Quiverfull adherents reference the importance of raising a “godly seed;” the Botkin sisters explicitly explain that “the Dominion Mandate” is to be accomplished through “male-female lifelong unions and multi-generational dynasties” (217).<sup>91</sup> Quiverfull adherents see this to be their primary purpose on earth: “The family is God’s primary tool of dominion. He gave the Dominion Mandate to a *family* and not a ministry organization, and the method it was to pursue was to fill the earth and subdue it” (Botkin and Botkin 172). Reproduction is seen as the most effective—and most Biblically required—method of achieving Dominion.

There are three explicit reasons that Quiverfull families place primacy on reproduction. The first is related to the structure of fundamentalism that the Quiverfull movement follows. This will be discussed in greater detail towards the end of this chapter; here, it is sufficient to note that Quiverfull adherents see reproduction as part of God’s first explicit command to Adam and Eve in Genesis, where he makes the direct statement “be fruitful and multiply.”<sup>92</sup> The second is that the husband and wife couple together equal a complete representation of God, so their bearing children provides a living model of God’s decision to send his son to earth for the salvation of humankind.<sup>93</sup> The third reason is rooted in practicality: success rates of producing soldiers for God’s kingdom are higher if you raise those soldiers from birth than if you convert them from other belief systems and ways of life,

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<sup>91</sup> Malachi 2:5 and Genesis 2-3.

<sup>92</sup> For Quiverfull adherents, commands such as “be fruitful and multiply” are understood as direct commands aimed at individual Christians; exceptions are only allowed in special circumstances. “Be fruitful and multiply” is not, therefore, something a couple can forgo if most of the families around them are doing it; instead, it is their personal responsibility to do everything in their power to fulfill the command.

<sup>93</sup> The ontological implications of this concept will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapter.

and the chance that soldiers raised from birth will be compromised by “the enemy” is considered to be much lower.

Accordingly, in *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement*, Kathryn Joyce makes note of the fact that Quiverfull families have a long history of seeing bearing children as a way to conduct spiritual warfare. Quoting Rick and Jan Hess, authors of the 1989 book *A Full Quiver: Family Planning and the Lordship of Christ*, Joyce highlights the potentiality that Quiverfull families place in their offspring: “If the body of Christ had been producing as we were designed to do, we would not be in the mess we are in today” (169). Joyce goes on to explain the Quiverfull mentality further:

But if just eight million American Christians began supplying more ‘arrows for the war’ by having even six children each, they [the Hesses] propose that the Christian right ranks could rise to 550 million within a century (‘assuming Christ doesn’t return before then’). They like to ponder the spiritual victory that such numbers could bring: both Houses of Congress and the majority of state governors’ mansions filled by Christians, universities that embrace creationism, sinful cities reclaimed for the faithful, and the swift blows dealt to companies that offend Christian sensibilities. (170)

This paraphrase from the Hesses’ book clearly demonstrates the extent to which Quiverfull adherents see their childbearing role as competitive: the more children they bear, the more quickly they will outnumber the non-believers, and the more quickly their worldview will be (re)asserted in American society.

Quiverfull-focused reality TV shows hint at this demographic potential as well. *19 Kids and Counting*, in particular, focuses on the priority the Duggars place on large families. In

S15E1, for example, in which Jill (Duggar) Dillard reveals she is expecting her first child, a producer asks Josie and Jordyn how many children they think their sister and her husband should have; they respond “10” and “70,” respectively.<sup>94</sup> Such documentation does not indicate that many Quiverfull adherents see demographic growth—the establishment of “multi-generational dynasties,” in the language of the Botkin sisters—as a key responsibility because it is a way to increase the percentage of the Quiverfull population and therefore as a way to bring more territory under Dominion. In such moments, the structure underlying the Duggars’ prioritization of large families is only visible to those already in the know.

As part of their childbearing program, Quiverfull adherents regularly dismiss the idea that there is a global overpopulation problem. In S8E10, an episode during which the Duggars answer questions put to them by viewers, Jim Bob responds to a question about overpopulation by stating that “one of the greatest myths in today’s society is that the world is overpopulated...the whole world population could fit into the city limits of Jacksonville, FL.” Indeed, Quiverfull adherents generally believe that concerns about overpopulation are a direct result of an anti-Christian mindset that recasts the individual as the highest priority. As Kathryn Joyce explains, they often point to Europe as an example of the under-population that they believe endangers Western Civilization: “decades of antifamily [sic] permissiveness—contraception, abortion, divorce, population control, women’s liberation and careers, ‘selfish’ secularism, and gay rights—enabling ‘decadent’ couples to neglect their

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<sup>94</sup> Duggar demographic potential is also discussed on Duggar fan sites, such as *The Original Duggar Family Fan Blog*. In particular, see the 2015 post, “47,045,881 Duggars and Counting,” in which post authors speculate on what the numerical result of each Duggar descendant having 19 children would be.

reproductive duties” (190).<sup>95</sup> For many Quiverfull adherents, the idea of overpopulation is itself corrupt, because it is evidence of what was once Christian society fleeing God’s call to pursue Dominion by subduing the earth.<sup>96</sup>

Despite the importance of fertility in the program of pursuing Dominion, however, it is not enough for families to simply birth large numbers of children. The task to which they believe they are called is much more complicated: “The family [is] for bearing, nurturing, and bringing up the future generations in the admonition of the Lord” (Botkin and Botkin 172). The Quiverfull husband and wife are charged with bringing up children who are knowledgeable in and obedient to the vision that their parents have set for the family, a vision which closely follows Quiverfull principles, since this is the only way for them to be confident that their multi-generational reproductive strategy will bear fruit.

For this reason, although some differences exist among Quiverfull families in terms of how children are raised—after all, the authority for how the family conducts its day-to-day affairs is understood to be vested in the father and not in any church or governmental entity—there is a general pattern that is followed. That pattern focuses around the idea of child training, which is the term that Quiverfull adherents generally use in place of the more mainstream term “child raising.” Unlike “child raising,” “child training” explicitly calls attention to the importance of moral instruction and mission readiness. As the Duggar sisters explain it, “It’s a parent’s responsibility to train their children to behave with good character

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<sup>95</sup>This line of thinking carries with it clear racial implications, as Joyce effectively notes in her book: “It’s the argument Quiverfull advocates have been making among themselves for years, that Europe is failing to produce enough babies--the right babies--to replace its old and dying. It’s ‘the baby bust,’ ‘the birth dearth,’ ‘the graying of the continent’: modern euphemisms for old-fashioned race panic as low fertility among white couples coincides with an increasingly visible immigrant population across Europe” (190). The issue of race and the Quiverfull movement will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>96</sup>This will be discussed in greater detail at the end of this chapter.

when they are young so that, by God’s grace, as they continue to grow and mature, they will one day be loving, caring, and responsible adults” (45). Within the Quiverfull movement, children are raised with the explicit intention of preparing them to not only follow Quiverfull tenets devoutly but to effectively spread them throughout the world.

To accomplish this end, child training revolves around teaching children obedience to authority structures, and it therefore adheres to the militaristic model of family arrangement discussed above. Children are required to obey both fathers and mothers without question; women are explicitly granted authority to guide, teach, and correct their offspring, as long as they are following the child training vision that their husband has laid out for them. As Bill Gothard explains it, the father of a family is supposed to issue “commands,” and the mother is supposed to create “laws” based on those commands. In Gothard’s understanding—which he roots in a unique interpretation of Proverbs 6:20-23—commands set standards and laws determine how those standards should be enforced (Session 18, Advanced Seminar). To use phrasing from the Botkins, fathers establish principles and mothers establish applications. The father acts as a general who sets campaign priorities for the family, and the mother as the lieutenant who explains and carries out those standards.<sup>97</sup>

In keeping with the militarized structure described above, the obedience that Quiverfull adherents require from their children is absolute in nature. In *The Duggars: 20 and Counting*, Michelle and Jim Bob identify four qualities that acceptable obedience should demonstrate: it should be “instant, cheerful, thorough, [and] unconditional” (116). If children

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<sup>97</sup>This works only for issues that are not primarily doctrinal in nature (in those cases, God through the Bible is considered to establish principles and it is fathers who determine their applications), but mundane. For example, a father might determine that it is important to keep the house neat and orderly. It is then his wife’s responsibility to decide how that should be done on a day-to-day level.

do not immediately follow directives they are given, they are considered to be disobedient. If they do not do what they are told respectfully and with a positive attitude, they are considered to be disobedient. If they do not complete the task they are instructed to perform fully, they are considered to be disobedient. If they try to bargain with their parents about following orders, they are considered to be disobedient. All such violations show rebellion to the authority structure that God has ordained and are therefore not to be tolerated. Violations of the authority structure risk polluting the family by causing it to function according to a sin-based model, rather than a God-based model; families work to create perfect obedience in order to create a family model that demonstrates purity in its affiliation to God's order.

For Quiverfull families, this promise of purity—which focuses around the concept of reproduction—is both highly prized and highly fraught. The parents who are raising children in the Quiverfull movement often come from origins outside of the Quiverfull movement—for example, Michelle Duggar grew up in a non-religious household and Kelly Bates grew up in a family that experienced divorce when she was a children—and they often bemoan the way that the struggles and exposures they encountered as they were growing up caused them difficulty in their ability to assimilate to Quiverfull standards. In other words, these parents cannot claim an unsullied lineage of purity, because their background experiences have always in some way introduced them to influences that fall outside the Quiverfull umbrella. They can, however, work hard to make certain that their children do not have the same experience. In many cases, they go to significant lengths to ensure that their children do not fall under similar influences.



These lengths include putting significant restrictions on the daily activities of their children, something discussed at length later in the chapter. They also include putting significant effort into dramatizing the negativity of the experiences that they had growing up and emphasizing the extent to which young people who grew up in the context of the Quiverfull movement are blessed. In this dramatization, all “worldly” pursuits become not only threatening but, to some extent, equalized, as they are understood through the lens of how they lead a person away from prioritizing God.

There is some disagreement as to what, exactly, counts as a worldly pursuit, but the application for admission to the Advanced Training Institute International (ATI), the homeschooling and family ministry of the IBLP, provides insight into the generally agreed upon structure and activities that are acceptable for a Quiverfull family.<sup>98</sup> ATI provides this information in a negative manner, by explaining what actions and activities might disqualify a family. According to both the application and its attached FAQ, reasons for lack of admission to ATI include the following: “unrelated individuals” living in the home; an explanation by the parents of the “basis” of salvation that is not “based on the principles of life found in the Bible and a personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ;” lack of abstention from “alcohol, tobacco, pornography, gambling, rock music, and immodest clothing;” excessive TV use; a mother who works out of the home (unless she is a single parent); and a lack of commitment to daily family Bible study (3-4). ATI families are expected to follow a particular set of behavioral and belief-based standards in order to be admitted--those standards range

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<sup>98</sup> A significant number of Quiverfull families have participated or continue to participate in ATI, which in addition to providing homeschooling curriculum sponsors “family conferences” for families to attend on a yearly basis. Becoming a member of ATI also includes access to videos of Bill Gothard’s Basic and Advanced Seminars, as well as to other Quiverfull media.

from a specific understanding of Christian belief to the kinds of entertainment that are allowed within the home. Adherence to those standards is verified through a detailed questionnaire and a photograph of the entire family.

Two beliefs form the basis for restricting activities and structure so narrowly: that Quiverfull families can raise their children in such a way that shields them from corruption, and that there is a purer past that functions as a space of purity from which they can draw knowledge, inspiration, culture, and worldview.<sup>99</sup> For many Quiverfull families, current society is degraded from its former height (often associated with the Protestant Reformation and the Puritan-led colonies in New England), and will only be restored when the United States—and eventually the world—returns to following what they identify as its Christian organizing principles.<sup>100</sup> In fact, many Quiverfull adherents integrate this theme of return into their eschatological approach, embracing postmillennialist views that hold that the second coming of Christ will occur only after the world experiences one thousand years of Christ-centered rule.<sup>101</sup> This outcome is sometimes understood as the reward God will provide for Christians fulfilling the Dominion Mandate.

The Quiverfull approach to putting their belief in avoiding any tempting corruption or ideological pollution into practice was first raised in the previous chapter on modesty, in which I introduced the way that the Duggar family deals with maintaining modesty in both public and private spaces. One of the most notable examples is the way that men's gazes are

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<sup>99</sup> The Quiverfull relationship to the past is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, Kathryn Joyce's opening discussion about Vision Forum's Jamestown celebration in *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement*.

<sup>101</sup> Again, see Kathryn Joyce, especially her discussion of the impact that Christian theologians such as R.J. Rushdoony have had on the Biblical Patriarchy movement. Not all Quiverfull adherents follow this postmillennialist approach, but it has strong pull within the movement.

under constant scrutiny, such that if an “immodestly” dressed woman passes by, the females of the family give warning, and the men look down at their feet until the woman has passed them.<sup>102</sup> Duggar males are also limited in their access to the Internet, with the women of the family holding the Internet password and only giving it out to the men and boys when they have a specific need for using the Internet. Furthermore, as mentioned above, Duggar offspring are rarely alone during their childhood or young adult years; according to Michelle, “Typically, we send our children off in twos, because there’s more ability to stand firm and to stand strong when you’ve got two together. I know the Lord Jesus sent out his disciples by twos and we feel like we’re sending out disciples and so we try to do that with ours” (S11E9). All of these family rules suggest an abiding concern in the danger of exposure to spiritually endangering stimuli. Concern is especially seen over men’s exposure to visual stimuli that might tempt them into sexual sin. Women are understood to be able to handle the risk of seeing immodest clothing or sexualized images to a much greater extent.<sup>103</sup> This is because of a belief about the intrinsic, different natures of men and women: men are understood to respond more to sexualized, visual temptation, whereas women are understood to respond to verbal or written, romantic temptation.<sup>104</sup> Due to this belief, women are often actively

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<sup>102</sup> This activity is not limited to the Duggars alone. On S1E14 of *Bringing Up Bates*, the family spends part of the day at the beach. The viewer watches as they avoid crowded parts of the beach where there might be a lot of “immodestly” dressed beachgoers; the male members of the family who go in the water wear full street clothing so as not to sacrifice their own modesty (though some of the girls do have specially tailored, “modest swimwear”).

<sup>103</sup> For example, in the lead up to Jessa’s wedding, viewers of *19 Kids and Counting* watched her, her sisters, her mother, and her grandmother look at a variety of dress styles on the Internet. Though the dresses that were selected as bridesmaid dresses did not meet the modesty standards of the family and had to be altered, no concern was expressed about the women looking at images of online models wearing the original, unaltered dress.

<sup>104</sup> In a lecture entitled “Vital Truths We Wish We Had Known before Marriage,” originally given at an ATI conference, Gil and Kelly Bates elaborate on this point of view. Kelly explains, “For a guy, his weakness may be through his eyes, through his eye gate, but for a girl, it’s in her mind.” She goes on to

discouraged from reading romances or watching movies that portray worldly relationships, but concern is rarely expressed over the possibility that exposure to obscene or suggestive imagery might lead women into pornography addictions the way it is assumed such exposure will do for men.<sup>105</sup>

The strong credence the Quiverfull movement gives to the threat of pollution, such that even a small dose of worldly pleasure or worldly temptation can rapidly produce a downward spiral, is discussed in by Gil and Kelly Bates in their lecture, "Vital Truths We Wish We Had Known before Marriage." In it, Gil relates the story of a father who came to him for advice about his twelve-year-old son. The son had been allowed to go to another boy's house for his first sleepover, and his father, nervous about the situation, had given his son his cell phone in case he needed to call him. When he picked up the boy the next morning and retrieved his phone, he learned that the two twelve-year-olds had spent the night viewing pornographic images. The father asked Gil what he should do about this situation, and Gil explained how difficult the situation would be. According to his lecture, he told the father that the boy could not be trusted, and that he would therefore have to develop a close relationship with him, so that he would tell him all of his temptations and struggles, because "he won't

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elaborate, "A woman's mind, that's where she struggles. She's living out these romantic fantasy, and there's romance novels and there's now even so-called Christian romance novels, because that's where the girl's, the wife's, struggle is."

<sup>105</sup> This is something that the older Duggar daughters discussed at length in their 2014 book *Growing Up Duggar*. In it, they provide the following explanation: "One girl told us recently, 'I was in love with the thought of being in love, and it consumed me every waking hour.' This is one of the greatest dangers of romance novels. They paint a picture of an unrealistic, unobtainable relationship. It's the same thing pornography does to men. Viewing pornography gives them a distorted view of women that leads them down the path of immorality and guilt" (111).

even be safe around his brothers and sisters.”<sup>106</sup> In Gil’s reading, the boy has allowed corruption into his heart, and he is now a danger not only to himself, but to all the people around him.

Because of their careful program to avoid exposing the young people in their movement to outside temptations, Quiverfull discussions of past temptation are often presented in ways that are intentionally vague. Returning to the lecture of “Vital Truths” that Gil and Kelly Bates present at ATI, Gil explains to his audience that he didn’t have the teaching that they grew up with, which meant that he didn’t have the advantage afforded by growing up in the kind of “joyful, protective home” that he believes people growing up in the Quiverfull movement can be expected to experience. As he outlines the differences in his own experience, he mentions the lack of frequent Bible reading or church attendance involved in his upbringing. Later, when he and Kelly discuss their process of getting married, parts of the discussion become less clear. They mention that they had both dated, and that the process of dating had opened them up to temptations that continued into their marriage, and Gil mentions that since he was used to looking at other women, he continued to do so once he had married Kelly, but they do not specify the particulars of their struggles. The Bates go to significant lengths to convince their audience that dating is a peril to be avoided at all costs.

Within this lecture, an anecdote is provided wherein Zach Bates, Gil and Kelly’s oldest son, came to tell his parents about the conversation he had with a young girl’s father on the

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<sup>106</sup> The reason for building a close relationship here is clearly one of surveillance. This is in keeping with the kind of relationship that Quiverfull adherents strive to build with God, and should be seen through that lens (though certainly this brings to the fore Quiverfull relationships with the idea of state surveillance--state surveillance would be welcome in the theocratic model that is suggested by the movement, but is not welcomed in the same way when it comes from the secular state).

occasion of asking if he could begin a courtship with her. He explained that the father of the girl asked, “Son, when’s the last time you saw pornography?” To this question, Zach was able to assert that he had never seen pornography, only the suggestive images on magazine covers at the grocery store and on billboards, which he had done his best to avoid looking at. As the Bates relate it, Zach recounted this story while crying and expressing his gratitude that his parents had helped ensure that he was never exposed to pornography and could therefore provide evidence of himself as a Godly young man.<sup>107</sup> There is consistent discussion within courtship lectures and materials about not having to admit to a prospective father-in-law a former battle with pornography; it is asserted that redemption is possible, but the path to it is depicted as narrow.<sup>108</sup>

Quiverfull adherents enforce standards of purity meant to ensure obedience to proper authority through the restrictions discussed above; they also find more positive methods by which to ensure that family remains the core of their everyday lives. The primary method used is to integrate the family into all the tasks and situations of daily life, so that the family becomes a single entity united in moving through its day. Quiverfull adherents believe this is what God intends and that it used to characterize Western culture, as seen in their

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<sup>107</sup> This demonstrates the way in which rhetorics of fear and purity are tied together. The Quiverfull movement very effectively paints any exposure to “worldly” influences as a very significant danger, and children are often hyper aware to the threats to their purity. This process is also fairly isolating—Zach is grateful because he has passed one of the many tests he needs to pass in order to get permission to marry a young girl with his values. If he were to have been exposed to sin in a serious way, his marriage prospects would be severely limited. For people watching the reality TV shows in which the Bates participate, this might seem strange, but of course it is necessary to remember that, for Zach, a marriage must be conducted in the way his family and the families surrounding him approve of if he is to remain within his family and his community.

<sup>108</sup> Indeed, the stakes for Quiverfull men are significantly high: if they cannot convince a prospective father-in-law that they will honor, respect, and protect his daughter, they are unlikely to be able to marry anyone within their faith community, which might mean that they are unable to find a marriage partner at all.

concern that current societal structures are actively anti-Christian. As Anna Sofia and Elizabeth Botkin explain it, Christians “don’t realize that new practices like age-segregated classrooms and age-segregated church services were devised to split up the family by fostering peer-dependence instead of family-dependence, promoting disloyalty to family ties, traditions, and religion” (174). According to the Quiverfull worldview, families are intended to be integrated units, sharing a singular purpose and set of goals. Families are the safest place for children, because it is within the family that children learn to understand the way in which marriage imitates the relationship between Christ and the church, and it is within families that children are completely immersed in the Quiverfull worldview.

For this reason, Quiverfull adherents almost universally support homeschooling as their educational ideal. The Duggars explain the reason for this in their second book, *A Love That Multiplies*: “we decided to homeschool so we could be the primary influence on every aspect of our children’s lives. We wanted to keep them at home with us so we could teach them character as well as academics. We wanted to train and prepare them to be successful adults with many skills but also, and most important, with hearts devoted to God” (112). Though many Christian schools place more value on Christian faith than on academics, such environments present a wide array of influences that could potentially undercut the authority of parents: peers, teachers, administrators, guest speakers, and materials that Quiverfull parents might not approve of. With homeschooling, Quiverfull parents can carefully control all aspects of education and ensure that any outside materials or instructors—the Duggar children, for example, had tutors in subjects that Michelle did not feel qualified to teach—agree with their values and are kept under their watchful eyes.

Many of the homeschooling materials that Quiverfull adherents use are supplied by the IBLP, through their Advanced Training Institute International (ATI). The ATI curriculum is structured around the Bible, and especially around Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament book of Matthew. As they explain the basis of the materials, "ATI training begins with Scripture and combines valuable academic information with character training and Biblical life principles. Each Wisdom Booklet is a **unit study** that amplifies a section of Christ's **Sermon on the Mount** through practical instruction in linguistics, history, science, law, and medicine" (emphasis in original text).<sup>109</sup> ATI's curriculum is organized around teaching children the tenets of Quiverfull believe and demonstrating how the world is in complete harmony with those beliefs.

ATI provides prospective parents with a sample Wisdom Booklet. That booklet, *Wisdom Booklet 4*, focuses on that character quality of humility, which it defines as "recognizing that it is actually God and others who are responsible for the achievements in my life" (cover page). This wisdom booklet is based around Matthew 5:4, an early verse of the Sermon on the Mount, which states, as quoted on the wisdom booklet's front page, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."<sup>110</sup> The booklet quickly makes clear that the mourning being discussed is not grief over a lost love one or some other traumatic loss; instead, the mourning to which Jesus refers is about repentance from sin. The wisdom booklet first gives what it identifies as the Greek word for mourning --πενθῆω--which it defines as "to lament, to grieve, to be sorrowful over our sin" (4). The booklet explains that "true repentance

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<sup>109</sup> See "The Curriculum" on the ATI website.

<sup>110</sup> The second page of *Wisdom Booklet 4* informs the reader of the booklet that "All Scripture verses are quoted from the King James Version of the Bible, unless noted otherwise."



is the result of dealing with sin rather than sin's consequence. Sin is refusing to honor God as God. It is rejecting the Lordship of Christ and making myself the "boss" of my life" (3). In this definition, sin is cast as primarily being about an individual usurping God's authority and making decisions that are not aligned with God's will.

To connect this spiritual lesson to academics, the wisdom booklet draws connection between the concepts of mourning sin and being humble to areas it calls "linguistics, history, science, law, and medicine" (5-6). Often, ATI's definitions of these spheres explicitly deviate from convention academic definitions of their parameters; for example, they consider Biblical prophecy to fall under the realm of history and teach Biblical prophecy to children through the wisdom booklet curriculum. In all cases, these spheres are filtered through Biblical application. Pages 17-27 of *Wisdom Booklet 4* focuses on "How to break up 'fallow ground' in your heart," predominantly discussing the process by which Christians can reject sin; throughout that section, students also learn how a plow operates in an agricultural context" (17). That lesson gets cemented in the science section, at the end of which students are told where to find "the principle of the plow pan" in the Bible (39). In the history section of the booklet, the focus is on the life and work of Jonathan Edwards, the American preacher heavily involved in the religious shift known as the Great Awakening. Student are provided a timeline at the bottom of this lesson that provides the major events in history from "Creation" to the "Gulf War" (33). In the "Authority through Accuracy" section, students are asked to use the Bible to calculate how many people were in Nineveh when God sent Jonah to warn them that their city was about to be destroyed (41). Students also learn important lessons about the mathematical concept of "pi," including how they can "use the concept of  $\pi$  to estimate the size of Nineveh" (42). In the law section, students learn the "ten cardinal rules of cross-

examination” and are taught how to apply them to examine their own state of sinfulness (43). In the medicine section, students learn about human metabolism by examining how “mourning affect[s] appetite” (58). *Wisdom Booklet 4* concludes with a copy of the music and lyrics to the hymn “Amazing Grace” (64).

*Wisdom Booklet 4* clearly demonstrates the importance of authority in Quiverfull life. Not only are children (and all believers) supposed to treat figures of authority with obedience and respect, a principle that will be elaborated upon during the examination of Character Booklet 5 below, but priorities of knowledge themselves focus around the authority of God as understood through the Quiverfull interpretive lens. Aspects of the world are, for Quiverfull adherents, only worth knowing about to the extent to which they fit into and reflect God’s master plan.

ATI also provides Character Booklets that reinforce the information disseminated by the Wisdom Booklets. Character Booklets focus much less heavily on academic study than do Wisdom Booklets, instead prioritizing moral instruction and self-reflection. Character Booklet 5 focuses on the character trait of orderliness and does an excellent job demonstrating both the child training practices that ATI families follow and Quiverfull understandings of the role and function of authority.

Character Booklet 5 begins by defining orderliness in the following way: “orderliness is bringing everything within my jurisdiction into conformity with the purposes for which it was created” (1). This definition directly raises two key concepts that structure the Quiverfull understanding of authority. First, the definition includes the concept of the jurisdiction. This concept permeates Quiverfull writing, especially writing that is directly on the concept of child training; it is also a word heard frequently on *19 Kids and Counting*, especially in the earlier

years of the show when the focus is more on managing everyday life with a house full of young children (S1E8). It is used in two primary ways. First, it is understood as one's proper sphere of authority, the place or people over which one rules. A father's jurisdiction is the family; a mother's is the running of the family: "God has given your father the authority to give overall direction for the family and your mother the authority to work out practical steps to carry out that direction" (14). Second, the term jurisdiction is used to indicate that authority has been delegated. God, with ultimate authority over all creation, has delegated to parents certain forms of authority. Parents, in turn, delegate certain spheres of authority to their children. In the Duggar household, for example, this means that each child is delegated a part of the home (either a specific space, such as the living room, or a task, such as the laundry) over which they expected to take charge and ensure that all is functioning in an orderly way. They hold authority over that space or task because they have been given that authority by their parents, who in turn have received that authority from God.<sup>111</sup>

The second authority-related concept is encapsulated in the words "the purposes for which it was created." According to the Quiverfull understanding of the world, all things were made by God to fulfill certain roles and to achieve certain goals. As the Character Booklet 5 explains shortly after defining the word orderliness, "the word orderliness presupposes design and function" (1). Each person must determine their proper role, and they must do so based on the pattern that God used to create and order the world. That pattern means that

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<sup>111</sup> Outside of the Quiverfull context, jurisdiction has associations with law and order, and Character Booklet 5 does not shy away from characterizing orderliness as having a militaristic cast. For example, it conveys the following message to its readers: "In the late 1500s, the word order was used as a military term to describe the formation of an army. The term came to be used as a verb as well when orders were given to get in battle formation" (1). This characterization is not anomalous; military language and framing is common within Quiverfull literature; indeed, it at least partially structures the Quiverfull understanding of the importance and function of reproduction within Christianity.

roles are socially determined rather than individually determined: a daughter is meant to fulfill a certain function, which overlaps with but is also different from a son's, and the individual characteristics of each daughter are less important than the role in which she is placed in the social hierarchy.

In the Quiverfull model, one's social role is always relational and determined by its position vis-a-vis others. In discussing orderliness, the booklet describes six figures of authority in relationship to which a child needs to pursue orderliness: God, parents, conscience, teachers and elders, civil authorities, and employers" (2).<sup>112</sup> The booklet then provides examples of Jesus demonstrating order in relation to all of these figures.<sup>113</sup> Here, Quiverfull children are exposed to analogy, the most utilized device in Quiverfull teaching: the faithful, though unlike Jesus because they are fallen and he is perfect, are to imitate and become like him as much as possible. Jesus is offered as both a strong example of the fact that orderliness is divinely ordained and as an example of how to engage in one's own life in an orderly fashion. Using Jesus as the center of the analogical lesson is also meant to demonstrate to children that God's order is consistently applied to all beings and across all contexts.

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<sup>112</sup> The role that orderliness with civil authorities plays will be discussed in the section of this chapter that deals with the Quiverfull understanding of the role of the state.

<sup>113</sup> Such examples are highly selective; they strategically leave out such examples as Jesus going to the temple without telling his parents where he was, as described in Luke 2: 41-52, or Jesus cleansing the temple of moneylenders, as described in John 2:13-22, despite the fact that the moneylenders are there with the sanction of community leaders and teachers. This is not to argue that there aren't exegeses that could be offered that would fit in with an exhortation to orderliness; it is, however, of note that the character booklet chooses to present examples that don't in any way engage with actions of Jesus' that are nuanced enough to need to be explained or analyzed.

Orderliness is also presented as being consistent with God's plan for the historical unfolding of humanity's time on earth. The pamphlet explains "God's order and purpose in history" as follows:

Since Creation, God's goal has been to raise up Godly families. Sin corrupted the world; God preserved families through Noah. God promised to bless every family through Abraham's seed. Through David's descendants came the line of Christ. Christ taught how families are to live together in love and truth. All believers are to proclaim truth and encourage Godly families. John foresaw that people, families, and nations will all be judged. (4)

In this explanation, history is presented specifically as unfolding through the lens of the family. The booklet seems to anticipate that there may be an objection to using the family as the defining object of history, as after the path of history is traced out, the booklet adds an addendum: "raising up a Godly seed is only one of God's purposes through history. His primary purpose is the plan of redemption, and His desire is that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance. As we dedicate our lives to His purposes, we will find outward order and inward peace" (4). The remainder of the booklet nonetheless gives heavy focus to the role that families play in maintaining God's order.

The final overall lesson that the character booklet offers is that orderliness should extend to all aspects and moments of daily life. For each of the six authority figures to whom a person owes an orderly response, a detailed list of how to provide that response is included. Instructions range from sweeping applications such as "dedicate all your possessions to God" to detailed applications such as "show order in your dress," because "casual dress tends to produce casual attitudes, and sloppy dress communicates a spirit of disorder and disrespect"

(14, 17). Because orderliness is a character quality, Quiverfull adherents believe that it should permeate all of an individual's actions. Furthermore, orderliness is essential to demonstrating proper deference to authority.

Since authority forms the core of daily life, Quiverfull families demonstrate significant focus on ensuring that proper authority structures are not compromised. One of the ways that they work to accomplish this is by ensuring that members of the family remain in direct contact as often as possible. We have discussed how this is accomplished in the context of school, and a later section will address how this applies within the church context, but it is far from only school and church that are structured around family integration; even social gatherings are designed to prioritize the family. This means that contact with peers occurs primarily within the context of family and church, because peer relationships are meant to be supervised and subordinated to the family context. This is seen in the setup of courtship, discussed earlier in this chapter. It is also seen in the way that everyday life is structured within Quiverfull families: even when children are encouraged to develop particular talents—as, for example, Jinger Duggar was encouraged to master photography—they are charged to use those talents first and foremost within a family context.<sup>114</sup>

The fact that the Quiverfull movement treats the family as the basic social unit is apparent on *19 Kids and Counting*, *Counting On*, and *Bringing Up Bates*. Watching both the Bates and the Duggars, one is consistently presented with activities the family is encouraged

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<sup>114</sup> Interestingly, one of the places where Quiverfull children are separated from their parents are the greatest length is at ATI Family Conferences. Although worship is conducted with the entire family present, the conferences split children into gender-segregated age groups, and they conduct activities separate from their parents and often from their other siblings. Perhaps this is a space in which Quiverfull adherents feel that ideological purity is strong enough to prevent possible corruption.

to participate in as a group. Events that are profiled on the show are often events that involve the whole family, such as parties, get-togethers, and activities. When they are not, they are activities that appeal to a certain demographic within the family, such as the older girls. Friends are sometimes present for these activities, which means that they are seen on camera, but only within the context of the larger family group. The lack of certain activities—participating in individual sleepovers or going to the movies—is not mentioned and, therefore, rarely seems to draw audience reaction. Children are, until they reach adult age and actively begin the process of seeking out marriages and families of their own, almost always seen within the contexts of their families.

#### Preparing Children for New Authority-Based Roles: Marriage and Ministry

Although all Quiverfull children are expected to submit to the God-ordained authority of their parents, and especially of their fathers, behavioral expectations are different for male and female children. Ultimately, this is based on the marriage roles, discussed in detail above, for which parents are preparing their children. Sons are meant to form new households; as such, they need to be prepared to take on the mantle of authority, to serve as leaders, and to be independent providers for their wives and children. Daughters need to be prepared to be helpmeets to husbands, to be properly dependent but simultaneously effective, and to accept the protection and direction of authority. For this reason, the relationship between daughters and fathers is particularly emphasized. A daughter remains under the authority of her father until she is transferred to the authority of her husband, whereas a son gradually gains more of his own authority to prepare him to assume a fully authoritative role on the day of his marriage.

For Quiverfull families, the process of training daughters to be effective and submissive “keepers at home” begins at a young age and continues up until marriage. In *So Much More*, the Botkin sisters include an interview with their father, who explains how this process worked in their family:

The fathers need to articulate a vision, and they can do this in stages for girls who are very young. You knew when you were five, six, and seven how important our home was in helping people. As you helped in the home, you knew you were important to the overall vision. Little by little you learned that your mother and I were discipling others in much the same ways we were discipling you. I was able to show you how valuable you were in helping us show hospitality to others. You came to learn that everything you did to help was highly important to the overall mission. Watching the baby, changing a diaper, or sweeping the kitchen floor were jobs that had eternal value, because it helped your father and mother spend more time with the people they were trying to help. I made sure you knew this. When people’s souls are changed so that they think differently and act differently, history changes. The consequences are eternal because souls are eternal. (318)

Daughters are taught to perform domestic tasks from a very young age; those tasks are put into the perspective of helping to carry out the family’s ministry of encouraging the faithful and propagating patriarchal Quiverfull worldviews. Such perspective discourages daughters from thinking of the chores they are completing as drudgery: they are serving their family and allowing its better-equipped members to win eternal souls for God’s training. In child training, authority is explicitly paired with vision in order to make its dictates fulfilling.



This method of training is also seen on *19 Kids and Counting* and *Bringing Up Bates*: viewers have access to multiple episodes that demonstrate the older Duggar and Bates daughters carrying out the chores essential to the daily running of the household.<sup>115</sup> On those shows, the primary emphasis placed on the roles the girls fill is one of practicality—the message is that a big family manages with everyone pitching in—but the ways in which their roles help their family to be able to extend their ministry activities are clear. The roles they fill often free their mothers up for other tasks; in the case of the Duggars, those tasks might include working on one of the family’s publications, giving a radio interview, etc. As the daughters get older, their younger sisters step in to allow them to do the same: *19 Kids and Counting* profiled Jana’s activities in serving as a mentor to young women in the IBLP’s Journey to the Heart retreat program. And of course, projecting their family structure and faith to a broad audience through reality TV serves as its own kind of ministry, something that will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

As the girls in Quiverfull families complete domestic tasks for their families and learn how to serve in ministry roles, they also practice the principle of Biblical submission. Because they do not have husbands to whom they must submit, they are expected instead to submit to the vision and authority of their fathers. This practice is modelled extensively by the Duggars. It is, for example, seen in the Duggar daughters’ commitment to modesty in their

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<sup>115</sup> See, for example, S1E1 of *Bringing Up Bates* and S1E7 of *19 Kids and Counting*. Indeed, this practice garners a good deal of online criticism from viewers (and many non-viewers) who believe that the Duggar daughters are being exploited and that they are being asked to take on responsibilities that are the proper purview of a parent. That critique is especially made when the Duggar daughters are actively involved in caretaking their younger siblings. This viewer reaction is so common that oldest Duggar daughter, Jana, who remains unmarried and living in her parents’ house, is sometimes referred to as “Cinderella Duggar.” See, for example, Amy Schaeffer’s *Inquisitr* article, “Why Jana ‘Cinderella’ Duggar Turns Down Offers of Courtship.”

book, as discussed above; it is sometimes more subtly hinted at, such as in S3E6 of *Counting On*, when 26-year-old Jana Duggar, in the midst of a house renovation project, discusses the fact that the budget, like all project budgets, is set by her father. It is also explicitly advocated by Quiverfull adherents, especially those who were associated with the now-defunct Vision Forum Ministries, run by Doug Phillips with help from Anna Sofia and Elizabeth Botkins' father, Geoffrey Botkin. Indeed, such Quiverfull organizations have produced extensive materials—including books, audio recordings, films, retreats, and conferences—designed to exhort families to think about their responsibilities towards their daughters as being primarily about preparing them for wifehood and motherhood; those materials and that vision has become one of the primary ministry goals of several Quiverfull families, the Botkins foremost among them.

Of all of the texts created advocating for a return to “Biblical Daughterhood,” or a lifestyle in which unmarried daughters submit completely to the guidance and “protection of their fathers,” the most revealing may well be the documentary-style video the Botkin sisters produced in 2007, *The Return of the Daughters*. That film aims to convince its audience that daughters are best served—and best serve the commands of God—by committing themselves to being their fathers' helpers until such time as they marry.

Anna Sofia and Elizabeth Botkin frame their film specifically around the Quiverfull goals laid out earlier in this chapter, explaining in the film's narration that the message they are sending is part of “a big vision of family and cultural reformation,” that serves as a counter to a contemporary culture that is “an aberration.” They inform families watching that “we live in a period of transition from a fiercely anti-Biblical society to a more Biblical society” and invite those families to join the movement back to a period of blessedness by keeping their

daughters at home so that those daughters can become part of the process of “changing history for the better as they return to God’s law.”

Interspersed between narrative framing moments are profiles that the Botkin sisters provide of several families who are committed to keeping their daughters at home and having them serve the father-led, family-oriented mission. The daughters—who range in age from late teens to late twenties—are shown doing a variety of tasks: bookkeeping for a family construction business, discipling younger women at church, cooking complex and appealing-looking family meals, and serving as a research assistant for a father’s writing projects. All are cast as following the guidance of their fathers in all of their activities; all are shown learning skills and having access to a wide range of engaging and challenging tasks.

The case study the Botkins offer of Jasmine Baucham is especially instructed. Jasmine, 17-years-old at the time of the filming, is depicted as a daughter who once had worldly ambitions--she was planning to study at a major university and pursue an independent career--until she realized that the “Holy Spirit was convicting me” to increase her dependency on her family, particularly on her father.<sup>116</sup> She then abandoned her career plans and devoted herself to doing whatever her father asked of her. In the film, her father, Voddie Baucham, himself the author of several Quiverfull books, claims that Jasmine was experiencing the curse of independence that women face due to Eve’s fall in the Garden of Eden, and explains that women are designed to desire their husbands as part of their nature. He explains that Jasmine

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<sup>116</sup> Jasmine did not discuss how the Holy Spirit convicted her of this belief. In Quiverfull circles, conviction is seen as something that involves emotional and spiritual struggle (the specific ramifications of the term “conviction” will be discussed in detail in a later section), but it can often be helped along in a variety of ways, including Biblical discipline, i.e. corporal punishment, provided by the family, and sometimes by programs offered by groups such as IBLP that impose strict limits on adolescents and remove them from exposure to any influences that are not IBLP-approved by segregating them from society for a specified period of time.

is being better served because her gifts are being developed “as she works [for] and serves her father.” This is in part cast as an issue of propriety: if Jasmine were to go out into the world, she would be serving a boss, a stranger, rather than her father; in doing so, she would be opening herself up to danger because she would not have her father’s protection. Jasmine, who is African-American, brings in the issue of racism to shore up this view. She explains that, as a black female, she is a double minority, but that working for her father protects her from that challenge: “in my household, I don’t have to feel like a double minority.” Women can be protected from all manner of social ills by placing themselves under their fathers’ authority.

In the Baucham family’s framing, daughters should stay at home for a wide variety of reasons: it is safer for daughters to work closely with their father rather than with another man, it provides them with the skills they will need to fulfill their sacred duties as wives and mothers, and it keeps them oriented towards their proper nature, rather than threatening their purity (both their sexual and their spiritual purity) by exposing them to outside influences. They remain firmly within the realm of the family, not leaving it except to move from one family to another when they marry. Indeed, in the ideal Quiverfull worldview, their lives will change as little as possible with that transition: as the Duggars so often explain it, the Quiverfull goal is that daughters find husbands who are as close a match to their fathers as possible.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> See *Growing Up Duggar*, p. 150. The “Biblical Daughterhood” movement does not explicitly address mainstream social concerns that this close of a relationship between a father and a daughter might signal impropriety, sexual or otherwise. It also does not discuss the tension felt in Quiverfull circles around the transfer of a daughter to a husband, though this is a significant concern within the movement. This is why courtship is often such a fraught process: Quiverfull women are expected to fully submit to their husbands, even if the husband’s will deviates significantly from her father’s. Quiverfull families often devote significant energy to finding young men whose views and lifestyle are as identical to theirs as possible. The motivation for this is indeed partially religious, but it also

Up until this point, this section has focused in detail on the training of daughters. Sons, too, are trained to fill specific life requirements: first and foremost, those of husband and father, which, for Quiverfull adherents, transfers to leader, protector, and provider. It is difficult, however, to find detailed literature on the training of sons: there is a large selection of available materials that discuss how to raise a daughter with appropriate Biblical values, and relatively scant materials devoted to properly raising sons.<sup>118</sup> This may be because, though the purpose and reasoning behind them might differ, the roles expected of Quiverfull sons deviate fairly little from the roles sons fill in more mainstream contexts: whether Quiverfull or not, most parents expect sons to prepare for careers out in the world before marrying and fathering children.<sup>119</sup> The expectations on Quiverfull daughters, however, vary significantly from mainstream values related to preparing daughters for adulthood, a fact that was repeatedly discussed in *The Return of the Daughters*. This may also be due to practical reasons: Quiverfull daughters are provided for by their parents fully, with no expectation that they earn their own livelihood directly. Quiverfull sons, on the other hand, are expected to become financial earners as they enter into adulthood: they need to build financial resources to be able to marry within Quiverfull circles. Therefore, perhaps Quiverfull sons have less time to spend immersed in such “encouraging” literature.

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demonstrates emotional tension around the transfer of authority that is believed to occur at the moment of marriage.

<sup>118</sup> The availability of literature and resources aimed at men and women seems to be much more even when that literature is addressed to husbands and wives and to fathers and mother than it is when addressed to parents about raising children or to young men and women about leading godly lives. The reason for this is unclear. Perhaps men are considered in more need of resources when they take on leadership responsibility over a household.

<sup>119</sup> This can be seen in Jim Bob’s invitation to Ben Seewald to come work for him during Jessa and Ben’s extended courtship. See *19 Kids and Counting* S14E1.

It is, however, possible to piece together the training that sons receive as they ready for their marital roles, especially the non-spiritual training. From a young age, Quiverfull sons are generally expected to be financially productive and to gain a broad skill set that will enable them to have both flexibility and security in their role as provider for their future family. To that end, boys are encouraged to begin earning money and saving for their future at a young age. Sometimes, boys are given limits by their parents before they are given parental blessings to begin families of their own—as mentioned above, Austin Forsyth’s father told him that he could not marry until he had flipped five houses, and he could not court until he had flipped four—but the goal is to establish autonomy and the ability to assert and maintain the authority needed to begin a family and to expand Quiverfull vision and ministry.

### Ministry

As can be seen from the above discussion, ministry is an activity that the Quiverfull family primarily undertakes together, with wife and children following the husband’s vision of reaching out to those in need of help outside the family.<sup>120</sup> Ministry takes on both physical and spiritual components, though spiritual outreach is usually the end goal of Quiverfull ministry work. Ministry can be directed at both unbelievers, in order to convert them to the

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<sup>120</sup> Two things need to be noted here. First, husbands do not necessarily take on large family visions without carefully considering the input of their wives (and, indeed, they are not generally encouraged within the Quiverfull movement to do so). Second, marriages are often based on shared vision that both members of the couple bring independently of each other. For example, Jill Duggar consistently expressed a desire to serve as a missionary to another country and to learn Spanish while she was growing up. Until recently, she and Derick were active missionaries in Central America. See, for example, S6E8 and the Season 13 episodes of *19 Kids and Counting* over which Jill and Derick’s relationship develops.

Quiverfull interpretation of Christianity, and it can be directed at believer, to “encourage” them as they “walk through” their daily lives.<sup>121</sup>

A set of excellent examples of the ways in which Quiverfull adherents undertake the task of ministry is seen in the pursuits that the married Duggar children follow. To date, all married Duggar children have pursued or are pursuing career paths that are specifically focused on Christian ministry.<sup>122</sup> Josh, the first to get married, spent a couple of years selling used cars. Due to the popularity of *19 Kids and Counting* and to his family’s appearances on a variety of Christian speaking circuits, he was eventually tapped to lead the political action wing of the Family Research Council, a conservative Christian lobbying organization in Washington, DC. He has since left that position due to personal scandal, but his intent was to commit his career to influencing American politics in a conservative Christian direction.

Until recently, Derick and Jill Dillard worked as missionaries in Central America, for S.O.S. Ministries, an organization that teaches Protestant Christianity and runs orphanages in Central America. The Duggars have a long history with the organization, having completed several missions trips under the sponsorship of the organization, a number of which have been documented on *19 Kids and Counting* and *Counting On*. In their capacity as SOS Ministries staff, Derick and Jill shared their interpretation of the gospel with the people who lived near them, holding Bible studies and retreats. The work they did was largely gender-

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<sup>121</sup> For Quiverfull adherents, only a narrow interpretation of Christian doctrine and moral standards are acceptable’ those who fall outside that interpretation, such as Catholics and Mormons, are not considered to be saved. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>122</sup> Quiverfull couples are not required to do so, as the most important ministry a Quiverfull couple is believed to have is a family. Providing for a family and raising it according to Quiverfull tenets (or what Quiverfull adherents might call God’s plan) takes priority; if that mission can be accomplished through formal and full-time ministry work, then that is an added bonus. The married Duggar children are partially able to do this because they receive income from their TLC show.

segregated: Derick preached sermons and completed village outreach missions and Jill held weekly women's Bible studies in her home and sometimes accompanied Derick in his travels.

Jinger and Jeremy Vuolo are also devoted to full-time ministry: when Jinger married Jeremy, she joined him in Laredo, Texas, where he serves as the pastor of a seed church that follows a Calvinist form of Baptism. Part of the explicit mission of the church is to share the message of the gospel with Catholics, whom the Vuolos, along with most Quiverfull adherents, believe to be unsaved.<sup>123</sup> In addition, Jeremy Vuolo makes a number of his sermons available online.

Ben Seewald, Jessa's husband, has professed that he is in the process of pursuing a career as a pastor; currently, while he completes post-secondary studies, he works part-time for Jim Bob Duggar. In this transition time, however, Ben and Jessa are actively engaged in Christian mission work: Ben has used social media to post a variety of Christian messages and videos, including some interviews with St. Louis, MO-based Christian hip-hop artist Flame. He has also held a Christian football camp that was documented on *Counting On*.

In all of the above cases, the women in the couples function overtly as helpers to their husbands. This is seen in both the fact that they take on household responsibilities, such as infant care, cooking, and cleaning, and in the way in which the majority of them participate in a direct but subordinate role in the husbands' ministries. When ministry-specific activities are

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<sup>123</sup> The reasons that Quiverfull adherents generally do not consider Catholics to be Christian will be discussed in another section; for documentation of this belief, see Jeremy Vuolo's sermon "Philippians: Human Responsibility in Establishing God's Church (pt.2)," available on YouTube.



documented on *Counting On*, those activities are always portrayed as the focus of the men, with the women helping out.<sup>124</sup>

Periodically, Quiverfull women participate in ministry activities that are not directly connected to the primary ministries conducted by their husbands. When these happen, they are almost always gender-segregated activities focused on “encouraging” women in their roles as daughters, wives, or mothers. Such activities are often referred to as “discipling” within Quiverfull circles, and they often take the role of mentorship relationships. In discipling scenarios, Quiverfull adherents reach out to others whom they believe need mentorship and encouragement and form friendships with those individuals through which they can model Quiverfull beliefs, values, and behavior. All Quiverfull adherents can participate in this process—more experienced fathers might “disciple” less experienced fathers, for example, or an older man might serve as a younger man’s prayer partner—but it is especially important for women, as it is one of the ministry methods that is almost universally available to them regardless of other ministry opportunities in which their husbands and fathers ask them to be involved. Older women, for example, are expected to disciple younger women in their process of fulfilling their role as godly helpmeets; older young women often mentor young women who are reaching the age of puberty to guide them in their process of remaining pure.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> See, for example, S3E6 of *Counting On*, in which Ben leads the aforementioned football workshop for children in the local community as, at least in part, a way of proselytizing to them.

<sup>125</sup> The impetus for this kind of ministry comes from the Quiverfull reading of Titus 2:3-5, which exhorts “The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (KJV). Titus 2 will be the focus of closer analysis in the subsequent chapter on ontology.

Discipling younger women takes place within the family context and in gender-segregated spaces.

Instances of such activities are extensively documented on *19 Kids and Counting* and *Counting On*; in various episodes, we see the Duggar sisters speaking to church groups and women's groups and Jill leading a Bible study in Guatemala to encourage young mothers.<sup>126</sup> Most of the Duggar women's speaking engagements are not, however, presented on their reality TV shows; instead, those can be found through both Embassy Media (with a subscription) and through media materials disseminated by a now obsolete Quiverfull organization that was significantly influential in the early 2000s, Vision Forum.<sup>127</sup> These talks are specifically aimed at women who adhere to, or are interested in adhering to, Quiverfull tenets and beliefs—in other words, to women who are explicitly interested in the discipling process—and while they often overlap significantly with information presented on the show, they also explicitly discuss the intricacies of religious belief in a more detailed way than the reality TV platform permits.

One such talk was given by Michelle Duggar to an audience at a Vision Forum-sponsored conference called "The Baby Conference" in 2010 and subsequently released on a video entitled *Tea with Michelle Duggar: A Celebration of Life with America's Most Inspiring Mother*. The talk was structured as an interview, and Michelle gave practice advice to the audience of women about how to parent large families. Towards the end of the interview,

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<sup>126</sup> See S10E10 of *19 Kids and Counting* and S3E1 of *Counting On*.

<sup>127</sup> Vision Forum shut down in 2013, after its founder, Doug Phillips, admitted to having an inappropriate relationship with a female staff member of the organization. (See Sarah Pulliam Bailey's *HuffPost* article, "Vision Forum Ministries Shut Down Due To 'Serious Sins' of Former President Doug Phillips.") Prior to this scandal, Vision Forum was integral to Quiverfull families: it sponsored conferences, published a wide variety of media, and sponsored an annual Christian film festival in San Antonio, TX.

she was asked to comment on the role of *19 Kids and Counting* in her life and the life of her family, and she responded with the following explanation:

I realize, again, that it is not about us, but it is about making Him known, making Christ known, and I think that our heart has been from the very beginning that we said we would be willing to allow the cameras to come into our lives as long as they would not edit out our faith because our faith is the core of our lives, and if they edit that out, it's not telling the truth, the whole story, and so from that, our prayer has been that people would see Christ, that they would see and turn their hearts toward God, and that they would realize that children are a gift and a blessing and a reward.

In this quote, Michelle highlights the ministry that the married Duggars of the younger generation share with their parents and in-laws: being on reality TV. That ministry is important for its ability to speak to both believers in the Quiverfull worldview and to possible converts; it's also important for the role it plays in cementing the role of family in ministry. As the Duggar girls explain it in *Growing Up Duggar*, "Our desire is to build family unity and a oneness of spirit, which comes as we work to apply God's principles to our daily lives. We look at the television show as our family ministry and as an opportunity to tell of God's greatness and His love to those we might otherwise never have the opportunity to meet" (173). Despite the fact that several of the Duggar daughters are now married and therefore might be led away from the Duggar family's engagement with reality TV, they have recruited their husbands to use that format as a way to continue demonstrating their lifestyle and beliefs to their viewers.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Participation in the reality TV show structure serves a second, important purpose for the Duggar families: they make a substantial income from appearing on *Counting On*, which is sometimes the income that allows them to pursue other ministry opportunities. Those ministries are then depicted on

Ultimately, the Duggars use their reality TV platform to extend the analogy that they draw from Ephesians 5. Their marriages and families are meant to serve as reflections of the relationship between Christ and the Church; by putting themselves on display in a television context, they are offering themselves not only as reflections of the ideal spiritual structure that they believe God has put into place, but also as models that can be copied by other families. In this way, the ministry of reality TV in some ways is patterned off of the reproduction that they prize so heavily: though they are not the biological authors of any families who might be inspired to lead lives that follow a similar structure to those of the Duggars, they are the vehicle through which more people join the Quiverfull movement and put its tenets into practice. They are, in other words, actively engaged in the process of recruiting disciples.

Because they are seeking to present themselves as models of a family following God's plan, all aspects of everyday life—those depicted on the show as well as those that are seen by family, friends, and the general public—cannot be separated from the idea of ministry. Quiverfull adherents believe that the daily conduct and demeanor of all individuals should demonstrate the grace of God in their lives; because they serve as mirrors of the relationship between Christ and the Christian church, married couples should work to ensure that all of their interactions are in keeping with the interactions that exist between Christ and his church. Many of the practical ramifications of that belief, including the authority of the husband, the submission of the wife, and the training of the children, have been discussed above. However, it is in this arena of Quiverfull life that some ambiguity is seen. Since

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the show, allowing them to receive a level of publicity they otherwise never would and, indeed, in some cases promoting the name recognition necessary to make those ministries feasible.

husbands are believed to have autonomy as to how to apply the Biblical principles to which Quiverfull believers adhere and wives are expected to follow the decisions made by their husbands, Quiverfull families sometimes choose to demonstrate their beliefs and principles in ways that differ. Such difference is seen both within separate family units and intergenerationally across extended families, and helps to fully flesh out the model of authority that structures Quiverfull life.<sup>129</sup>

Differences among families are most easily noted on *Counting On*. As discussed in the modesty chapter, the Duggar sisters followed a family conviction that all women should wear skirts when they were living in their parents' home, whereas the boys followed a conviction that it was immodest for them to wear shorts. Now that several Duggar children are married, we see different behaviors emerging. For example, Josh Duggar, Derick Dillard, Ben Seewald, and Jeremy Vuolo have all been documented wearing shorts; Jinger (Duggar) Vuolo has been documented wearing leggings, pants, and shorts.<sup>130</sup> As the Internet gossip stream was quick to pick up on, this is because her husband Jeremy supports the idea of pants being included in women's modest dress.<sup>131</sup> It is Jinger's responsibility to follow her husband's guidance; therefore, her post-marriage foray into an expanded marriage is first and foremost a sign of her practicing proper Quiverfull obedience to her husband. The frequency with which she wears pants may indicate that she is glad to have left her birth family's conviction behind, but

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<sup>129</sup> Again, the duty of husbands to determine the proper path for the family to follow does not mean that wives are not consulted.

<sup>130</sup> See the final two seasons of *19 Kids and Counting On* and the six seasons of *Counting On* for examples of the men listed wearing shorts; for examples of Jinger wearing shorts, pants, and leggings, see her Instagram account, @jingervuolo.

<sup>131</sup> See Free Britney's *The Hollywood Gossip* article "Jeremy Vuolo: Jinger Duggar Wears Pants Because I SAY SHE CAN!" for a discussion of this issue from an Internet gossip source.

it cannot be read as an indication of her breaking away from the Duggars' Quiverfull belief system.

Another significant example that ties together the Quiverfull belief in a husband's authority and the possibility of applying principles different arises in a recent trip that Jessa (Duggar) Seewald and her husband Ben took to St. Louis to work with a Christian hip-hop artist known as Flame. Jessa Duggar grew up not listening to genres such as hip-hop, because of her family's belief that certain genres inherently carried sinful influences. As Jessa and her sisters explained it in *Growing Up Duggar*,

Our family does not support the idea of Christians adopting this type of music [rock] or putting "Christian words" to it and bringing it into church, because the underlying message of the music is still the same, and we believe that the combination of the two sends a mixed message. Our God is not the author of confusion but of order, and our lives and even our music should be a reflection of that. We have found that classical music and traditional hymns usually follow a pattern and maintain a very distinct and definite order, and over the years Mom and Dad have encouraged us to pursue those types of music. (163)

Though this was a strong condemnation of musical genres other than classical music and traditional hymns, this was not the Duggar girls' personal condemnation; rather, it originated with the family, under the leadership of Jim Bob.<sup>132</sup> Now that Jessa is married to Ben, her new

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<sup>132</sup> The belief that Jim Bob (and Michelle) have about rock music and similar genres is clearly based on ATI teaching. The FAQ section of the family application to ATI reads as follows: "Music is one of the most powerful influences for good or for evil in the life of a young person. Scientific studies have affirmed the ability of music such as Baroque and Classical to increase the capacity of the mind for creativity and retention of information. The basis of this music's ability to influence the mind is in its mathematical order." The FAQ continues, "On the other hand, rock music (whether secular or Christian), with its repetitive structure, causes the listener to either react or come under the

spiritual authority, hip-hop becomes an available option. The principle at work here is a shared Quiverfull belief in filling oneself with influences pleasing to God, and it is one that Ben Seewald and Jim Bob Duggar both endorse. It is their interpretation of what fits within the parameters of “pleasing to the Lord” that differs.<sup>133</sup> For Jim Bob Duggar, and therefore for his family, hip-hop is of the devil because its repetitious pattern and seductive beat attempt to lure the reader into questionable influences; for Ben Seewald, and therefore for Jessa, it is a tool that can be used to spread the Christian message to a wider range of people than the Duggar tradition of classical and bluegrass music was likely able to reach.<sup>134</sup>

Examples such as this demonstrate that, for Quiverfull adherents, the concept of family centers around the husband-wife unit. Families of origin are not disregarded—indeed, the injunction to honor one’s father and mother is seen as an injunction that must be followed for a child’s entire life—but the authority of the nuclear family unit supersedes the authority of the birth family unit.<sup>135</sup> The authority invested in the husband is essential to the consistency of the Quiverfull family structure and to the sustenance of the belief that husband and wife, once married, function as a single person in a spiritual context.

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domination of the music and the message being communicated by the musicians.” It is noteworthy that though the Duggar girls’ explanation closely matches the ATI explanation (with some confusion over the issue of pattern and repetition), they exclusively credit their parents with this lesson, a credit that demonstrates investment in the authority structure of the family.

<sup>133</sup> See, for example, Jenny Speed’s ATI Conference speech, “The High Road to Failure.”

<sup>134</sup> Ben Seewald is overtly committed to reaching out to members of other races, in particular the African-American community. Such outreach has included relatively sympathetic comments towards the Black Lives Matter movement. For more information, see Ben Seewald’s Twitter account (@BenSeewald) or S2E5 of *Counting On*. Ben’s stance on racism is not generally reflective of the Quiverfull position.

<sup>135</sup> In some ways, this points to a nascent individualism within the Quiverfull movement, though not in any sense likely to be recognized by an audience attuned to modern constructions of the individual. Because Quiverfull adherents believe that husband and wife are one person before God, the unit of most significance to them theologically is the individual.

Although Quiverfull adherents understand the core unit of ministry work to be the family, ministry is one of the key modalities through which the unit of the family and the unit of the church are linked. Family and church serve somewhat different functions, but those functions overlap and facilitate each other. That relationship will be explored in detail in the following section of this chapter.

## **Section 2: The Quiverfull Church**

Though the family is seen as the central unit of authority by Quiverfull adherents—in the words of Anna Sophia and Elizabeth Botkin, “the family is the heart of society; the condition of the family will determine the condition of civilization”—it is not the only unit of authority that Quiverfull adherents recognize (172). Instead, “when God created man, He provided order for society and a structure for the administration of his kingdom. He created three separate institutions: the Family, the Church, and the State (the civil government). The Church was instituted to be God’s ministry of mercy and reconciliation. The State was to be God’s ministry of justice” (Botkin and Botkin 172). The role of the Church within the Quiverfull movement—which encompasses, but is not limited to, the Botkins’ above description—will be discussed presently; the role of the state will be discussed in the subsequent section.

To understand the Quiverfull church, it is important to keep two main points foregrounded. First, for Quiverfull adherents, the church is not a formalized institution. There is no specific Quiverfull denomination or organizational structure; not all Quiverfull adherents agree on all points of Christian doctrine. The church is considered to be the community of the faithful, those granted salvation through the grace of God. Second, the church stems from and is made up of families, which are considered the “heart of society” (Botkin and Botkin



172). The church is not precisely subordinate to the family, but it is dependent on the family for its existence.<sup>136</sup> The church cannot, therefore, be understood outside of the context of the Quiverfull family, because it would not exist if that family were not in place. The detailed relevance of these two aspects of the Quiverfull church are discussed below.

### Differences in Doctrine and Denomination

Quiverfull families do not belong to a single denomination of Christian belief, as the Quiverfull worldview takes precedence over certain doctrinal disagreements that lead to different rules of church governance. That fact notwithstanding, Quiverfull families almost always belong to Presbyterian, Baptist, and a variety of Reformed churches, including ones that do not have official ties with any formalized denomination. Despite their differences, these denominational affiliations share a set of doctrinal beliefs and worldviews that are amenable to the Quiverfull movements. Catholicism and Pentecostalism lack some of the key beliefs and structures to which Quiverfull adherents hold, so though they sometimes share values and ways of life with them, they often exclude members of those groups from their ranks. This exclusion is primarily the result of differences in belief that relate to the doctrine of salvation, church authority structures, and modes of worship.<sup>137</sup>

The core Christian doctrine embraced by the movement is that salvation comes by grace through faith alone. Quiverfull adherents uniformly reject the idea that salvation can

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<sup>136</sup> Indeed, in some ways, the church and the family can be seen as synonymous: when one family holds a worship service in their home on a Sunday, they are considered to be functioning as a church. This belief is drawn from Matthew 18:20, in which Jesus tells his disciples, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (KJV).

<sup>137</sup> The tenets of Quiverfull belief that hold members together as part of a distinct community despite some significant doctrinal differences will be discussed further in both the Ontology and the Community chapters.

be earned, or that good works can play any part in the salvation process, a belief which establishes the Quiverfull movement to be strongly aligned with Protestantism despite lack of a formalized requirement of allegiance to particular denominations.<sup>138</sup> This belief permeates both Quiverfull church statements of faith. It is also visible in institutions associated with Quiverfull belief; as noted above, ATI requires prospective families to explain what they believe the basis for their salvation is before they will be granted membership.<sup>139</sup> This is the only doctrinal question explicitly asked—other application questions focus on lifestyle compatibility issues—which suggests that it serves a gatekeeping function among Quiverfull families.

Despite the relative broadness of denominations to which Quiverfull families can belong, stricter gatekeeping practices often happen within individual church gatherings. There is room for both Calvinists and Arminians at the broader Quiverfull table; there is not always room for adherents to both doctrines at smaller church tables. The manner in which doctrinal conformity is enforced varies--some churches welcome visitors with doctrinal disagreements, while others maintain strict rules about who is allowed to participate in services based on doctrinal adherence--but individual churches are often formed around a core of several families who maintain close to identical doctrinal affiliations.

Such gatekeeping practices often come down to fears of pollution: doctrinal disagreements are seen as bearing with them the potential to corrupt members of the church

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<sup>138</sup> In this instance, Protestant refers to a Reformation heritage as recognized by historians and religious scholars. Among Quiverfull adherents, the term Protestant is rarely acknowledged, because Quiverfull adherents see themselves as returning to the one, true Church (despite some denominational differences). Their characterization as Protestant does help to designate their separation from Christian groups such as Catholics and Pentecostals, however.

<sup>139</sup> For a church statement of faith that reflect this doctrine, see the statement of faith of Jeremy Vuolo's church, Grace Community Church of Laredo.

and lead them astray. For this reason, some of the most heavily policed issues of doctrine are ones that might seem relatively minor, even petty, to outside observers. Such issues are usually ones that relate directly to lifestyle choices and outward appearance. Wearing clothing that the church does not recognize as sufficiently modest—a woman choosing to wear a pair of women’s pants rather than a skirt, in some churches—might earn a member official censure; repeated offenses of such a nature might result in banishment or excommunication.

Such fears of corruption often mean that Quiverfull adherents create their own churches from the ground up. When the Duggars first began their reality TV show, they were part of a home church: a church in which several families gathered together at the homes of members to hold worship services on Sundays, with fellowship meals afterwards.<sup>140</sup> Often, such churches grow in membership to the point where meeting in homes will no longer suffice. When this happens, churches might split, or they might decide to purchase a building and expand the size and public availability of the church. In other cases, churches that become established sometimes create seed churches, sending members from their church to a nearby region to form a new church, in hopes of attracting more like-minded believers and also ministering to the local community. This is the kind of church of which Jeremy Vuolo serves as pastor.

This way of organizing churches, in which Quiverfull churches individually have a lot of autonomy and in which, within churches, doctrine and principles are heavily enforced,

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<sup>140</sup> As indicated in Seasons 5 and 6 of *Counting On*, the Duggars now attend a Baptist church in Fayetteville, AR, near their hometown. It is clear that this church endorses similar values, both because of publicity that the church has received as a result of their relationship to the Duggars and because Joseph Duggar has recently become engaged to the pastor’s eldest daughter.

allows Quiverfull churches the ability to avoid heavy scrutiny and to continue the education of their children in a supportive, sheltered environment. This organizational scheme also allows Quiverfull adherents to main true to their understanding of authority: namely, that it comes directly from God through the Bible and is delegated primarily to the heads of families.

#### Subsection 2: Families: The Underlying Structure of the Quiverfull Church

Quiverfull churches enable families to expand their missions and to gather together with like-minded families so as to gain encouragement and reinforcement of their lifestyle and beliefs, but the root unit of the church is, like the root unit of civilization, considered to be the family. Because Quiverfull adherents understand the church to spring from the family, and because the family is seen as an integral unit that should be kept together in as many ways as possible, almost all Quiverfull churches are “family-integrated” churches, or churches in which all generations worship and study in the same context: there are no separate Sunday School classes or lessons held for children. Instead, services are designed to integrate all members of families, whatever their ages might be.<sup>141</sup>

This structure serves several purposes. First, it reinforces the social modelling, or learning by analogy, which is so important to the Quiverfull understanding of the purpose of the family. Younger children, from a very early age, see people acting out the roles into which they are expected to grow; if they are boys, they learn to emulate the young men in the church as they mature; if they are girls, they learn to emulate the young women. This social modelling continues into adulthood: younger women observe how to become godly older women;

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<sup>141</sup> Jim Bob Duggar discusses the fact that his family prioritizes attending family-integrated churches in SSE15.

younger men observe how to become godly older men. Church provides another setting in which Quiverfull social roles are reinforced.

The reinforcement of these social roles are considered especially important for children, because they are in special danger of corruption, even inside a Quiverfull space. As the Botkin sisters explain it, age-segregated classrooms and age-segregated church services were devised to split up the family by fostering peer-dependence instead of family-dependence, promoting disloyalty to family ties, traditions, and religion” (174). Children who are exposed to long-term, repeated separation from their family structure will come to weigh that structure as less important, and will be more willing to adopt the ideologies, habits, and beliefs of peers than to accept the ones taught to them by their parents. A family’s only way to know that its ideological control is secure is to keep children within its context at almost all times.<sup>142</sup> Keeping children surrounded by family also serves to ensure that teachers, relative strangers when compared to parents, are not usurping the authority of the family, the same rationale that underlies both the justification of and the intense preference for homeschooling within the Quiverfull movement.

Since the Quiverfull church is considered to be primarily a gathering of families that, along with worship, provides encouragement to member of the family to fulfill their appropriate, Biblically-designated family roles, the church functions similarly to the ways that individual families do. Each husband/father, as the head of his family, has equal standing with other heads of household; together, the men of church make decisions for how the church

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<sup>142</sup> The anecdote provided by Gil Bates, discussed above, about a son who was corrupted by a single sleepover at another boy’s house demonstrates the extent to which Quiverfull adherents believe pollution is quick, pervasive, and devastating.

gathering will be conducted, what doctrinal orientation the church will have (if the church hasn't agreed to submit to the doctrine of an organized denomination), what ministries the church will undertake, how church finances will be managed, etc. Women serve similar roles to the role that they fulfill within their own families: they organize and prepare church fellowship meals, they mentor younger women, and they minister to needy members of the church (widows, the elderly, and families who have fallen on hard times, among others) with both encouragement and material support.

Such ministry does not come without qualifications, however. The Botkins explain when help is to be given and when it is to be withheld: "Some women (abandoned, divorced, or widowed) have no family able or willing to support them. If this happens, churches should step in and carefully provide both spiritual and financial protection. Churches have a duty, however, to qualify the help they give. It can only go to those who have proven themselves obedient to God's standards for family-centered living" (109). The authority that is vested in the church is one of doctrinal policing: the church can decide which members fit its agreed-upon model and which members do not. Those members have the ability to conduct their lives as they see fit, but they will not receive the support of the church if they do not conform to the church's standards. If members do submit to the tenets of the church to which they belong, they often rise in prominence and influence.<sup>143</sup> The church exercises its authority by punishing those who deviate from its tenets and rewarding those who conform.

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<sup>143</sup> This structure extends to Quiverfull ministry institutions, such as Vision Forum and IBLP, as well. For a direct illustration of this fact from an IBLP source, see the talk "The High Road to Failure," given by Jenny Speed at the 2014 ATI Conference. In that talk, Jenny Speed discusses the pressure she felt to live up to star families, like the Duggars. She does not blame the IBLP for that pressure--and indeed, her family has become a prominent family within the IBLP context, invited to speak at conferences and benefitting from having its ministry promoted--but she does note the trend that exists within Quiverfull circles to bestow privileges on particular families.

### Section 3: The Quiverfull State:

The complex way in which Quiverfull families simultaneously maintain anti-establishment but heavily conformist ideas in regard to the church can also be seen in their ideas about the appropriate role that the government has within a civilizational context. Quiverfull adherents are very particular about the purview that the state does and does not have, and primarily limits the state's powers to security-related duties, arguing that the state should play little-to-no role in social support or the oversight of families.<sup>144</sup> To Quiverfull adherents, government is seen as having a God-appointed place in the organization of human society, but the limits of government are carefully set to focus around issues of justice and national defense. This is demonstrated by both the Botkins, who explicitly mention justice as one of government's purviews, and the IBLP, which provides the following analogy to children through the platform of Character Booklet 5: "the chipmunk demonstrates one of the primary functions of government when it sounds the alarm against intruding enemies. The chipmunk also represents the way people should respond to government by taking steps to avoid unnecessary confrontations with danger" (18).<sup>145</sup> In this statement, the IBLP is clearly expressing its belief that it is appropriate for governments to provide military defense services for their constituents.<sup>146</sup>

Character Booklet 5 also enumerates the Quiverfull outlook on government more directly. For example, it explains why paying taxes to the government is required: "public

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<sup>144</sup> See pp. 313-315 of *So Much More*.

<sup>145</sup> For the specific citation from the Botkins, see above or their discussion of government's role on page 172 of *So Much More*.

<sup>146</sup> They are also suggesting that Quiverfull families should avoid confrontations with government, and seem to be implying that too much negative contact with government might endanger Quiverfull principles or practices. This theme will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

officials are ministers of God, and, therefore, God instructs us to pay taxes for their support” (18). It also asserts that it is important to obey traffic laws, keep records (such as birth certificates and insurance papers) required by the government, comply with “health, safety, and building codes,” and “support the system of law and order,” since such aspects of government accomplish important functions in making society function in an orderly fashion. The booklet also tells students to make “orderly appeals to government.” Its rationale is as follows: “when officials make a decision that you do not believe is just or proper, go directly to them with your concerns, and make a wise, orderly presentation of your reasons. Never join a disorderly demonstration to produce a show of power or force. Doing so would not only violate the law but would also cause government officials to bring harsh judgment against you” (19). To the list of appropriate governmental activities, the IBLP suggests, it would be appropriate to add monitoring safety and security.

Quiverfull adherents consider a much broader list of possible governmental structures to be inappropriate (as opposed to the view that they consider appropriate), and they spend significantly more time enumerating those limitations. The scope of activities regarding which Quiverfull adherents believe the government does not have legitimate authority to carry out is demonstrated by footnote provided by the Botkins in *So Much More*:

Statism is the rival religion that puts the government in the place of God. The Messianic State assumes God’s authority in the preserving and governing of all His creatures and all their actions. Known in America as the Welfare State or the Nanny State. Its main characteristics are compulsory government schooling, high taxes, an entrenched bureaucracy, police-state powers, and an ever-growing body of laws and regulations. (138)



The Botkins do not elaborate on the parameters of some of the items that they list, so it is unclear what they consider to be the state's appropriate justice-related purview and when the "ever-growing body of laws and regulations" and "police-state powers" crosses a boundary and becomes inappropriate. The footnote, however, certainly indicates what Kathryn Joyce has previously noted in her study of Quiverfull culture, which is that there is a strong streak of libertarianism within the Quiverfull movement (26-27). Such libertarianism, however, cannot be understood outside the context of the Biblical structures of authority that Quiverfull adherents identify. To make this relationship clear, I will examine two areas in which the Quiverfull movement generally believes that government has overstepped its bounds of authority: marriage and education.

#### Marriage:

Quiverfull adherents sometimes disagree on the role that government has to play in marriage; however, they tend to generally agree that God's authority is the only authority that can provide marital legitimacy. This is because marriage is seen as an institution that stems from God's ordering of the world and initial command to Adam and Eve. As such, Quiverfull adherents consider marriage to be a covenant--a sacred promise between two people that should not and, except in extraordinary circumstances, cannot be broken--not a contractual arrangement. Contracts belong to the purview of government, but covenants belong to the purview of God and family.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> See the discussion of covenant marriage elsewhere in this chapter.

Since Quiverfull adherents believe that God has specifically dictated a pattern for marriage, they believe that any state-sponsored marriage laws must follow that set-up exactly: “God ordains authority to establish and maintain order in society. God has ordained authorities in churches, in the government, and in the home. These authorities actually have the responsibility to *represent God* and His laws and standards to those under them” (Botkin and Botkin 198). Quiverfull adherents must obey a government that is “representing God.” When the government is not doing so, a wider set of options opens up, as the Quiverfull adherent has a duty not to perpetuate laws that go directly against God’s teaching.

One option that has opened up and been pursued by Quiverfull adherents is rejection of state marriage licenses. This is an option that the Pearl family pursued; as Michael Pearl explains, “None of my daughters or their husbands asked the state of Tennessee for permission to marry. They did not yoke themselves to government. It was a personal, private covenant, binding them together forever—until death” (“The’ Wedding”). Pearl’s comments indicate a resistance to being officially tied to the government through contractual agreements; his mention of the fact that all of his daughters’ husbands agreed with this decision indicates the existence of significant endorsement of this view in the circles in which the Pearls travel.

Pearl does not see this decision as solely personal. In the blog post in which he discusses that members of his family have elected not to acquire state-sponsored marriage licenses, he articulates the importance of such a choice as a political action: “The sooner there is such a movement [to renounce state-sponsored marriage licenses], the sooner we will have a voice in government. Some of you attorneys and statesmen reading this should get together and come up with an approach that will have credibility and help to impact the political

process” (“‘The’ Wedding”). In this, Pearl is expressing his belief that a large number of people rejecting the state’s ability to sanction marriage will alarm politicians and give Quiverfull adherents a platform from which to influence the state to (re)institute a model of marriage that is in keeping with what Quiverfull adherents see as God’s laws.<sup>148</sup> Pearl also indicates an assumption that his blog post is read widely and by men with influential political positions in American government, though the ground upon which he bases this assumption is unclear.<sup>149</sup>

How has state-sponsored marriage strayed from God’s command, according to Pearl and like-minded thinkers? Primarily, it seems, the issue is the sanctioning of same-sex marriage. Pearl pulls no punches when articulating this as problematic:

So when the sodomites have come to share in the state marriage licenses, which will eventually be the law, James and Shoshanna will not be in league with those perverts. And, while I am on the subject, there will come a time when faithful Christians will either revoke their state marriage licenses and establish an exclusively one man-one woman covenant of marriage, or, they will forfeit the sanctity of their covenant by being unequally yoked together with perverts.<sup>150</sup> (“‘The’ Wedding”)

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<sup>148</sup> There has been some direct legislative pressure on states to accommodate conservative Christian understandings of marriage as a covenant. To date, three states have covenant marriage as an option that couples can elect up marriage. For more details, see Carrie Weisman’s *Altnet* article “‘Covenant’ Marriages--How Some Christian Couples Make It a Lot Harder to Divorce Each Other.” Weisman’s article provides details on the states that allow for covenant marriages and indicates that Jill Duggar and Derick Dillard opted for such a marriage.

<sup>149</sup> The extent to the Quiverfull movement has the ear of politicians is not entirely clear, but is likely significant, given that known Quiverfull adherents, including Jim Bob Duggar and Daniel Webster (father of John Webster, the husband of Alyssa Bates) have served in government at both the state and national levels.

<sup>150</sup> Pearl’s statement is blatantly homophobic in nature. The majority of Quiverfull publications—especially those written in the past decade—have tended to avoid such languages, perhaps to avoid the public backlash that it often brings.

It is in this statement that Pearl makes clear the stakes for which he is arguing. It is not just that the state cannot be considered the ultimate authority on marriage or that the state needs to be encouraged to return to a godly path. Those things are important considerations, but for Pearl, the problem runs even deeper. Quiverfull adherents like Pearl take the state's authority quite seriously, because they believe that authority was granted to the state by God. The state's powers, therefore, have weight behind them. One of the powers that the state is delegated the authority to grant legitimacy to the illegitimate. When the state grants the ability to marry to same-sex couples, it doesn't merely misunderstand what marriage is, it actively changes the definition of marriage, imbuing marriage with characteristics that are, in the Quiverfull understanding, counter to God's plan for humanity. The state therefore actively works against God's plan and threatens the Dominion mandate. As this is done, the authority vested in the state becomes corrupted. Because the authority structure of the state is connected to the authority structure of the family and of the church, such corruption has the potential to spreading to godly men and women and causing them to actively participate in the process of turning against divine law. If the state is not maintaining its proper relationship to authority, it threatens all other relationships of authority that undergird civilization.

Pearl's approach of encouraging his family to reject state-sponsored marriage licenses is not the only one used in Quiverfull circles. Viewers watched Jessa and Ben Seewald both applying for and signing their Arkansas state marriage license on S15E8 of *19 Kids and Counting*, and other Quiverfull families also choose to pursue legally recognized marriage from the government.<sup>151</sup> Most Quiverfull adherents do, however, agree with Pearl's

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<sup>151</sup> See, for example, Peter Telian's film on courtship, *To Be One*, in which at least one couple explains that they are engaged in the practice of covenant marriage but acknowledges having obtained a state

underlying concerns about the dangers of a state which enacts laws that do not match their understanding of Christian morality,

Quiverfull adherents who consider governmental authority structures to be corrupted often explain that corruption as being a byproduct of the corruption of the family. The family is, as discussed in detail above, considered by Quiverfull adherents to be the base unit of society; if it is organized and run in accordance with principles that do not match God's design for it, it should not be surprising that the rest of society follows suit. However, though Quiverfull adherents often support the idea that the inherent problem is located within the family, they offer more than one explanation for how this has come about. The first explanation concerns corruption from within the Quiverfull family model itself and will be discussed below; the second concerns the forces that exert pressure on the family from outside its bounds. That explanation will be explored within the subsequent discussion on the Quiverfull state and education.

Many Quiverfull adherents believe that the weakening of the family results from Christians being seduced by worldly practices and values. Within the context of marriage, a wide range of examples are identified as signs of this weakening, though these examples are rarely agreed upon and function as areas of significant disagreement within Quiverfull circles.

One such example is the example of the marriage ceremony itself. Quiverfull wedding practices range from traditional American wedding structures, as described above in the case of the Duggar sisters, to marriage practices that are meant to imitate marriage practices

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marriage license, though they explicitly explain that that license has much less meaning to them than the covenant they plan to exchange. This view is also reflected in Carrie Weisman's *Alternet* article, mentioned above, that details Jill and Derick's choice to opt for a covenant marriage. Quiverfull adherents believe the covenant is made before and sanctified by God, rather than humans; the state's involvement, therefore, can only be significant in a recordkeeping capacity.

described in the Old Testament of the Bible as much as possible. One of the latter weddings is profiled on the Quiverfull film *To Be One*, which profiles three couples who chose to engage in courtship relationships rather than be involved in dating. Two of the couples involved came from very strict families with very rigid rules on how a courtship should take place; in one of those families, the marriage that occurred was fairly close to an arranged marriage, with the families suggesting the match and guiding the couple through the courtship process.

The father of the groom in the couple described above is a self-described advocate of Biblical-style betrothal; lest he be considered an outlier, consider the following words from Geoffrey Botkin, from his interview in Appendix A of *So Much More*, in which he advocates returning to the practice of a suitor paying a bride price:

With the bride price, both institutions [the family and marriage] are strengthened over many generations. Good daughters attract worthy suitors who have proven themselves good, productive servants. By giving the bride price to the girl's father, suitors also prove they understand the father's authority over the daughter and their subordination to God's order and the father's authority. By giving the gift [dowry] to the daughter, the father signifies his obligations to succeeding generations. (308)

Here, Botkin explicitly advocates applying (his own interpretation) of ancient Israelite marriage practices to modern society. Botkin is, as mentioned above, a highly influential figure within Quiverfull circles, with close connections to Vision Forum, as well as his own "ministry" organization, the Western Conservancy. Despite these views, Botkin does not go as far in his desire to engage in ancient Biblical marriage practices as all Quiverfull adherents, such as those featured in *To Be One*, believe he should.

Even further along the scale of returning to Old Testament marriage practices is Vaughn Ohlman, author of the self-published book *What are you Doing?: A Conversation about Dating and Courtship* and the blog *Let Them Marry*. In his book, Ohlman argues strongly against the courtship model favored by a large number of Christians and by the vast majority of Quiverfull adherents with any kind of public presence. Instead, he insists that Christians have a moral obligation to model their practices off of the practices of godly men and women found in Scripture. Ohlman notes that the vast majority of the marriages described in the Bible were arranged marriages; there are no examples of either dating or courtship off of which Christians can model their own relationships. For Ohlman, it is not enough that something is not expressly forbidden by the Bible; rather, if there is a model or example of a particular kind of behavior, and that model is positively portrayed, then it must be followed absolutely.

*What are you Doing?* explicitly challenges a number of well-known Quiverfull adherents, including Bill Gothard and the Botkin sisters, directly. One of its main critiques of the courtship system, aside from its lack of Scriptural evidence, is that it significantly delays marriage because it places strong emphasis on eligible young people to meet strict moral and spiritual standards. Using I Corinthians 7 as a base, it argues that marriage is a remedy for lust, and that those who are tempted to engage sexually should marry as quickly as possible. Again, one of Ohlman's main issues is one of Biblical authority: all commands in the Bible are to be obeyed as closely to the letter as possible.

In keeping with its argument for following the pattern of Scripture, the book makes the case that fathers should be in charge of choosing spouses for both sons and daughters. The book also rejects state- or church-sanctioned marriage, citing Biblical examples to argue

that a father's gift of his daughter to her putative husband and his acceptance of that gift meet all the requirements of a covenant marriage.<sup>152</sup> Ohlman also rejects adhering to legal marriage ages as determined by the state, though the book is rather cagey in this assertion.<sup>153</sup> The book further argues that marriage is not a state one is supposed to be ready for; rather, it is a state that one should grow into.

One area of difficulty that the book's argument encounters is the issue of consent. In the Biblical examples it cites, it was the cultural norm for fathers to exercise complete rights of disposal over their daughters (and, at least in some ways, their sons); a woman would have grown up expecting her father to choose her husband, and her society would have supported that eventuality. In contemporary, US society, women do not generally accept that. The author provided the example of discussing the principle with his children and having them agree to it and then proceeding as demonstrated in the Bible. The ultimate goal, however, is the reinstatement of the power to marry within a family's--and specifically a father's hands; if such a system were to be realized, modern concerns regarding consent would hold no sway, since a father would be empowered to consent for his daughter (and, indeed, she couldn't offer her own consent that clashed with his).

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<sup>152</sup> This has resonance with the assertions made by Michael Pearl above.

<sup>153</sup> For example, a section of the book discusses that women are ready to marry when they have developed secondary sex characteristics, such as breasts, but it does so indirectly, without mentioning a specific age and without dwelling on the issue in detail. Recently, the author of the book gained public notoriety when his *Let Them Marry* conference was noticed by the mainstream media and he and his ministry became associated with underage, arranged marriage. Once that conference was cancelled, Ohlman's website was largely dismantled, so it is hard to verify the extent to which he was advocating underage marriage. However, it is worth noting that his daughter-in-law's blog, *Diapers, Dishes, and Prince Charming*, which actively supports the arranged marriage practice, pitches itself to "Christian wom[en] above the age of 13."



Ohlman also tackles the role of tradition within the Quiverfull community and expresses concern with the trajectory of the “multi-generational vision” that is at the core of the Quiverfull movement. He argues that tradition should not be followed for its own sake; rather, tradition must be matched to Biblical standards. If it is not—as, Ohlman asserts, under the current system of courtship, it isn’t—then the vision of reproductive dominion is in danger of not being realized. Since courtship systems usually require making sure that young people are “ready” to get married, many young people are not getting married until they are in their mid-20s or later. This is, according to Ohlman, especially a problem for girls, since this means that they are not reproducing during the time when they are most fertile. By pursuing courtship as the appropriate path to marriage, members of the Quiverfull movement are actively sabotaging God’s plan for dominion and, as such, are in direct rebellion against his authority.

Although it is not well-written and is not always well-argued, Ohlman’s book consistently sticks to its principles. Throughout the book, which is structured as a kind of Socratic morality play, it is a family with Middle Eastern first names that serve as the standard bearers of its argument. Sakal and Isha, transplants to the United States, remind the local Christian community what the Bible has to say about marriage. This seems to serve as a strategy for suggesting that American culture has gotten away from Biblical roots by setting itself culturally apart from the regions in which the Bible originated and instantiating traditions that come from cultures other than the one originally chosen by God.

Though they differ in degree, the decision by the vast majority of Quiverfull families, such as the Duggars, to reject dating in favor of courtship, the wedding practices reflected in *To Be One*, and the views of men like Geoffrey Botkin and Vaughn Ohlman all share a common

preoccupation: concern that worldly values have trumped the instructions that God lays out within the Bible for Christians to follow.<sup>154</sup> To remedy this turn to the world, Quiverfull adherents advocate a return to Biblical principles as necessary not only for living a Godly life but for the return of society to a path that God will bless. They place the onus on that return on their children, carefully raising them within a narrow worldview that is created by, and helps to create, their particular interpretation of those Biblical principles. That process of raising explicitly rejects the idea that education should happen in any context except the family.

### Education

According to Quiverfull adherents, the family is the most important institution for maintaining the godliness of society. Closely examining the relationship between Quiverfull marriage practices and the state has allowed us to observe the Quiverfull concern that the family is eroding from within because of its inability to face up to the full extent of God's expectations as laid out in Scripture; examining the relationship between Quiverfull beliefs about education and the state will demonstrate the fears that Quiverfull adherents have about the Christian family being under direct and intentional attack from forces outside it.

Quiverfull adherents argue that the existence of public education at the K-12 level puts the state in a position of inappropriate control over the family. For the vast majority of

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<sup>154</sup> It appears as though there is significant disagreement in Quiverfull circles about whether society should be reformed from within or whether its structures should be rejected entirely because they are corrupt. Prominently visible families like the Bates and the Duggars tend to advocate the former view: in addition to pursuing state-sanctioned marriage licenses when their children wed, they actively participate in politics and community service.

Quiverfull adherents, education is part of child training and should therefore occur under the authority of parents; when the government provides public schooling, it usurps the authority of the family to train its children as it sees fit.<sup>155</sup> As the Botkins explain it, “An education can be defined as the training and shaping of the heart, soul, mind, and strength. An education consists not only in the learning of facts and skills, but also in the developing of affectations and worldview” (134). For Quiverfull adherents, there is only one way that the heart, soul, mind, and strength should be trained: “Godly education is purpose-driven. Because our purpose as young Christian[s] should be to glorify God and obey Him, our education needs to be our tools in this task” (135). When the government provides an education, according to Quiverfull adherents, it is the government that first and foremost shapes all aspects of the children that it educates. When that government is not explicitly Christian, it shapes them away from Christianity, and therefore from glorifying and obeying God.

Furthermore, the Botkins believe that public education is actually teaching children an alternative to religion, because “*all education is inescapably religious*” (134, emphasis in original). In the Botkins’ worldview, and in the worldview of Quiverfull adherents more generally, a person must belong to a religion, and if that religion is not Christianity, it must be a religion that is structured to oppose the tenets of Christianity.<sup>156</sup> The Botkins best represent

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<sup>155</sup> Many Quiverfull adherents see public schooling as just one anti-family practice among many. In *The Monstrous Regiment of Women*, for example, narrator Emily Gunn asserts that Christian families are currently forced to subsidize the following “anti-family” practices: “Medicare, public housing, public school, after-school programs, daycare, welfare, social security, abortion, head start, sex education, [and] school lunch program[s].”

<sup>156</sup> Such binary thinking can be seen in many examples of Quiverfull thinking. For example, it is apparent in Quiverfull understandings of original sin: because of the Fall, humans are inherently corrupt. Corruption is a sign of removal from God’s perfection; because God is good, anything not directly and clearly from God is a representative of evil. There is no grey area to be found. Similarly, Christianity is good; therefore, all things other than Christianity must be evil, and if they are evil, then they are unapologetically opposed to all that is Christian.

this worldview because they so explicitly lay it out. For them, education in service of non-Christian government goals is education that specifically teaches government as the religion that should be followed rather than Christianity.

Quiverfull families generally agree on the importance of homeschooling on the primary and secondary levels, because such homeschooling prioritizes the role of the family and keeps children well within the worldview the family is working to actualize.<sup>157</sup> Higher education is a more complex issue; for the Botkins, the limited use of colleges, almost entirely for males, can be acceptable; the dangers are legion, though, because they believe that the American government (and most other Western governments, as they define them) is currently non-Christian.<sup>158</sup> According to the Botkins, this is a shift that occurred between the middle of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th: “In 1850, every college in America was a Christian institution of higher learning. Most schools attempted to direct students into useful knowledge and virtuous stewardship of intellectual gifts and abilities...By the early 1900s, even the semblance of academic rigor was dying, and now colleges have become intimidating reformatories of anti-Christian, politically-correct accreditation” (136). In the 1800s, they go on to assert, American universities “served the individual and the family,” whereas today, they “serve industry and the political state” (137).

How did all of this change? According to the Botkins, this is part of a battle that has been raging since the development of civilization. The sides of the battle can be understood

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<sup>157</sup> See Joyce, pp. 218-222.

<sup>158</sup> The Botkins believe that this danger exists even in Christian colleges, because Christian colleges accept accreditation requirements from the state. They note that “The Nehemiah Institute has found that the Christian worldview of some Christian college graduates is weaker upon graduation than it was on entering the college. All American colleges were once Christian. The same theologies and ideas that corrupted the older colleges are corrupting the colleges currently labeled ‘Christian’” (143).

simply: the battle has always been between God and humanism. Though humanism as a directly articulated philosophy emerged in early modern Europe, they trace its roots back much further in time:

It's interesting to note that the specific humanist philosophies that dictate education and lifestyle today flowered in Ancient Greece and Rome. In a nutshell, the Greco-Romans worshiped man. They placed great faith in man and worked hard at keeping that faith strong. From a practical perspective, they glorified the body and the mind and devoted their lives to...elevat[ing] them to a divine level. (136)

They go on to warn of the dangers of adopting such an approach: "every society that becomes infatuated with the Greco-Roman curriculum and worldview and puts such an emphasis on human reason and physical development suffers moral decline. The Renaissance and the Enlightenment were steps backward, not forward. Without Biblical wisdom, a nation cannot stand" (136). To the Botkins, humanism is at direct odds with Christianity, and it is the corrupting force that leads nations away from a reliance on God and towards a self-sufficiency that is destructive.

Though the Botkins identify humanism as having existed since ancient times, they locate the blame for America's investment in it in a specific set of historical thinkers: Marx, foundationally, and the Marxist Frankfurt school, operationally. Here, they explain their understanding of the Frankfurt School's influence on American education:

The Frankfurt School faculty (mentioned in Chapter Six) knew that teachers were some of the most powerful and influential people on earth, for they trained and disciplined the next generation. As Lenin put it, 'Through the schools we will transform the old world...the final victory will belong to the

schools...the final sketch plan of the socialist society will belong to the schools.' So the Frankfurt school targeted and took control of the teachers' colleges in order to control what was being taught to the children. In fact, if we were asked to what primary cause we attribute the astounding transformation of Western society, we would reply, to the Marxist infiltration of the teachers' colleges, universities, and schools. Today, the education colleges are hotbeds of religious Marxism, and young teachers are forced to go through possibly the most rigorous courses of indoctrination available in any universities." (157)<sup>159</sup>

Education in America—in fact, as the Botkin sisters assert, all aspects of mainstream American society—has become corrupted from its Christian roots because of a concerted effort by Marxists to hijack the schooling system.

The Botkins are neither alone in this set of ideas, nor are they the founders of it, though they are one of the sources that most clearly articulates it. The next and final section of this chapter will examine the Botkins' claim in more detail. Specifically, it will examine the ways in which the Botkins identify humanism as the enemy *par excellence* of Christian

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<sup>159</sup> Quiverfull reading practices and their implications will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter on Quiverfull ontology, but it bears noting here that the Botkins engage in a very selective form of source research. In the above passage, for example, they cite Lenin indirectly, from a Deerwood Studios documentary called *Certain Failure*. They go on to assert that teaching students must absorb "Frankfurt School doctrines. Not just a few doctrines, but most of them" (157). To back this assertion up, they quote a past NEA president, George Fischer, but they again quote him indirectly, from an article published on WorldNetDaily, called "Is NEA a 'Terrorist Organization?'" (157). The Botkin sisters and their Quiverfull compatriots do not consider this to be inappropriate scholarship, because for them, the most important authority is the Bible: if a source is in line with the Bible as they read it, it is inevitably going to be counted as a valid scholarly source. For my part, I am not interested in refuting the scholarship the Botkins present; instead, I am interested in uncovering how they understand good scholarship and how it helps to structure and reinforce their worldview.

practice, and it will uncover the origin point from which the Botkins derive this idea. This examination will in turn provide elaboration on Quiverfull understandings of authority and explore how they work to provide core structure for the Quiverfull worldview.

#### **Section 4: The Quiverfull Bible: God’s Word vs. Man’s Word**

Perhaps the most important aspect of the Quiverfull authority structure is what it is centered on defining itself against: namely, the Quiverfull understanding of humanism. For the Quiverfull movement, which prides itself on being God-centered, humanism is the ultimate strategy put into place by God’s enemies to counter God’s will for humankind: it is dangerous, because it appeals to humankind’s fallen nature, and it is elegantly ironic, because it capitalizes on original sin and turns it into a guiding principle.

For many Quiverfull thinkers, modern humanism is deeply connected to Marxism, which is its most pernicious form. As the Botkins--who are, as mentioned above, among the clearest sources to articulate this understanding-- explain it, “Marx was a German philosopher who lived about the same time as Abraham Lincoln. He was a Satanist whose objective in life, in his own words, was ‘to dethrone God and destroy capitalism’” (64).<sup>160</sup> At face value, the assertion that Marx was a Satanist is, of course, patently absurd. But within the Botkins’ oppositional understanding of authority structures, it’s almost necessary, since anyone directly opposed to the Biblical values they discern is inevitably in direct service of evil. The Botkins go on to establish just how Marx embodied that evil: he “absolutely hated fatherhood

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<sup>160</sup> It should be noted that while the Botkins do include direct quotes from Marx, they derive those quotes from books, articles, and websites that quote Marx and that endorse their own general understanding of Marxism and its role in society.

and daughterhood. He hated patriarchy. He hated the concept of submission and honor to God-ordained authority...He believed the family stood in the way of his ambitions to replace Christianity with international socialism” (64). For the Botkins, “international socialism” is the religion of the state prioritizing the individual over the family; as such, it is inevitably linked to humanism.<sup>161</sup>

According to the Botkins, Marxism has spread widely in Western society: “practically every person in the West today, including nearly all young women, including young Christian women, look at the world through Karl Marx’s eyes. He has influenced modern thinking possibly more than any other person” (64). Marx became so influential, the Botkins argue, because of the work of the Frankfurt school, which theorized that,

The revolution would be stalled until Christianity was destroyed, not by guns, but by an alternative theology...The Frankfurt School was set up as a think tank in Frankfurt, Germany to develop and teach this new theology as a clever ‘social science.’ They dressed it up as behavioral psychology and used ingenious methods of public relations to get the new ideas into every school, every movie studio, and every university in the West. (Botkin and Botkin 66)

In the Botkins’ view, the Frankfurt School’s main impetus was to systematically destroy every aspect of and support structure behind Christianity: “They identified each main element of Biblical Christianity and then invented its opposite. They preached a strategy called ‘the great

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<sup>161</sup> To scholars of Marx and/or Marxism, it might be hard to see how anyone could think of socialism as an individualistic system, but socialism does privilege the individual citizen as the unit of society’s collectivity, directly countering the authority structures in which Quiverfull adherents invest. Since that is their only concern in evaluating Marxism, it is unsurprising that they consider it inherently individualistic.



inversion,' which was nothing more than the replacement of truth with error, then making error 'politically correct.' Basically, their objective was to turn God's order on its head" (66). As the Botkin sisters continue, they articulate their specific view of both God's order and its opposite:

If the Bible taught a family-based education model, they insisted on forced state schooling (with a curriculum of their own design). If the Bible taught male leadership, they insisted on forced cultural changes to place women over man in every area of society. If the Bible instituted marriage, they insisted on its removal. If the Bible placed high value on children, they insisted on developing a culture of widespread abortion and birth control practices. If the Bible labeled evil as wrong, they defined it as right. (67)

Reading the Botkins' account, one would easily walk away with the idea that the Frankfurt School's philosophy was developed in direct opposition to the Bible, systematically designed to take on and destroy every principle they could determine within it.

The Botkins draw a direct connection between the rise of Marxism and the resurgence of feminism that occurred in Western Europe and the United States in the 19th century. They assert that modern feminism was actually the primary tool of the Marxist takeover: "the goal of Marx's feminism was to Marxise [sic] the thinking of women, then men, then the entire culture. Notice how women were first on the list? Recall that Satan targeted a woman first, too. God's enemies have recognized that women are not only the weaker vessels, and consequently more easily led, but they are incredibly influential over their husbands (think of Eve again) and children" (68). Marx, Satanist that he was, was seizing on the oldest anti-God religion in history: feminism.

For the Botkins, feminism is a form of humanism because “feminism is about ‘self’ and cannot abide the principle of ‘God first, others second, ourselves last.’ The leaders of the feminist movement hate the things of light and love the things of darkness, and they hate the blessings God bestows on those who are faithful and obedient to Him” (71). Since feminists are directly anti-God, Quiverfull virtues such as “purity, holiness, and submission to God and His order are disgusting to them” (71). Feminists, having rejected God’s authority, hate everything that Christians who abide by God’s laws love. According to the Botkins, Marx knew that this was the core of feminism and wanted “simply to use emotionally distraught women to subvert Christian society, then to exploit all who streamed from their homes into the factories” (72). Marx was in on the secret of Eve and all women: at heart, they struggle with an ungodly will that wants to assert feminism over obedience to God’s commands: ““We have a special kind of God-given influence, and we can either use it for His purposes or Satan’s. We can use it to pull ourselves and our culture out of this big mess. We can use it to encourage our fathers and the other men around us become men. We can do this by repenting from our natural inclinations towards feminism and becoming real women” (74). Eve was the very first humanist, wanting to put herself in the role of God, and all of her female descendants have inherited her curse.<sup>162</sup>

The Botkins demonstrate the Quiverfull devaluation of the self as a rubric through which human actions should be judged. The self is, at root, in rebellion against God’s authority

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<sup>162</sup> This is a place where the Botkins’ logic, even within their self-selected authority structure and reading practices, scrapes thin. If Eve struggled so hard with feminism in Eden, then women’s nature must contain feminist tendencies within it. The Botkins, however, identify feminism as categorically sinful; following their logic would mean that original sin existed prior to the Fall and was placed in humans by the will of God. This is a reading the Botkins would categorically reject, but it is suggested by their own discussion of feminism.

structures because it is corrupted by human imperfection and the human desire to take on the roles and authority of the divine. As the Botkins put it, “We have no ‘selves’ that are worth being loyal to. Much of what makes up our natural personalities and the state of our hearts is dictated by our sin natures” and it all needs to be “examined and evaluated against Scripture” (Botkin and Botkin 78). Here, we see that the Botkins believe that all desires had by an individual need to be filtered through the authority of Scripture--God’s unalterable, eternal word--and the authority structures that Scripture establishes.

Scripture, however, is often interpreted in diverse and contradictory ways. To understand how that the Botkins have arrived at their conclusions, it is important to look directly to the words of the closest thing the Quiverfull movement has to a foundation: the seminars given by Bill Gothard, founder of the Institute in Basic Life Principles (IBLP).<sup>163</sup> Gothard provides the basic outlook on humanism that the Botkins and many others have adopted; he also demonstrates the reading practices that structure the Quiverfull movement’s beliefs and overall worldview.

Many Quiverfull families experience a similar path of indoctrination into fully fleshed-out Quiverfull belief. That path involves some sort of initial contact and frequently leads to the Institute in Basic Life Principles and its subsidiary organizations, including the Advanced Training Institute, Journey to the Heart, ALERT Academy, and others. Typically, families first complete the IBLP’s Basic Seminar; they are then vetted, and if approved, are allowed access to the Advanced Seminar. The Basic Seminar is run as a Christian family self-help seminar; the

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<sup>163</sup> The Botkin sisters, of course, follow this path as well; as evidenced by “Appendix A” in *So Much More*, they directly arrived at their conclusions through the teachings of their father. In Quiverfull circles, this aids, rather than detracts from, their credibility and prestige, because it demonstrates proper submission to authority.

Advanced Seminar more clearly lays out core Quiverfull tenets.<sup>164</sup> The first session of the Advanced Seminar is titled “Humanism,” and lays out IBLP founder Bill Gothard’s understanding of humanism as the fundamental opponent of the Quiverfull faithful.

Session 1 of the Advanced Seminar is largely structured around the 1933 “Humanist Manifesto” published in *The New Humanist*. Treating that manifesto as broadly exemplary of humanism, Gothard provides his audience with a handout that he calls “Recognizing the False Religion of Secular Humanism.” That handout provides abridged text from the source document, with underlying and footnotes added by the IBLP. The footnotes explain the primary objections that the Quiverfull movement has to humanism as they interpret it, and include accusations that it is a religion, that its “foundation” is evolution, that humanists reject Christianity and the Bible, that humanism inherently permits “any form of sexual perversion,” that it attempts to “minimize death, “ that it is “opposed to American free enterprise system,” that it supports a “one-world government” and advocates “socialistic communism” (13).<sup>165</sup> Humanism is clearly seen as an all-encompassing system that is opposed to Christianity on multiple levels.

The handout very clearly demonstrates the particular set of reading practices in which Quiverfull adherents engage: namely, approaching a text with an ideology in mind and then

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<sup>164</sup> Both the Basic and the Advanced Seminar are currently available through Embassy Media, the IBLP’s online repository of conference and seminar sessions. To access Embassy Media, an application and a monthly fee of \$9 are required.

<sup>165</sup> The Quiverfull opposition to humanism explains the amount of energy they invest in countering evolution: evolution is, in their eyes, a scientific theory that places the human being at the center of earthly processes and removes the need for a direct, ongoing involvement of the divine in the lives of human beings. Quiverfull adherents also believe that the theory of evolution fundamentally opposes the idea that humans are made in God’s image, as they believe that being made in God’s image means being set apart from the rest of God’s creation. The extent of the irony involved in the fact that opposition to evolution is based on human-centrism is not noted or acknowledged by the Quiverfull movement.

filtering the text directly through that ideology. In fact, Quiverfull reading practices very much mimic the structure of a scavenger hunt: the goal is determined before the reading begins, and clues are hunted within the text to bolster that goal. This reading practice structures how Quiverfull adherents engage with the Bible—a practice that will be analyzed in detail in the subsequent chapter—but also how they engage with reading in an extra-Biblical context.

For example, one of the underlying preoccupations of Gothard's seminar session is advocacy against what he calls "sexual perversion." To keep readers' focus on the underlying sexual propaganda he believes to be in the manifesto, Gothard's handout excerpts the seventh item in the manifesto as follows: "'Religion consists of those actions, purposes, and experiences which are humanly significant. Nothing human is alien to the religious...'" (13, both underlining and ellipsis in IBLP handout). The accompanying footnote explains that "nothing human" includes "any form of sexual perversion" (13). A similar move is made in reaction to item 9, which reads "in place of the old attitudes involved in worship and prayer the humanist finds his religious emotions expressed in a heightened sense of personal life and in a cooperative effort to promote social well-being" (13, underlining in IBLP handout). Handout readers are directed to the same footnote as in the previous example, and references to personal life are equated to sexual perversion.

This interaction with "The Humanist Manifesto" clearly demonstrates the Quiverfull reading practice of using a key idea or text to found a principle that is then hunted out in every other ostensibly relevant text. This is seen first in the choice of the manifesto, which though endorsed by a number of influential thinkers of the time, in no way offers an interpretation of humanism that is universally representative or accepted by those who self-identify with the term humanist. Furthermore, the Advanced Seminar reflects the application of

predetermined principles that filter Gothard's reading of "The Humanist Manifesto." As discussed above, to Gothard and, it follows, most Quiverfull adherents, all approaches to the world are fundamentally religious in nature. Humanism therefore becomes a religion that both substitutes for (by being the "religion" to which some members of American culture adhere instead of Christianity) and opposes (by being antithetical to Christian teaching) Christianity. Therefore, the first tenet of the manifesto, which reads "Religious humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created," is read as stating the fundamental truth that "humanism is a religion" rather than as indicating that the humanists authoring the manifesto believe that a rigorous, systematic application of humanism results in the set of beliefs enumerated in the manifesto. Because Gothard's vision of Christianity is one refracted through the lens of Dominion, humanism, too, becomes a technique of dominion, but dominion of "sin" or "the enemy." The manifesto is not proof that a set of authors advocate a religious approach to humanism; rather, it is proof that all people engaged in humanistic thought or practice are following a religious system.

This approach to the manifesto is also clearly demonstrated by Gothard's reading of phrases in the manifesto such as "personal life" and "human personality" as coded references to sexual perversion. For instance, consider the IBLP-inserted underlying in the eighth statement in the manifesto: "Religious humanism considers the complete realization of human personality to be the end of man's life and seeks its development and fulfillment in the here and now..." Both underlined portions direct the reader to a footnote that reads "Including any form of sexual perversion." It is certainly plausible that one could read this statement as being open to sexual behaviors that fundamentalist Christians would find perverse (presumably, homosexuality and transgender identity top the list), but that is not

the work that the footnote is doing; instead, it is upholding the idea that humanists are actively working towards a world in which so-called sexual perversion is a universalized, acceptable--even encouraged--practice. Everything becomes code for sexual perversion, because it is sexual perversion that destroys the family and heralds the possible destruction of the nation and possibly even the world.<sup>166</sup>

This reading practice elaborated upon above illustrates the Quiverfull obsession with maintaining existential certainty, the primary device of which is to engage in binary thinking that renders things either good or bad, holy or sinful. It is this reading practice that renders the world threatening to Quiverfull readers and therefore contributes to strict interpretation of spheres of authority: any lapse of judgment, however slight, that causes a failure to observe authority structures correctly can imperil one's soul, because it can cause a cascade of misinterpretation that can lead to a rejection of God's word and plan for humanity. However, it is also this reading structure that maintains the interpretive flexibility that Quiverfull adherents need to make the Bible successfully undergird their worldview.

For Quiverfull adherents, all authority comes from God. But the bounds of that authority are communicated from God to the faithful indirectly, through the mediation of the Bible. This means that reading is the primary venue through which Quiverfull adherents gain their understanding of the authority structure under which God intends them to live. As Quiverfull adherents are fundamentally Protestant, they believe that each Christian should have a direct relationship with God through his word as laid out in the Bible. All readers are

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<sup>166</sup> This is demonstrated by the introductory quote included at the top of the handout page on the humanist manifesto: "When parents abdicate their God-given responsibility to educate their own sons and daughters, a curse comes upon their lives (See Malachi 4:6). The curse of our day is the religion of secular humanism, which permeates our entire society" (13).

not, however, created equal: it is the patriarchs of families who determine the final reading of Scripture, with wives and children invited to ask questions and grapple with the text to understand how their leader ended up with his interpretation. Family patriarchs are, in turn, to listen to and consider the wisdom of other, more experienced godly men, those God has ordained as his teachers (men such as Bill Gothard, for example).<sup>167</sup>

Ultimately, Quiverfull adherents have determined a specific approach to reading scriptural texts that they believe is the approach that God intended. That approach is predicated on the idea that the principles enumerated in the Bible are consistent and immutable. Answers in Genesis, a Quiverfull-affiliated institution which defines its mission as “enabling Christians to defend their faith and to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ effectively. We focus particularly on providing answers to questions surrounding the book of Genesis, as it is the most-attacked book of the Bible. We also desire to train others to develop a Biblical worldview, and seek to expose the bankruptcy of evolutionary ideas,” offers insight into that approach. The “About” page of their website notes that,

AiG teaches that “facts” don’t speak for themselves, but must be interpreted. That is, there aren’t separate sets of “evidences” for evolution and creation—we all deal with the same evidence...The difference lies in how we interpret what we study. The Bible—the “history book of the universe”—provides a reliable, eye-witness [sic] account of the beginning of all things, and can be trusted to tell the truth.

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<sup>167</sup> This practice of listening to wise elders can be somewhat dangerous; if Quiverfull adherents aren’t careful, they can end up creating *de facto* hierarchies of the kind that they observe and reject in other churches, such as the Catholic Church. The fact that they are aware of this risk may well explain why they are so quick to discipline leaders, such as Bill Gothard and Doug Phillips, who are caught violating the Quiverfull moral code.



According to Answers in Genesis, all information must be filtered through the lens of the Bible. Not only that, but there is a correct way to interpret the Bible; once that way is established, all other understanding should only be reached through that Biblical lens.

This discussion explains how the Bible is approached within Quiverfull circles, but it does not explain the way that specific interpretations are established. That exploration—which Bible verses are targeted as containing key principles, how they are used to structure the reading of other passages, and how readers, especially children, are taught to engage with the Bible in such a way that their own understanding perpetuates the Quiverfull worldview—will be examined in detail in the next chapter. That chapter will use Quiverfull reading practices as a platform through which to understand the ontological undergirding of the Quiverfull movement.

## Chapter 3

### Quiverfull Ontology: Reading the Self as an Agent of Dominion

*"I believe that the happiest of Christians and the truest of Christians are those who never dare to doubt God, but who take His Word simply as it stands, and believe it, and ask no questions, just feeling assured that if God said it, it will be so" -Charles H. Spurgeon<sup>168</sup>*

#### Section 1: Quiverfull Reading Practices as Foundation for Quiverfull Ontology

The Quiverfull movement derives its interpretation of the Bible in large part from the writing of Protestant Christian Reconstructionists such as R.J. Rushdoony.<sup>169</sup> This selective engagement with historical and intellectual writing informs the ways in which Quiverfull folk interpret what they see as Biblical mandates. Quiverfull adherents are initiated into a direct and Quiverfull-specific practice of reading the Bible well before they engage with or even learn of the intellectual heritage to which they are heirs. The extent to which an individual is seen as a powerful figure in Quiverfull circles--in other words, the extent to which their authority is recognized outside their own family kingdom--determines the extent of this engagement (and, to some extent, the engagement of the individuals' children).

We have already seen this method of engagement thoroughly demonstrated by the Anna Sofia and Elizabeth Botkin, whose work was discussed in some detail in the preceding

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<sup>168</sup> *A Defense of Calvinism*. Kindle location 125 of 222.

<sup>169</sup> According to Kathryn Joyce, for example, "Rushdoony is rumored by some to have personally converted Doug Phillips's father, Howard; in any case he was certainly a close friend to the elder crusader. At Rushdoony's eightieth birthday, Phillips [founder of Vision Forum, a key Quiverfull institution throughout the early 2000s] introduced him as 'the most influential man of the twentieth century' due to his foundational work on Christian homeschooling, his unrelenting push for the institution of Biblical law...and his singular efforts to 'reconstruct' society in law, education, science, religion, and the family along the lines of the Bible" (25). Such derivation is not always direct, but is often mediated through other sources of interpretation.

chapter. The Botkin sisters derive their interpretation of both the Bible and the world from their father's interpretative matrix; it is he who informs their understanding of the world, introduces them to the texts they are to study, and teaches them the process of reading those texts. This is seen in both the way that they echo his philosophies and in the way that they integrate him into the texts that they produce.<sup>170</sup> Botkin, in turn, derives the bulk of his understanding of the world from the teachings of influential Quiverfull men, though as a patriarch, he has more ability to focus the direction of his intellectual development and "ministry." A similar pattern has been seen in the ways in which the Pearls produce texts that offer readings of the Bible and of the world: Debi Pearl, for example, includes a specific section written by her husband in her book *Created To Be His Help Meet*; that section addressed whether there are any times a wife should disobey her husband, and she explained her reasoning as follows: "since this is a doctrinal issue, I have asked my studious **husband** to help me out on it. He contributed to the section on **When Not to Obey**" (258, emphasis in original). Michael Pearl offers instruction that Debi Pearl is not permitted to offer because to do so would be to overstep the bounds of her authority as a woman and a wife; by prioritizing this set up, the Pearls indicate that Debi is expressing views that are in keeping with her husband's throughout her book. She derives her interpretation—and the authority on which that interpretation rests—from him.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, Appendix A of *So Much More* demonstrates this aptly, as does the video interview that he gives at the end of the Botkins' film *The Return of the Daughters*.

<sup>171</sup> In this way—based as it is on the immutable authority structures that determine being in the world—Quiverfull interpretation should be understood as a primarily ontological, rather than primarily epistemological, engagement with the world. This will become clear as the current chapter unfolds.

In the next chapter, I will examine how the Quiverfull movement looks backwards towards foundational figures to root their interpretive practice in historical practice; the present chapter will be devoted to examining the process of interpretation that occurs among current Quiverfull movement members as well as the results that interpretive framework produces. Those results have a direct impact on both how Quiverfull members understand the structure of their beliefs and on how they understand the very nature of their being. It should be noted that, though the chapter focuses on Quiverfull methods of interpretation, it does so primarily with the purpose of establishing the ontology that undergirds Quiverfull community. Within the Quiverfull context, epistemology cannot be understood as separate from ontology, because ontology is seen as foundational in a way that epistemology is not.

The foundation for exposure to Quiverfull interpretive practice is laid early for all Quiverfull readers and helps to inform the way that they understand the Scripture and commentaries to which they are exposed. The newer, younger, and/or weaker members have limited exposure because of the spiritual danger that Quiverfull adherents believe might occur from knowing too much too quickly. They are given instruction in the reading pattern they are supposed to follow, and then guided carefully to ensure that their reading content is narrowly focused and structured to confirm the veracity of the pattern to which they have been introduced.

Pattern recognition, usually filtered through the structure of analogy, is central to Quiverfull reading. Quiverfull inductees are introduced to a core interpretation, usually based on a carefully selected passage of the Bible, that is already in place and then are carefully trained to find ideas, references, and commands in the Bible that reinforce that interpretation. In this way, though Quiverfull reading practice might at first glance appear to

be a hermeneutics, it is actually a poetics, since it seeks to understand the nuances and structures of meaning from the position of a core meaning that is already established. Quiverfull reading practices become not primarily about the process of developing one's abilities or skills as relate to interpretation—though that is considered an important consequence of the process—but about being capable of uncovering the true knowledge that must, due to human limitations, be reached through the interpretive process. God becomes the supreme creator (poet) of the universe, and it is the job of his adherents to study his work so as to understand how it operates and so as to align one's "heart, soul, strength, and mind" with that work (Luke 10:27).<sup>172</sup>

Such references can be direct—a verse from another book of the Bible that matches an exhortation to which the new Quiverfull reader has been introduced elsewhere. Often, however, they are indirect and ambiguous—a Quiverfull inductee will be shown how, by reading them through the lens of the interpretation provided, they can arrive at the proper understanding of the reference. Readings of the Bible (and of other texts, though many of those are not introduced immediately) thus function as scavenger hunts with concrete prizes that need to be discovered; budding Quiverfull readers are guided through this practice, often with no direct references to the foundational readers who initially provided the interpretation that is being used.<sup>173</sup> This scavenger hunt model is quite elaborate, with many levels that

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<sup>172</sup> This approach goes a long way in explaining why Quiverfull adherents are so focused on training their children to obey joyfully: to do so is to approach authority in a way that demonstrates one's full acceptance of God's structure of the world. The more one learns about God's perfect plan, the more one is to take comfort, joy, and encouragement in it.

<sup>173</sup> This scavenger-hunt model includes carefully crafted language study. ATI's core homeschooling curriculum, for example, devotes significant time and energy to teaching Quiverfull children ancient Greek root words in order to further their understanding of the New Testament (and, one imagines, to give them instant authority when presenting their interpretations of Scripture to listeners less steeped in ancient languages). Quiverfull authors from Mary Pride to Jenny Chancey also routinely engage in

sometimes require years before full advancement occurs. With newly converted adults, the process most commonly used is the IBLP's seminar system; for example, families accepted into ATI are required to first attend or watch the Basic Seminar, which introduces the key doctrines and practices that make up the Quiverfull movement; once they have completed that seminar, they are required to move on to the Advanced Seminar, which provides more detailed exegesis and begins to bring in significant amounts of source material beyond the Bible.<sup>174</sup>

Quiverfull reading practice is therefore fundamentally hierarchical in nature—the readers who first derive general principles are a small set elite men within the Quiverfull movement who draw information from Christian apologists and theologians such as John Calvin, C.H. Spurgeon, and R.J. Rushdoony. Other Quiverfull members in turn participate in the exegesis of these already established principles; as mentioned above, women will often be charged to author books or create lectures that provide advice or instruction that applies to women's roles as wives and mothers and that are then distributed to other Quiverfull women. At this secondary level of textual dissemination, the historical origins of Quiverfull principles are rarely mentioned or discussed, a fact that may or may not reflect an ignorance on the part of the individuals providing explication, but that nonetheless functions to both entice less fully initiated readers rhetorically by remaining practical and straightforward and

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providing ancient Greek and Hebrew root words to establish the veracity of their Biblical translations (though whence they derive these translations is rarely, if ever, cited, something that is also true in the ATI curriculum).

<sup>174</sup> A similar process works with Quiverfull children as well.

to underscores the Quiverfull principle of obedience to authority, something a lengthy historical justification would likely undercut.<sup>175</sup>

The Quiverfull method of reading Scripture thus happens in two basic parts. First, particular examples from the Bible are used to derive general principles, with such derivation being completed by men with high levels of community regard and authority.<sup>176</sup> Then, once those general principles are established, they are applied to all writings in the Bible, no matter how difficult such an application might be or what ambiguities might be present in the text. This two part model is fundamentally structured around searching for unchanging, universal, absolute truth and using the discoveries of such as patterns for understanding one's purpose and guiding one's behavior in one's own life.

The execution of this pattern can be clearly seen when we examine the way that women's purpose and roles, discussed in the previous chapter, are derived by Quiverfull readers. The way that Quiverfull adherents interpret what they believe to be the centrally important Biblical passages about women clearly demonstrate their commitment to reading the Bible in such a way that elevates the priority of particular passages and uses them as a cypher for understanding all other, related passages.<sup>177</sup> Within the Quiverfull movement, significant written and verbal attention has been given to these passages, which include

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<sup>175</sup> In many ways, this structure mirrors the structure that exists within the context of marriage, in which husbands are considered the ultimate authority and the role of wives is to implement that authority, whether that's in the context of Christian ministry or of child training.

<sup>176</sup> The role such men play will be examined in greater detail in the subsequent chapter on Quiverfull understandings of history.

<sup>177</sup> It is noteworthy that most detailed interpretative explorations of these Bible passages are done in either a woman-only or, to a lesser extent, within a family-oriented setting. At ATI conferences, it is often older women who expand on these topics; books that use these passages as models--including books by Debi Pearl, Martha Peace, and Mary Pride--are usually written by women as well. This is, in part, a carrying out of the Quiverfull understanding that older women should guide younger women, a mandate found in Titus 2 itself.

Proverbs 31, Titus 2, and Genesis 1-2: the numerous Quiverfull-sponsored publications that explore the way that these passages explain the proper role of women include blog posts, books, speeches given at IBLP-sponsored conferences, and documentaries.<sup>178</sup> Despite the varied media through which these passages are explored, interpretations remain consistent; the media provide different methods of explication and help Quiverfull faithful appeal to a broader audience.<sup>179</sup>

In her 1985 book, *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism and Back to Reality*, which was written and published in the earlier days of the organized Quiverfull movement, Mary Pride offers a detailed reading of these passages, especially Proverbs 31 and Titus 2, that follows the Quiverfull mold; though she is not by any means the first author to establish the broad strokes of that reading, her text has become foundational.<sup>180</sup> She explains the purpose of her book in the following way:

This book is an exposition of the Bible's 'mystery passage,' Titus 2:3-5. '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 train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home [literally, *home-working*], to be kind, and to be subject to their

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<sup>178</sup> See works by Mary Pride, Martha Peace, and Elisabeth Elliott, for example. For a look at the process of Titus 2 mentorship of younger women by older women in action, see Amy Kohn's *A Courtship*.

<sup>179</sup> This fact matches the Quiverfull reading practice on which I am elaborating; the practice is designed to encourage unity, a fact I will further elaborate. This goal of unity also explains why there is so much agonizing over what might seem to outsiders to be small details of interpretative disagreement. This might be a good place to discuss the concept of "encouragement"—which is, of course, a code for "helping keep on track."

<sup>180</sup> There are several possible reasons for this. The first is that Pride is a woman, and her status as both author and subject lends her words weight. Another is her appeal to American common sense; the effectiveness of this appeal will be discussed in later sections of this chapter, which explore the extent to which the Quiverfull movement is inextricably American in its character.



husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.’ The mystery is not what the passage *says*--its message is fairly obvious. The mystery involves why modern Christian writers on woman’s role are so unwilling to face up to it. Titus 2:3-5 is the most important text in the Bible on married women’s roles, capsulating a young wife’s marital, sexual, biological, economic, authority, and ministering roles. Yet women’s books routinely ignore, mutilate, or even mock this passage. There appears to be a great desire to accommodate Christianity to our culture, and a corresponding willingness to dismiss the Bible’s teaching as a remnant of outdated, male-dominated culture. (xi)<sup>181</sup>

In structuring her book, Pride interprets Titus 2:3-5 as laying out the boundaries of women’s appropriate role and tasks. She spends the duration of her book elaborating on exactly what each one of these things means and explaining their limits, making the case that this list of behavior appropriate to women constitutes the *only* behavior appropriate to women.<sup>182</sup>

In Pride’s reading, the boundaries of women’s proper behavior are fundamentally derived from their ontology. She explains, “I already pointed out in the last chapter how divorcing sex from fruitfulness leads to perversion according to the most likely interpretation of Romans 1:26,27. But more than that, it is a *denial of the image of God in women*. God ‘made them male *and female*,’ and sterilizing the female half of the partnership defaces the image of God” (41). For Pride, gendered differences take ontological precedence over human

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<sup>181</sup> Pride’s statement indicates an understanding that the Quiverfull approach to reading the Bible is the one that is most pure.

<sup>182</sup> In fact, there is at least one instance in which Titus 2 itself is interpreted secondarily, through another lens. Verse 2 instructs older women not to be “addicted to much wine” Quiverfull teaching, however, strongly eschews the use of any alcohol, despite the fact that there is no direct Biblical prohibition against it.

similarities shared across sexual iterations (though, of course, Pride recognizes male and female as the only two sex-based differentiations for humans). The gendered differences she gives heed to are the ones that she finds enumerated in Titus 2 and the ones that are discussed in the previous chapter on authority within Quiverfull contexts.

Later in her book, Pride provides another verse from the Bible to back up her interpretation of women's roles, though, of course, she interprets the verse that she offers through the already established lens of Titus 2. She writes, "*the Bible teaches that childbearing is a wife's basic role*. Look with me for a minute at 1 Timothy 2:15--'but women will be kept safe through childbirth, if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety.' Commentators perennially have difficulty with this passage, and no wonder, since it actually says, 'women will be saved through *childbearing*.'" (41). Notice the interpretive sleight of hand that Pride performs: she does not offer an explanation for where she gets her information, why it is more accurate than that of the "commentators," nor, indeed, who those commentators are. What she offers, instead, is a claim to a return to authenticity, made in a matter-of-fact, confident appeal of the reader's "common sense." Pride also conveniently avoids discussing the several possible other meanings that inhere in the verse, including the possibility that it is indicating that women will maintain health through the childbearing process if they follow God's command.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> This reading is given weight by the fact that verse I Tim. 2:14 explains that women are not permitted by Paul to teach men because they both came after Adam and first caused Adam to sin. The curse that was bestowed upon Eve for her actions in the Garden of Eden was that she would suffer in childbirth. It is also equally possible, perhaps even likely, however,, that Pride's reading of the verse is the most compelling one available. The purpose of this section is not to quibble with her reading or to make an argument that the Bible does not, in several places, emphasize motherhood as one of women's most valuable roles; rather, it is to note the reading practices in which Pride engages.

In her next paragraph, Pride explains her thought process for understanding the meaning of I Timothy 2:15 in the following manner:

The mystery [of interpretive difficulty] is solved when we look at the context. Paul has just finished giving Timothy instructions about how men should pray and how women who profess to worship God should dress. Next Paul said women should learn quietly and submissively, not be teachers in the church. The next logical question would be, 'Well then, what *can* women do for God if they are not supposed to teach?' Paul says that by persevering in our God-given role--childbearing--with a godly attitude, we will be saved. 'Childbearing' sums up all our special biological and domestic functions. This is the exact same grammatical construction as Paul's advice to Timothy that Timothy should persevere in his life and doctrine, 'because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers' (1 Tim. 4:16). Timothy's particular path to heavenly glory was his preaching and example. Ours is homeworking, all revolving around our role of childbearing. (42)

In this passage, Pride relies on several strategies to convince her reader. First, she suggests that a singular logical chain of reasoning informs both Paul's exhortations and his reader's expectations. In doing this, she simultaneously concretizes and universalizes Paul's instructions to the men and women of Corinth, ignoring any possible historical context or flexibility for those instructions.<sup>184</sup> Second, she exaggerates the centrality of the role of teaching within the Christian church, suggesting that it is the only explicitly spiritual task that

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<sup>184</sup> The way she engages with this logic raises the issue of metaphor and metonymy once again. Metonymy happens in the sequence of questioning (What comes next?) and metaphor happens in the need to substitute function--emphasizing the similarity of men and women and the difference simultaneously.

one could carry out for God. This allows her to universalize roles—men teach, women bear children—even though many men in church congregations do not take on the primary role of teacher (whether they did in Paul and Timothy’s context hardly matters, since Pride is not interested in that context).<sup>185</sup> Indeed, even in her own above paragraph, she reveals underlying instability of this characterization when she notes that Timothy has a “particular path” to “heavenly glory,” while women have a universalized one.<sup>186</sup> The rhetorical move of turning the particular into a universal allows Pride to make the extraordinary claim—not justifiable by close reading of any of the Bible verses that Pride has provided to her readers—that “‘Childbearing’ sums up all [women’s] special biological and domestic functions.” Pride senses possible ambiguity in the text, and she eliminates that ambiguity by conforming it to an already established doctrine—that women’s particular function is to bear children.<sup>187</sup>

This interpretive strategy is important, because it dictates how Quiverfull readers understand other scriptural passages specifically relevant to women. The Israelite Deborah is a perfect illustration of the results of this practice. Deborah, a judge whose story is told in the Old Testament’s Book of Judges, does not, at first glance, fit the Quiverfull model of womanhood: she is a woman granted direct, explicit authority over her fellow citizens, both

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<sup>185</sup> This also functions to reinforce the Quiverfull structure of the family, which casts the husband/father as the authority figure who sets the family’s vision, and the wife/mother as the figure who implements and augments that authority.

<sup>186</sup> Often, the Quiverfull strategy for dealing with this conflict is to focus on their interpretation of the Genesis creation myth, which they see as explaining that women’s role is to be a helpmeet for their husbands. Husbands, as primary agents, set the goals and priorities for the husband-and-wife team; all wives must follow their husbands. This might mean completing different specific tasks, since husbands’ visions will differ, but those tasks are being completed in the name of being a valuable helpmeet.

<sup>187</sup> In fact, this is somewhat at odds with accepted Quiverfull wisdom, which holds that husbands should be a greater priority to women than children.

male and female, she leads the army to battle during a conflict with a neighboring tribe, and she is explicitly referred to as a ruler of Israel.

The Quiverfull reading practice is well equipped to put Deborah in her place. As Anna Sofia and Elizabeth Botkin, authors of *So Much More: The Remarkable Influence of Visionary Daughters on the Kingdom of God*, explain, Deborah's position of leadership was a direct result of Israel's social and political decline: "Women holding seats of authority, whether it be in business, church, family, law, or politics, is one of the distinguishing marks of a society under God's curse" (124). In this reading, Deborah was forced to step into a leadership role because the men of the society were failing to pursue their proper roles as men; it was a last ditch effort to save her society from collapse. Her leadership role was, therefore, both contingent and temporary: "Deborah was glorified and blessed by God as a 'deliverer' of Israel, and, in essence, what she did was to bring men back to leadership" (128). Here, the Botkins not only explain Deborah's existence within the concept of an already established framework; they also link her, by placing the word "deliverer" in quotes, within her proper, childbearing context: Deborah was a mother of the Israelite people; her salvation came, as Mary Pride would note, through childbearing, though her "child" was a nation rather than an individual.

Pride, too, focuses on the exceptionality of Deborah. She notes that "the important thing to remember about Deborah's doings, and the activities of all the people in the Book of Judges, is that *they are not normative*. In that time, 'Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit'" (143).<sup>188</sup> Here, Deborah is an exception, not the rule. The rule has already been

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<sup>188</sup> Here, Pride notes that she is quoting both Judges 17:6 and Judges 21:25.

derived because, according to Pride, “we judge the judges by the explicit commands of God, not vice versa” (144). Here, Pride comes closest to articulating the Quiverfull reading practice this chapter has been discussing; she also notes that direct declaratives are to be given more weight than narratives. This, too, is a value that is seen in many examples of Quiverfull reading, one that reflects the scavenger hunt model of finding and applying kernels of truth within the text of the Bible.

Pride elaborates on how and why Deborah should be seen as extraordinary in a way that reminds us that her reading practice is situated in the particularly historical and cultural context of the modern-day United States:

In any case Deborah was not a nine-to-fiver. She was a ruler, and the people came to *her*. She could have been a widow or childless. The text does not tell us. (Deborah calls herself a ‘mother in Israel,’ which in Hebrew idiom could just as well mean a mother *of* Israel, since she was the ‘mother of the country’ at that point). Deborah was not anxious to venture forth into the ‘economic-opportunity sphere.’ When her big chance came to lead the army in battle she demurred, and only the commander Barak’s cowardice forced her to do. (144).

In this passage, Pride is determined to sever any possible connection a female reader of the Book of Judges could make between Deborah’s situation and her own. Modern references “nine-to-fiver,” “economic-opportunity sphere”—are used to not make an argument about changing social context but to highlight the corruption that modern culture and feminism bring to our understanding of the role of women. Such possibilities didn’t exist in Deborah’s time; they are a reflection of our contemporary abandonment of Biblical commands.

Pride concludes with an assessment that is very similar (though somewhat less upbeat) to that of the Botkins: “when the men are all dishrags incapable of leadership, a woman may end up leading a country. Thus, Deborah was a leader, not a working wife; her example is not normative. Nothing in Scripture says we should abandon homeworking and deliberately try to recreate the atmosphere of moral and social decay in the time of the judges, when Deborah ruled” (144). Deborah, then, is a noble woman because her willingness to rule over Israel was a sacrifice she had to make to save her people. Nothing less will justify a woman stepping out of the role of childbearing, homeworking wife (and even then, women should remain tied closely to the home: according to Pride, Deborah pursued the role of ruler from a domestic context as much as she possibly could).

Deborah is not the only judge who is read by Quiverfull adherents as an exception meant to illustrate the dangers of deviating from God’s direct commands. In his message “The High Price of a Sensual Girl,” delivered at the 2013 IBLP Family Conference, a keynote event sponsored by the Institute for Basic Life Principles, Gil Bates offers a detailed glimpse into the second step of Quiverfull reading practice: using general principles to manipulate particular examples well past their standalone meaning. He frames his lesson by discussing the story of Samson, noting that Samson’s parents were given specific prohibitions by God regarding his raising: because he was to be a Nazarite, Samson was to avoid drinking wine or eating grapes, cutting his hair, and having contact with dead bodies or other sources that made him unclean. For Bates and for other Quiverfull adherents, such stories are present in the Bible to serve as object lessons that must be interpreted through a New Testament lens. As he explains it,

stories such as Samson's are in the Bible to teach Christians how to learn from other people's experiences so that believers do not have to learn painful lessons themselves.<sup>189</sup>

Through this lens, the "special parameters" that are imposed on Samson represent the special restrictions that God imposes on "believers" today. Like Samson, who was chosen for a special purpose by God, Christians should not drink wine (or any other alcoholic beverage), because wine impairs judgment and encourages addictive appetites which distract the Christian from serving the special purpose that God has ordained in his or life.

The parable of Samson does not, however, offer a direct guide for appropriate behavior in the contemporary world, as is shown by Gil Bates's reaction to the length of Samson's hair. Bates interprets the requirement the Samson should not cut his hair to symbolically demonstrate that Christians should look noticeably different from the people around them, demonstrating by their appearance that their priority is God, not the world. While this interpretation sticks relatively close to the source text, it is of note that Bates is careful to specify that God's command that Samson allow his hair to grow is "not a good reason to grow long hair." That was acceptable in Old Testament times, according to Bates, but it is not appropriate in modern day America. Bates doesn't provide his audience with a reason for this shift in acceptable hairstyles; conceivably, there is something about long hair in men that Bates feels does not appropriate project Christian standards.<sup>190</sup> Regardless, Bates maintains that the underlying principle--visibly setting oneself apart for God--has remained

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<sup>189</sup> At the beginning of his sermon, Bates indicates his Protestant background by thanking God for granting him and his audience the ability to read Scripture directly. He also makes reference to "our great country" as he opens his sermon.

<sup>190</sup> The issue of hairstyle was first raised in the modesty chapter; it will be subsequently discussed in more detail later in this chapter, which will in part examine the connection between gendered norms and American identity that is found within the Quiverfull movement and which will also highlight some of the history behind Quiverfull interpretations of American values.



consistent, even if the correct application of that principle has altered over time. The extent to which Bates extrapolates meaning from the text has increased in this reading.

The degree of extrapolation expands further as Bates draws a connection between God's command that Samson not touch things, including dead bodies, that will make him ritually unclean and God's will about the kind of contacts believers are allowed to cultivate. According to Bates, the prohibition from touching physically dead things that Samson is given in Judges is meant as a warning to Christians to avoid sustained contact with things, or people, that are spiritually dead and that therefore threaten your walk with God. In this reading, Bates transmutes physical touch to prolonged contact—Quiverfull adherents do not generally hold that casual contact with unbelievers, of the sort that might result from checking out at the grocery store or distributing a religious tract, results in corruption--and draws a conclusion that is based in a complex, if unarticulated, series of references to New Testament verses and Scriptural exegesis.

At the end of his discussion of Samson's "special parameters," Bates quips that he believes Samson "was in ATI, don't you...we're trying to follow the same pattern." Exactly what that pattern is and how it is derived becomes clear a little later in Bates's message, at which point he has begun to focus on the role that Quiverfull parents play in creating and enforcing parameters for their children.

For Bates and his Quiverfull audience, it is this issue that is key, because the restrictions that Quiverfull parents place on their children, ranging from prohibiting TV, video games, and Internet access to participating in the process of choosing a spouse, are a fundamental component of their ontological self-concept. Bates incorporates this into his lecture. At the beginning of the message, he had made the claim that the two most important

decisions a person makes are whether to give one's life to Jesus and whom to marry. The message orients itself towards the direction of marriage at this point, focusing on how Samson came to desire to marry a Philistine girl shortly after reaching adulthood. Bates quotes Judges 14:1-2 as saying "And Samson went down to Timnath and saw a woman in Timnath, of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up and told his father and his mother and said, "I have seen a woman of Timnath, of the daughter of the Philistines. Now, therefore, get her for me to wife." His parents asked him if he could find a woman of his own people, but he refused. Bates goes on to quote verse four as saying, "But his father and mother knew not that it was of the Lord that he sought an occasion against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel."

Here, Bates's interpretation of the story he has just read best exemplifies the Quiverfull practice of first deriving general principles from particular verses and then using those principles to interpret other verses. Bates asserts that many people misunderstand this set of verses, believing that they indicate that it is sometimes acceptable to marry an unbeliever. He argues that this is a misreading, however, because if God had wanted Samson to marry a Philistine girl, that would have meant that God changed his mind from assertions made in earlier Bible books, such as Exodus and Deuteronomy, that Israelites should not marry the uncircumcised. Instead, Bates suggests that the passage is suggesting that God did want "an occasion against the Philistines," but that he did not want that occasion to be Samson marrying one of those Philistines.

Bates's interpretation clearly requires rhetorical contortion to shift the passage's meaning from the suggestion that God had ordained Samson's interest in the Philistine woman to the idea that God was using something he did not approve of to his advantage; to

make this contortion fit, Bates introduces the following principle: a reader of the Bible should not “try to interpret a cloudy Scripture by itself,” but should, instead, use “clear Scripture” as a guide to understanding cloudy Scripture. Within the context of the message, it is unclear exactly what parameters are used to determine which Scriptures are cloudy and which are clear; that is perhaps already known to Bates’s ATI Conference audience.<sup>191</sup> What is also clear is that Bates inserts ATI-inspired beliefs into his interpretation of what it means to marry a fellow believer; he explains that God “wants you to marry someone of the same goal, background, belief, direction.” It is not enough, for Bates or for Quiverfull adherents more generally, to marry someone who is a self-professed Christian. Instead, one’s life partner should come from as similar a set of beliefs and background influences as possible.

Throughout his talk—and especially whenever the issues of sexual attraction and marriage arise—Bates emphasizes the role that Samson’s parents play in his life. He notes that the commands God has for Samson are delivered directly to his parents. Authority, therefore, is presented as primarily mediated through a structured chain of command—a principle already established in Chapter 2 as central to the Quiverfull worldview.<sup>192</sup> When that chain of command is broken—Samson choosing a spouse for himself without his parents’

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<sup>191</sup> Placing the message within its larger context, it is clear that this determination strongly rests on the interpretive interventions made by Bill Gothard in his Basic and Advanced Seminars. Critics of Gothard have noted that his interpretation is not consistently framed; from a theological standpoint, this is certainly true. From a cultural standpoint, the logic of Gothard’s interpretation arguably has more structural continuity, despite the fact that it is undeniably convoluted at times. We can also turn to Mary Pride to understand that Quiverfull adherents generally interpret direct commands or exhortations as clear; parables, narratives, and character studies are subordinated to these commands in any quest for meaning.

<sup>192</sup> This chain is both structural and active: structural in that it is pre-ordained and inviolable, active in that part of the reason for it is that parents are more experienced than their children and have a better understanding of the consequences that particular actions will bring. Quiver parents, therefore, put “special parameters” on their children because they are protecting them from the evils of the world and giving their “sin natures” as little opportunity to act on their desires as possible.

advice, for example—disaster ensues. Bates highlights the dangers that such breaking can have, not only for the person directly responsible, but also for people along the chain: he explains that, when Samson gives his parents honey that is taken from inside the carcass of the lion he has killed, he is directly defiling his parents through his own sinful actions.

It should also be noted, following the military metaphor, that within the Quiverfull worldview, one does not find one's place in the chain of command; instead, one's place in the chain of command is predetermined and can only change in preordained, strictly structured ways (ways that include, primarily, marriage and childbirth). This explains why it is that very few texts produced by the Quiverfull movement delve into the nature of God—such exploration might be seen as questioning authority. Instead, Quiverfull texts focus on explicating what God wants from his followers. For Quiverfull adherents, in other words, the world has been structured by God to function properly in one way and one way only—everything is read through and against that ontological structure, which is understood through the reading pattern elaborated above. That reading pattern—locating and interpreting a principle, rendering it universal, and then using that principle to determine the meaning of particular examples and situations both within the Bible and within everyday life—is to some extent an epistemological practice, but it is that practice that provides the foundation for the development and propagation of a specific Quiverfull ontology. We have begun to see hints of this in Gil Bates's rendering of the Samson story; in the next section of this chapter, we will discuss how gender, reproduction, and repetition are concepts that structure the core of Quiverfull ontology.

## Section 2: Quiverfull Ontology and Reproductive Futurity

*Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,*

*The fruit of the womb is a reward.*

*Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,*

*So are the children of one's youth.*

*Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them;*

*They shall not be ashamed,*

*But shall speak with their enemies in the gate. Psalm 127: 3-5, NKJV<sup>193</sup>*

As discussed previously, the hierarchical military model that structures the Quiverfull movement finds its most common and cherished expression in the heterosexual, nuclear family. Quiverfull understandings of the family start with the relationship between husband and wife--no other central, organizing relationship is permitted. The heterosexual, monogamous marriage is not only the origin of the family but also the most important relationship of the family: Quiverfull adherents argue that the relationship between husband and wife is more important than the relationships between parents and children. They often focus on the duty of wives to put their husbands before their children and the importance of children witnessing the priority of the marital relationship, in large part because it is not the single Christian but the married Christian couple who represents the image of God on earth, both for the couple's children and for all of humanity.

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<sup>193</sup> This is the only instance in which the NKJV rather than the KJV has been used; this is because the language of this version of the passage more clearly matches several of the phrases used within the Quiverfull movement.

Quiverfull adherents derive this belief from their interpretation of Genesis 2:22-24-- another set of verses that, as mentioned above, is treated as the origin of an immovable principle. The passage reads as follows: “And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made her a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” (KJV). These verses provide Quiverfull adherents with a template for the structure of the marriage relationship, and it is in light of these verses that all other Bible passages that address marriage are understood.

The Quiverfull movement reads Genesis 2 in a way that emphasizes the ontological progression that they believe both the married man and the married woman undergo— marriage makes a person fundamentally different than they are in their single state in that marriage causes a person to begin the process of realizing their God-given purpose. As single people, both men and women exist in a state of fundamental lack; it is only when they marry that they can become whole. This ontological progression is not, however, identical for men and women, despite the fact that it is integral to both sexes. For men, marriage serves the purpose of bringing back to them the piece they had lost, thus restoring them to wholeness. By taking a wife, men are making it much more possible to fulfill their fundamental purpose, which is to take dominion over the earth, in two ways: their wives will help them complete the specific ministries they adopt during their lifetime and will help them magnify and carry their ministry into the future by giving them children. For women, marriage serves the

purpose of saving them from their lost state.<sup>194</sup> By taking a husband, women are fulfilling their fundamental purpose, which is to unite with the man that God has intended for them and become his helpmeet. In other words, before marriage, men are the entity that is missing a piece, and women are the missing pieces. Together, they are whole, but the extent to which that wholeness structures their being is not equal. Both share the quality of being essential to fully carrying out God's plan, but men serve the more active, dominant, and directive role.<sup>195</sup>

The Quiverfull interpretation of the marriage relationship links its understanding of these verses to fact that Eve was made by God from Adam's rib. To them, this means that God made her through Adam, instead of directly from earth, and so she owes her existence and purpose to Adam in a way that Adam does not owe his to her. In *So Much More*, the Botkin sisters interpret the relationship between husband and wife as laid out in Genesis in the following way: "Marriage is about two people of different abilities and roles becoming one flesh, sharing one life and one vision, so that the two will complement each other and complete each other. It's about restoring the rib to the side of the man so that the two are whole, finished, fulfilled. Only when they are united can the two represent the image and glory of God together" (216). As the Botkin sisters indicate, within Quiverfull circles, a woman's role as helpmeet isn't merely the result of her obeying her husband, who has greater authority; it's intrinsic to her created purpose as a being who is oriented around a man. In their interpretation, she is the rib restored to her husband; he is the central entity, she a

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<sup>194</sup> This reading is both reflected and reinforced through the Quiverfull understanding of Ephesians 5, which draws an analogy between husband and wife and Christ and the Church. For a more in-depth discussion on Ephesians 5, please see the previous chapter.

<sup>195</sup> This is discussed in detail by Embassy Media speaker Gary Fraley, who devotes an entire lecture, "The Great Mystery," to discussing a wife as her husband's left hand.

subordinate one.<sup>196</sup> Her ontology and his are different precisely because they are structured around this principle. Any attempts to structure life in a way that does not reflect this ontological priority will inevitably lead to disaster.

Given their belief that following a pattern other than the one that God created for men and women will be unsuccessful at best and damning at worst, Quiverfull adherents must explain why it is that a significant number of women resist following that path. Their answer is found in their understanding of original sin. According to Quiverfull beliefs, humanity was corrupted in the Garden of Eden; since Eve's decision to tempt Adam to sin and his acquiescence to that temptation, human beings have all been born with "sin natures." As the Botkin sisters see it, "Much of what makes up our natural personalities and the state of our hearts is dictated by our sin natures" and it all needs to be "examined and evaluated against Scripture" (78). These sin natures are intrinsic and cannot be eradicated by human agency; they are, in effect, ontological saddles that all humans must wear until the second coming of Jesus, when humans will be restored to the godly, sinless natures that God intended them to have.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> There is some ambiguity between the interpretive possibilities laid out in the Biblical passage the Botkins are interpreting, as it also discusses a man leaving his parents and cleaving to his wife. The Biblical passages provide for a movement that is directed towards the other and that comes from both partners. The Quiverfull method for dealing with this is to focus on the verse as stating that husband and wife become one person; they also sometimes use it to indicate the inauguration of the man into his adult ministry. In the Duggar family, we see husbands who do not live with their parents, sometimes living with or near their wives' families.

<sup>197</sup> It is tempting to posit that this is a flaw in Quiverfull interpretation; after all, if it was Eve's sin that condemned women to an unending earthly struggle with a "feminist sin nature," then it must be the case that Eve had always already contained within her that nature, since she made the choice to act in a feminist way (that is, without submitting her planned decision for Adam's approval) before the Fall. This, however, neglects Quiverfull understandings of the function of free will. Both Adam and Eve had the capacity to sin while in the Garden of Eden, and both of them were likely to be tempted by things that pulled them away from God's plan; however, they also contained the capacity to resist sin. Free will was the ability to choose between right and wrong: right for Eve was being submissive to Adam,



The ontological implications hinted at here offer deeper insight into the role that the family plays in Quiverfull society, because these are the principles from which the Quiverfull movement derives the patriarchal authority model that serves as the bedrock for the structure of the family. In the origin narrative that Quiverfull adherents endorse, the sin committed by Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden was a foundational moment that established human nature and forever doomed humanity to fall short of God's standards, unless they receive the gift of God's grace, through which they are saved.<sup>198</sup> The original father and mother committed the original sin; because they are the ancestors of all humanity, all of humanity is forced to live under the conditions of their curse.

Although the Quiverfull movement focuses on the negative effects of original sin to a significant extent—humanity experiences suffering and separation from God because of the sins of Eve and Adam—it also focuses heavily on how to mitigate the effects of that sin, which consists primarily of following what they believe to be God's pre-fall template for humans as closely as possible. In this way, the Biblical information provided about Adam and Eve serves as a fairly broad template for Quiverfull families to follow. Gender roles within marriage relationship are derived from the Quiverfull understanding of marriage's ontological function: men are to provide vision and security for the women who are their helpers; women to enable

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whereas wrong was acting on her own initiative; right for Adam was boldly and effectively leading, whereas wrong was giving in to the unrighteous urgings of his wife. Once they gave in to their respective temptations, they were cursed to carry within themselves intrinsically sinful natures; they still had the capacity of free will, but not the ability to actuate it in such a way that they could avoid sin without the direct intervention of God. They were, in effect, polluted by their failure to apply free will properly and that failure was passed down to all of their posterity.

<sup>198</sup>As noted in the previous chapter, the Quiverfull movement consistently embraces the principle of salvation by faith alone. They are split, however, on the question of Calvinism and its corresponding doctrine of predestination. Many Quiverfull adherents attend Reformed churches in the Calvinist tradition; others attend Baptist or non-denominational churches that understand grace in a more Arminian fashion: they believe that God's grace is available to all who ask for it.

their husbands to achieve their visions and bear children to extend the family ministry and legacy. Ultimately, Quiverfull adherents understand marriage to be the central way through which they can fulfill God's plan for humans, which is spelled out in Genesis 1:28: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." (KJV version). In Quiverfull parlance, this command is referred to as the Dominion Mandate, and it functions as the basic order that not only structures each married couple's ministry mission, as discussed in detail in the previous chapter, but also structures each spouse's core identity.

Broadly, Quiverfull adherents understand the Dominion Mandate to task Christians to bring all of the Earth, and especially its humans, into submission to God's plan (inasmuch as such a task can be accomplished in a fallen world). Each married man leads his family towards achieving this goal; each family follows their husband and father's specific vision for how they can contribute to achieving Dominion. That vision might require the development of different skills within different families—some families serve as missionaries—but the roles of each member of the family remain fairly static. As the Botkins explain it, those roles need to be clearly defined and broadcast: women's every actions need to reflect their status as their husband's helpmeet in accomplishing his goal of achieving dominion, and the best, indeed, the only, way for them to accomplish that is by ensuring that every aspect of their appearance and actions is obviously feminine: "A real woman understands that God designed femininity because masculinity was not enough in itself to represent God's image and glory. The differences between men and women glorify God, and downplaying these differences downplays God's glory. A real woman wants to bring glory to God by being a woman" (Botkin

and Botkin 76).<sup>199</sup> This assertion that God can only be glorified if wives consistently, completely, and visually register embodying a different aspect of humanity than do their husbands offers a point of entry into exploring the way that gendered relationships are portrayed on *19 Kids and Counting*, *Counting On*, and *Bringing Up Bates* and the way in which this serves to reinforce Quiverfull epistemological and ontological categories.

In previous chapters, the strict dress code by which Quiverfull adherents abide has been discussed, as has the evolution of that dress code over the period during which Quiverfull clothing standards have been clearly documented. Dress is an important indicator of gender within Quiverfull circles, but it is only one factor amid a variety of factors that are emphasized. For example, in S4E5 of *Bringing Up Bates*, Zach, the oldest son of the Bates family, and Whitney, his wife, have his sister Erin and her husband Chad over for dinner. While at dinner, the women discuss the fact that they are both simultaneously expecting girl children. They begin this discussion by enthusing over the fact that they will be able to dress their children in ornamental clothing (both the color pink and the use of bows are mentioned), and they then move on to discussing the fact that they feel it will be very different raising a female infant than it has been raising a male infant. Though excitement over a child of a different sex than one's first child is hardly novel, it is the almost desperate excitement, and the extreme emphasis on the difference between boy and girl infants, that stands out. In this moment, Whitney and Erin are reinforcing the idea that girls and boys are fundamentally different and that they are anticipating a significantly different set of experiences raising their

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<sup>199</sup> This rhetoric of "real womanhood" will be discussed in detail in the next section of this chapter.

girl children than they have experienced raising their boy children. By doing so, they are reinforcing the fundamental structure of their own gendered identities.

Indeed, extreme emphasis on gender differences between boys and girls, from a very young age up to and through adulthood, is present on all three Quiverfull-focused reality TV shows. Perhaps the most ostentatious example is the amount of time and effort that both the Bates and the Duggar family spend creating elaborate ways to reveal “the gender” of each new, expected child. The energy invested in this process is comparable to the energy young couples spend determining how to share the news of a pregnancy with one’s larger family; indeed, announcements that a couple is expecting often occur in fairly informal, family meeting settings, whereas the moment when an expected child’s sex is divulged often occurs at an elaborate “gender reveal” party.<sup>200</sup> This emphasis is seen in wedding episodes, too, particularly in the way that both Duggar parents highlight the extreme pathos of Jim Bob’s reaction to “giving away” his daughters: in each of the episodes that depict the weddings of his daughters, Jill, Jessa, and Jinger, Jim Bob is depicted crying as he sees the women in their wedding dresses and expresses his disbelief that he is about to walk them down the aisle.<sup>201</sup>

Milestone moments such as these provide spectacles that especially highlight the emphasis on gender differences seen among Quiverfull families, but almost every episode of

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<sup>200</sup> In many cases, the Duggar family takes this process a step further, in which they are abetted by the entertainment industry. For example, when Josh and Anna were expecting their first child, the child’s sex was revealed on a national broadcast of *The Today Show*, during which Josh cut into a cake baked by the star of TLC’s *Cake Boss*; the color of the cake, pink, revealed that Josh and Anna’s first child would be a girl.

<sup>201</sup> This reaction can be compared to the relatively lackluster reaction that both Michelle and Jim Bob have to Josh’s marriage to Anna. While there may be underlying personal reasons for that reaction--the relationship that Josh has with his parents seems more fraught than the relationship portrayed between the elder Duggars and their other children--it is also the case that there is less of a build-up around the marriage of a son within Quiverfull circles, perhaps because the adult son is not seen as the same kind of property that the adult daughter is.

each of the Quiverfull reality TV shows devotes some time to explicating those differences. On *Bringing Up Bates*, the competitiveness of the male members of the family is constantly highlighted, often through family sports games that are presented as impromptu.<sup>202</sup> Female family members rarely play such games (non-contact sports sometimes see participation from male and female members of the family, but they tend to be few and far between), but they often serve as enthusiastic spectators for their sons, brothers, fathers, and husbands.<sup>203</sup>

The Bates often discuss such gender differences as innate; the Duggars echo that sentiment, though there are fewer episodes in which they express it explicitly. That idea does appear in S1E8 of *19 Kids and Counting*, in which the Duggars are featured teaching their children the skills of the “opposite” gender—the girls are taught to change oil and tires, while the boys clean the house and learn how to cook tater tot casserole, a Duggar-standard meal. In that episode, producers ask Michelle if she is “reinforcing gender stereotypes by having the girls do the cooking and cleaning.” She replies, “I think there are some gender aspects you just can’t get around. And I think there’s differences in their personalities, probably due to gender in some of those respects. That’s not bad; I think that’s a good thing, um, because it’s innate, it’s in them, you know, from the time they’re little.” A couple of moments later, after we watch Jim Bob telling the girls he’s going to teach them basic car skills, we are returned to the interview scene, where a producer who is off-screen asks Michelle, “Are you basically setting up your daughters for a life of being a stay-at-home mom?” She replies, “No. We’re not setting up our daughters to be a [sic] stay-at-home moms. Now, [sic] majority of the girls,

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<sup>202</sup> See for example, the family football game during Thanksgiving on S1E13.

<sup>203</sup> See, for example, Jessa and Ben’s joint bachelor/bachelorette party on S15E9 of *19 Kids and Counting*.

that's their heart: they want to be married, they want to have a family, and they want to allow their husband to have the role of being the main breadwinner for the family, and that's just something that they feel strongly about." Michelle does go on to assert that her girls may be in a position where they need to be the breadwinner and that they will be equipped to do that, but her comments are framed within a context that treats heterosexual, monogamous marriage as a given; she notes that, in the early days of her marriage to Jim Bob, she worked right alongside him in their various businesses (which included selling used cars, owning a towing company, and owning a convenience store), but she does not suggest a future in which one of her daughters could be entirely self-sufficient.<sup>204</sup> Towards the end of the show, Michelle asserts that "there is absolutely nothing that our girls could not do if they set their minds to it. I don't have a doubt that they'll be successful. I think it all goes back to the character" (S1E8). What Michelle doesn't say is that what the girls will set their minds to will be determined by their future husbands.<sup>205</sup>

The strategy here is one that was first highlighted during my examinations of both modesty and ministry in the Duggars' TV shows. A common concern that the producers anticipate that viewers might raise is discussed head on; the Duggars (Michelle, in this

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<sup>204</sup> Indeed, at 27, Jana Duggar, who remains unmarried, still remains a resident of the family home and does not have consistent, out-of-the-home employment. This is because, as discussed in the previous chapter, Quiverfull children are considered to be under the direct authority of their parents until the point at which they marry, and women are expected to serve as helpers to their father in anticipation of their roles as wives and mothers. Jana is employed in the very job she expects to have in the future within her own family context; her twin, John David, lives at the family home but maintains his own employment, so that he can build a foundation for supporting his future family.

<sup>205</sup> Part of the reason that Michelle insists on denying that the family is not setting their daughters up to be stay-at-home moms is that the very term reflects dissonance with their worldview. Quiverfull women focus on the domestic space and remain under the authority of their husbands, certainly, but they conceive of themselves as playing an active role in ministry, which adds a, active outreach dimension to their roles that the framing "stay-at-home" clearly lacks.

particular episode) frame that concern in a way that doesn't directly lie about Quiverfull beliefs, but allows viewers to interpret the Duggars' agenda in several ways, while also hearing phrases or terms that reflect more mainstream child-raising values. In the above episode, for example, Michelle appeals to the mainstream cultural narrative of individual choice: it's not that the Duggar parents are limiting their daughters' options, she explains, it's that her daughters want to become wives and mothers first and foremost. She also appeals to the cultural narrative that "girls can do anything guys can do," explaining that in her early married years she towed cars alongside Jim Bob as part of their towing business; at the same time, she discusses how stressful she found the experience, offering viewers who consider towing cars to be "man's work" a point of identification as well. Finally, the episode focuses on the Duggar children learning skills that are traditionally associated with the "opposite" sex, and Michelle trades on the fact that her family believes it is important to each such skills to all children to present the family as open-minded. By omitting a frank discussion of the reasoning behind these actions, Michelle makes it possible for a wider range of viewers to find commonality with the Duggar family than would otherwise be the case.

In this episode, we can clearly see that Michelle functions as both an author and a subject of the discourse surrounding her, although the boundaries between those roles are somewhat difficult to ascertain. Michelle does not exert direct control over the specific questions that the producers ask her during the interview components of the show, which means she is confronted with a structure that is somewhat out of her control; at the same time, she carefully crafts her answers as she responds, exerting direct control over the

information that her show disseminates.<sup>206</sup> She does not have complete control over what the producers film, though she is certainly able to influence her family regarding their behavior in front of the camera crew and to ensure that certain activities engaged in by her family are not conducted in front of the crew and that others are.<sup>207</sup>

The care with which the Duggars approach the narrative that is constructed on their reality TV show is obvious; it is made even more obvious by the occasional moments in which there are slips. For example, Season 5, Episode 15, which is entitled “Duggars on Fire,” viewers follow Duggar daughters Jill and Jana as, having recently joined the local volunteer fire department, they try to find firefighter dress uniforms with a skirt option (they do not try to find active duty firefighting uniforms with skirts; in Anna Duggar’s words from the episode, “obviously, they will wear the fire suits. You can’t walk into a fire in a skirt.”).<sup>208</sup> It is Anna, involved in the episode because she helps the girls tailor uniform pants into skirts when they cannot locate any premade skirts, who explains the rationale behind the project: “I think the

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<sup>206</sup> It is also likely that some subjects are forbidden the producers by the production contract that they’ve signed with the Duggars and that the Duggars participated actively in the process of delimiting the boundaries of that contract.

<sup>207</sup> For example, the police report that was made public after the first scandal involving Josh Duggar broke included testimony from a Duggar child (whose name was redacted) that indicated that the family uses corporal punishment (including the blanket training method that was discussed in Chapter 3). See, for example, *In Touch Weekly’s* article “Josh Duggar Chilling Molestation Confession In New Police Report,” which contains a digital copy of that police report. Such parenting methods are never directly witnessed, or even discussed, on camera.

<sup>208</sup> We see the girls wearing pant suits in certain, limited cases: when wearing active duty firefighting uniforms (S5E15), when hunting, (S10E11) when skydiving (S6E1), and when engaging in winter activities that involve snow pants, such as skiing (S7E1). This seems to be an exception that is made for a combination of pragmatics (such as fire safety) and modesty concerns (skirts, which generally considered more modest for women by the Duggars than pants are, would not be practically more modest in the case of skydiving). It is somewhat noteworthy that the Duggar girls are permitted to engage in activities in which an exception must be made to their general modesty standard; at one point in this episode, Josh notes that this is an appropriate time for his sisters to wear pants, because their doing so will not cause men to focus inappropriately on their bodies, since everyone will be focused on the priority of fighting fires. These exceptions also relate in part to the Duggars’ commitment to American identity, which will be discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter.



main reason Joshua’s sisters don’t wear pants is just to be feminine and to look like a lady.” This statement does not explicitly associate the Duggar girls’ skirt-wearing practice with behavioral restrictions or religious beliefs, giving viewers a potentially broad set of options for engagement with the practice. As the conversation continues, however, Anna returns to the original question, and also notes that wearing skirts is “really a way to show deference to men.” Anna, here, is bucking the trend of making indirect allusions to the ideology behind the Duggar girls’ practice of wearing skirts rather than making outright statements that make that ideology more explicit; though the episode does not dwell on the moment, it clearly stands out as atypical to the Duggars’ usual approach by narrowing the way in which readers can understand the practice.

In many cases, the Duggars present gender roles and characteristics in ways that are not explicitly discussed at all. For example, they consistently emphasize characteristics of their children that demonstrate their commitment and suitedness to expected gender roles. Jessa, we are told repeatedly, is an excellent organizer; that this will equip her to manage her husband’s household is hinted at, but never fully expressed (S15E9, *19 Kids and Counting*). Jana is shown having a strong ability to complete home improvement projects, especially ones that involve interior decorating--this will enable her to be a resource for her husband, as she creates a warm, inviting home on a thrifty budget (S3E6, *Counting On*). Jill is talented with the children—she pursues an apprenticeship in midwifery, which allows her to facilitate the home birth her sister Jessa opts for when delivering Henry, her second son, and gives her skills that can support her husband’s overseas missions calling (S5E4, *Counting On*). Josh (pre-scandal; he’s rarely discussed post-scandal, except as a way to showcase his wife’s faithfulness), John-David, and Joseph are all successfully, manly entrepreneurs and workers—they are good

providers, able to support their future wives and to provide for “as many children as God gives them.” Such consistent, ongoing characterizations function to naturalize the gender differences that the viewer perceives among the Duggar family. Taken as individual traits, they appear innocuous; taken as a program of gender role reinforcement, they establish an ideological underpinning that is both difficult to recognize and difficult to counter.

This programmatic emphasis of gender difference not only serves to allow the individual to fight against the corruption of original sin, but also enables them to set an example for those outside their worldview’s parameters.<sup>209</sup> Above, Michelle Duggar argued that, to some extent, gender differences are innate; the Botkin sisters explained that when women behave in ways that don’t reflect the gender roles God intended, they are giving into the feminism that they have inherited from Eve, who gave into self-glorification and putting herself first in the Garden of Eden and have cursed women to fight against the same temptation ever since. Therefore, when Quiverfull adherents insist on gender differences—such as women being tempted by romance stories and men being tempted by pornography because women are primarily verbal and men are visual—they are not only attempting to document God-given gender differences, they are also actively working to instantiate them

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<sup>209</sup> It is difficult to determine the extent to which Quiverfull adherents enthusiastically embrace gender difference because it is something emphasized by their religious worldview and the extent to which they enthusiastically embrace it because, within the Quiverfull worldview, difference and individuality are often minimized or even denigrated as rebellion against God and his natural order, and gender therefore functions as a way to carve out a somewhat unique identity. Certainly, having a unique identity surfaces as a concern of Quiverfull adherents: when new children are born, families often make a point to talk about how each new child is unique and special. This was the case in the episode in which Alyssa (Bates) Webster’s second child was born (See *Bringing Up Bates*, S5E15).

over and against the “natural” inclinations that are the result of original sin and that they believe are overemphasized by contemporary American culture.<sup>210</sup>

This model of engagement is based on the belief that repetitive and consistent external stimuli can create lasting internal changes in the people who experience them. This belief informs Quiverfull approaches to child raising; that approach is exemplified in the example of one of the child training techniques that is common among Quiverfull families, “blanket training.”<sup>211</sup> Though it is not clear with whom or when blanket training originated, it is most clearly laid out by Quiverfull adherents Michael and Debi Pearl in their book *How to Train Up a Child*. The Pearls’ teachings have inspired many families who are either affiliated with Quiverfull movement or who have adopted some of the child-raising and family-structuring practices that are common among Quiverfull families. The Pearls advocate consistent, frequent use of corporal methods, including spanking and switching, and beginning at a very young age, to “train” children. The Pearls explain that the consistent use of the word “No,” accompanied by a spank or a stroke of the switch any time a child does not comply with the verbal instruction will train the child to obey instantly: “Through this process, the child will associate the pain with the word “No.” There comes a time when your word alone is sufficient to gain obedience” (6). The method used is very Pavlovian, and children are

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<sup>210</sup> This attempt requires a complex sleight of hand. For example, in S3E8 of *Bringing Up Bates*, the family’s firstborn son, Zach, graduates from the police academy. Though the cameras clearly show women in his graduating class, the family never comments on those women, but maintains an active commentary that frames Zach’s police pursuits as inherently masculine. The lack of commentary is an indictment--Quiverfull adherents disapprove of women taking on positions of authority or physical prowess generally--but it is a carefully crafted condemnation, one that aims at minimizing the ire produced among certain fans by not calling specific attention to it.

<sup>211</sup> When Quiverfull families discuss child raising, they almost always use the word “training” rather than “raising.”

consistently compared not only to soldiers and athletes in the Pearls' book, but also to horses and dogs.<sup>212</sup>

Though the Duggars do not mention the Pearls by name on *19 Kids and Counting*, and although an instance of corporal punishment is never mentioned on the show, the Duggars have mentioned using blanket training several times in various public forums. For example in their first book, Michelle explains the following:

Another important character quality we want to instill in our children is self-control, and we begin that training early in their lives with something we call 'blanket time.' The practice has been a blessing to us in many ways. Our only regret is that we didn't hear about it until our second set of twins were toddlers. In short, during blanket time—for older youngsters, we call it 'sit-down time'—the child quietly sits and plays with a single toy for a specified time in one place, either on a blanket spread on the floor, in a chair next to me (Michelle) if it's during homeschool time for the older siblings, or wherever they're asked to sit quietly for a few minutes. (123)

The Duggars do not specifically state that the punishment for infractions of the rules of blanket time is corporal in nature, but the setup Michelle describes mirrors the one the Pearls discuss in their book closely. Additionally, their discussion of the "four points of obedience--instant, cheerful, thorough, [and] unconditional"--very much mirrors the Pearls' teachings, especially when they use phrases such as "delayed disobedience is really disobedience" and "Mom has found that many of these situations can be avoided by training kids how to respond

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<sup>212</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, the Quiverfull movement considers obedience to authority to be an absolute imperative. Such a method is explicitly aimed at breaking the child's will, because the post-Fall will is polluted and will ultimately lead the child astray.

to a situation before it arises” (*Growing Up Duggar* 44, 45).<sup>213</sup> The Pearls advocate punishing children any time that obedience is not instant; the Duggars characterize disobedience in a way that closely matches that view.<sup>214</sup>

For the Duggars, the Pearls, and the other Quiverfull families who engage in this method of child discipline, the end justifies the means. Blanket training contrasts rather starkly with the prevailing model of child training, as the Pearls suggest in their book. Mainstream child raising wisdom, which Quiverfull adherents refer to as “the American system” or simply as “humanism,” tends to value a style of parenting that centers on developing a child’s individuality and potential from the assumption that the child is inherently good or innocent, or at least not wicked. Quiverfull adherents believe that we are all inherently corrupt, so while individual personality traits are sometimes considered indications of God’s craftsmanship, behaviors that do not demonstrate proper conformity to authority need to be excised from the child. The Pearls explain this philosophy as follows:

In many families, it seems that many of the goals of child training have been lost. Parents often *expect* their children to know what they should say and do, and then they’re shocked and react harshly when their sweet little two-year-old throws a tantrum in the middle of the grocery story. This parental attitude probably stems from

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<sup>213</sup> As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there is concrete evidence that the Duggars’ child training program involves corporal punishment. That evidence can be found in the police reports that were published in the wake of the first Josh Duggar scandal contained. Those reports contained accounts from the children that they were spanked by their parents. See, again, *In Touch Weekly’s* article “Josh Duggar Chilling Molestation Confession in New Police Report.”

<sup>214</sup> This theory of child raising also appears in Appendix A of the Botkin sisters’ book, in which they provide an interview that they conducted with their father. In responding to questions about how to properly raise daughters, he opines that, to correct a daughter’s bad attitude, her father should “spank her firmly and calmly when she’s young, for active and passive disobedience, and she will love you for it all her life” (304). This condemnation of passive disobedience is in line with what is discussed by both the Pearls and the Duggars above: if a child obeys grudgingly, they are not truly obeying.

the belief that we are all basically good deep down inside, but the truth is, we are all born with a sin nature. (44)

According to this worldview, if children are not strictly trained to obedience, no matter the length to which that training must go, they will be eternally damned, because they are born innately corrupted by sin. As they express that belief, the Pearls also uphold the common Quiverfull assertion that the worldview they espouse was once more widely held, calling attention to their belief that the authority structure that God has ordained has, itself, been polluted by modern society's collective captivity to its "sin nature."

Children are "trained" in the way described above for two ontologically significant reasons. The first is, as mentioned above, out of concern for their eternal salvation: children trained to obey their parents unconditionally are primed to follow (the Quiverfull interpretation of) God's will unconditionally; following God's will unconditionally is a sign of being saved.<sup>215</sup> The second is a focus on obeying the abovementioned Dominion Mandate. Children serve as tools that parents use to fulfill this fundamental purpose; their participation in the process of spreading Christian dominion is one of the main targets of the child training programs in which Quiverfull adherents engage.<sup>216</sup>

This understanding of children largely derives from Psalm 127: 3-5, the psalm quoted at the beginning of this chapter and from which the Quiverfull movement derives its name. That the psalm is used as the guiding principle for Quiverfull families avoiding any kind of birth

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<sup>215</sup> This belief reflects the influence of orthodox Calvinism, in which participation in the hierarchy of authority ordained by God is a sign of being right with him (see John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*).

<sup>216</sup> As mentioned previously, Quiverfull families almost never refer to the process of parenting as "child raising"; instead, they consistently refer to parenting as "child training." Such language emphasizes their devaluation of independence in their children, as well as their focus on the moral condition of their children, or what they refer to as their "character."

control, instead accepting the number of children with which God blesses them, has been clearly documented (Joyce 134). The psalm is also used, however, to characterize in what way children are a blessing and the fundamental purpose they are believed to serve, something that is discussed much less often in popular discussions of the Quiverfull movement and not explicitly documented on any of the reality TV shows that follow the lives of Quiverfull families.<sup>217</sup> Children function, according to Quiverfull interpretation of Psalm 127, as tools through which their parents' mission of dominion is extended. Specifically, they are the weapons through which their parents wage war to take over the Earth.

This characterization of children exemplifies the Quiverfull concept of authority discussed in previous chapters. Husbands have absolute authority, wives are the direct lieutenants who execute their husbands' orders, and children are loyal subjects whose duty is to obey and contribute to the kingdom that their parents are growing. Returning to the Botkins' phrasing, "Marriage is where your new ministry starts, where you become, in a sense, the queen of a little kingdom where you rule with your husband as God's vice-gerents [sic], working together extending the kingdom, subduing the earth, properly managing its resources, and disciplining the nations" (216). Children start out their lives as resources to be managed; as they progress through their development, their parents "invest" in them, training them to be ready to wield the weapons of dominion in addition to functioning as

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<sup>217</sup> There is an active online community, hosted on Vyckie Garrison's blog *No Longer Quivering* and others, of people who grew up in and have left the Quiverfull movement; on those sites, this purpose is discussed frequently. Additionally, Kiernyn Darkwater's *Autostraddle.com* article that was published within a week of the 2017 Trump inauguration and that discussed this element of Quiverfull culture received notable attention on social media. It seems likely that we can understand the lack of discussion of this second focus on Psalm 127 to result from a generally dismissive attitude towards Quiverfull culture.

those weapons.<sup>218</sup> When the children have been fully trained, they enter into marriage and begin the cycle anew. With each generation, the number of weapons, and the number of those equipped to wield them, grows.

This conceptualization of children has significant ontological implications. Since the Quiverfull interpretation of Genesis 2:23-24 sees a husband and wife functioning as a single person, and therefore understands non-married persons as ontologically incomplete, it follows that children fall into this category of being unfinished. This means that individual men and individual women are only partial reflections of God; God can only be fully reflected in the singular person of the married couple. Quiverfull adherents use the verse not only to interpret the proper role of children, but also to interpret their ontology itself: children are incomplete people, waiting for the spouse that will enable them to enter full responsibility and accountability in the eyes of God; as incomplete entities, they must remain under the watch and guidance of their parents.<sup>219</sup>

This set of understandings—the weaponization of children and their extreme dependence on their parents until marriage—explains why marriage and pregnancy are areas

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<sup>218</sup> See *Bringing Up Bates*, in which Gil and Kelly discuss “investing” in their children in many episodes.

<sup>219</sup> This, of course, adds another dimension to the importance of purity. If a young person engages intimately with someone other than their God-intended counterpart, they tarnish the perfection of their bond and thus, in the process, tarnish their ability to fully reflect the image of God. (One thing to possibly discuss is the reason that this form of sin is seen as so central). For Quiverfull adherents, you “belong” to your future spouse because you are the only pairing that can come together in a full reflection of God (in a later section, discuss the relationship this has to the concept of the Trinity—just as God is both one and three, so the husband and wife are both one and two). This also explains why Gil Bates, in his ATI speech discussed above, spends significant time focusing on how it is important for families to avoid becoming “permissive, separated, or secretive.” This belief also explains why it is that older children, such as Jana and John-David Duggar, both 27 years old, remain at home with their families rather than pursuing a more independent life.



of such consistent and extreme excitement within Quiverfull families.<sup>220</sup> It might seem natural to express skepticism about the focus that the families place on pregnancy and birth, given the large number of children that the Duggar and Bates families have. Erin Paine, second oldest daughter of Gil and Kelly, argues against such skepticism in a statement she makes in *Bringing Up Bates* S4E22, the episode that showcases the birth of her second child: “It was so exciting. There’s no words for it. It was, like, the best time of my life. You know, you have all these special moments, and I think of the time when we got married, you know then Carson’s birth, and then Brooklyn’s, and it’s just, it’s so special.” Gil Bates explains the events of this episode in a similar way. He states that the family is “Just looking forward to the next miracle...God’s writing a book and we’re just reading one chapter at a time.” (*Bringing Up Bates*, S4E22).<sup>221</sup> Such milestone moments as marriage, pregnancy, and birth, which may begin to seem banal to the average viewer of these reality TV shows, are moments of accomplishment (victory, perhaps, in their own words) for the families involved, as each marriage signifies another vicegerent in God’s kingdom, and each child a weapon in the hand of God’s warrior.

The milestone moments of marriage and children both signify ontologically significant events: in marriage, people become whole, complete reflections of the image of God; in the

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<sup>220</sup> Among both the Bates and the Duggars, there is significant emotion surrounding weddings- of daughters, which are characterized at least in part as moments of loss for the family and, particularly, for the father. (S3E1 of *Bringing Up Bates*, which highlights daughter Michael’s wedding, is a good example of this trend). This reflects the ontological change that takes place at the moment of marriage- the daughter has become something other than she was in her birth family.

<sup>221</sup> This pairs with a comment Gil made in an earlier episode of the same season, in which he noted that “You know the Bible talks about having a lasting heritage,” going on to say that kids and grandkids are the “one thing you’re gonna leave that’s gonna really matter.” In addition to emphasizing the importance that the reproductive cycle, these statements highlight the focus on people as instruments that pervades the Quiverfull ideology.

birth of a new child, weapons and future weapon makers are created. Those ontological events indicate that the relationship that Quiverfull families have to reproduction is one that is primarily characterized by repetition and expansion. Marrying allows one to begin fulfilling an essential part of one's destiny. Having a baby equals the fulfillment of that destiny; once the baby is had, the way to move forward is to both train the baby to behave in the same way that you have and to have another baby so that you can begin the entire process again. This fundamentally mirrors the narrative of Christianity to which the Quiverfull adhere--the idea that there is a foundational moment that establishes a reality (i.e. asking Jesus into one's heart) that one lives one's entire life striving to fulfill, and that if enough people engage in such foundational moments, the battle for the earth will be won.<sup>222</sup>

### **Section 3: Quiverfull Ontology, Representation, and Reality TV**

Since reproduction represents the fulfillment of human beings' ontological purpose within the context of the Quiverfull movement, genealogy occupies a priority placement in Quiverfull valuation. Michel Foucault has theorized that a genealogical, or effective, approach to history highlights the discontinuities that develop within structural limitations that we

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<sup>222</sup> One way to think of the Quiverfull project is that it is actively working towards the erasure of time. Eternity, after all, is timeless, and there is a powerful strain of post-millennialism in the Quiverfull movement that holds that humans themselves will be instrumental in bringing about the millennium. There's also an interesting contradiction here between the forever corrupted nature of the individual and the idea that human community can achieve a greater state of perfection. The ontology of Quiverfull participants is constantly, intentionally mediated and contested—they have instantiated for themselves a sin nature and need God to intervene in that natural state—hence, they are always in a process of becoming. This is probably a discussion that will be moved to the theoretical section at the end of the chapter.

often take for granted as stable and secure.<sup>223</sup> Within the Quiverfull movement, the traditional act of recording genealogy is used as a way to directly combat historicity: it serves as a tangible, symbolical documentation of Quiverfull efforts to eliminate as much change as possible throughout generations, using processes of purification that has been extensively discussed in this and previous chapters. In this model, each generation (itself functioning as both a result and an origin) is supposed to be purer than the last, by virtue of being free from the pollution that the original generations necessarily bring to the movement (as discussed in the purity chapter, the Duggar and Bates parents regularly bemoan their own exposure to the world and the pain and temptation that it has caused them). The Quiverfull movement's goal—the establishment of the pure (enough) society that will usher in the millennial reign of Jesus Christ—will be accomplished when they have put an end to historical change.

This goal means not only that Quiverfull adherents are constantly seeking to progress towards an already established end but also that they face constantly anxiety as they seek that end.<sup>224</sup> Anxiety emerges as most acute when individual's ability to participate in the program of Dominion appears to be stalled in some way: when the marriage partner one has been yearning for fails to appear in one's reproductive prime, or when menopause ends a woman's period of fertility. Such anxiety disproportionately affects women, whose primacy in serving as a helpmeet and bearing children eclipses any other purpose they might find. The Duggars, for example, acknowledged on *19 Kids and Counting* that they were both exploring

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<sup>223</sup> See Michel Foucault's "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History."

<sup>224</sup> It is this anxiety about the efficacy of genealogy that connects it fruitfully to Foucault's theoretical framework: Quiverfull adherents work to eliminate much of the variation that comes with both genetic recombination and contesting cultural narratives, but they are aware of the challenges they face in their task, particularly in regards to the latter form of variation.

fertility treatment options for Michelle and “praying about adoption.”<sup>225</sup> This process occurred after the significantly premature birth of their youngest child, Josie, and Michelle’s miscarriage of the fetus that they named Jubilee Shalom.<sup>226</sup> For a viewer not aware of the purpose behind the Duggar’s pursuit of children, Michelle and Jim Bob’s actions often appear shocking and almost callously selfish.<sup>227</sup>

Even for viewers familiar with the Quiverfull framework, questions might arise. Why, for example, is it considered acceptable to help God along with the fertility process (by using such means as fertility medication, for example, or even the resources of a neonatal intensive care unit to keep a child that would otherwise be non-viable alive) when it is not acceptable to make it more difficult for God to act? Isn’t each kind of intervention an interference with the purity of God’s design?<sup>228</sup> In answering these questions, it is important to remember that the Quiverfull movement more heavily emphasizes ontology than it does theology. While such theological questions might exist, and might even be raised within Quiverfull circles, ontological pressures take precedent. If children are a blessing from the Lord, then children are a sign of God’s favor—the more fertile one is, the more God is bestowing his approval.<sup>229</sup> Furthermore, Quiverfull adherents interpret Psalm 127 and other verses to indicate that

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<sup>225</sup> See S11E3 of *19 Kids and Counting*.

<sup>226</sup> See S9E9 of *19 Kids and Counting*.

<sup>227</sup> As discussed previously, the Duggars do not fully expound upon their theological beliefs on their reality shows. They express the belief that “children are a blessing from the Lord,” and note that they plan to have as many children “as God provides,” but they don’t explain the rationale for those beliefs in detail.

<sup>228</sup> Quiverfull authorities and adherents have expressed considerable disagreement over the issue of adoption and how it fits into God’s plan of Dominion—this issue will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>229</sup> In E1S2 of *19 Kids and Counting*, Michelle relays what Jim Bob told one of his younger sons when he asked why people were always around taking pictures of the family: “it’s amazing that God would give us this many blessings and bless us with all these children.” According to Michelle, he went on to tell his son that it’s surprising, and that that’s why so many people want to take pictures of the family.

having children is one of the primary objectives of marriage. Seeking to demonstrate one's openness and willing to work for children becomes cast as obedience to God because it is in line with God's larger design; making conception more difficult would be a direct attack on God's plan.

This anxiety about God's favor is seen not only in concern over fertility issues; it manifests itself throughout the child "training" process discussed in some detail above. Despite its desire to end history, the Quiverfull movement believes that its goal can be accomplished only with the grace of God. Human beings cannot be perfected without God's help; full perfection will not arrive in the world until the transcendent God become fully immanent, collapsing the difference between the divine and earthly realms. The responsibility that is placed on human beings is twofold within this model: to recognize and accept God's grace working in one's life and to make the world as ready as possible to receive that grace. Advice such as "practice makes progress," an axiom frequently expressed by both Michelle and Anna Duggar on *19 Kids and Counting*, reflects this worldview: a person can be better at recognizing and reflecting God's grace in her life, but she can't achieve perfection before God decides to grant it.<sup>230</sup>

The phrase "practice makes progress" also provides evidence of the general Quiverfull rejection of self-motivation and independent subjectivity. "Practice makes progress" is applied to the training of children not only in the context of learning skills, but also in terms of learning obedience. External authority structures—both rules and those who enforce them—are believed to be set by God, and one's own emotions and reactions are

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<sup>230</sup> See, for example, Seasons 12 and 13 of *19 Kids and Counting*.

surface-level distractions meant to lead one away from truth in a misleading question for self-sponsored authenticity. A person should not give in to their own desires and urges, since those come from what the Botkin sisters would refer to as one's "sin nature." Instead, a person should seek to conform completely to God's plan, working to eradicate feelings of discontent, frustration, or uncertainty. According to this system of belief, an individual's desires takes less precedent than the needs of the community around him.<sup>231</sup> Obedience is not just something that is required of children; it sets the precedent for a person's entire life of following God's will.

Within a Quiverfull context, those community needs are often expressed programmatically: every person has a role in the community, and while the available roles don't change, a person will progress through several over the course of her life. Careful attention to *19 Kids and Counting*, *Counting On*, and *Bringing Up Bates* reveals a constant reference to life stages. Those life stages seem to be composed of child, spouse, parent, and elder. In many ways, these stages map onto the five life roles promoted by the IBLP: provider, parent, proclaimer, person, and partner, and it is noteworthy that child and elder do not find an easy location in the life roles that Quiverfull authorities promote. Younger (and unmarried people) have not yet reached their purpose; older people become, in many ways, passive or secondary observers of the development of their investments (posterity).

The set life roles around which Quiverfull belief is structured make reality TV a perfect venue for Quiverfull families to use to display their way of life and their values. Both the

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<sup>231</sup> There is another acronym commonly cited in Quiverfull circles that explicitly expresses this principle: "Jesus first, Others second, Yourself last," which can be collapsed into the acronym, "JOY." See the previous chapter for a detailed discussion of this axiom.

Quiverfull movement and reality TV in general share repetition as a key ontological component.<sup>232</sup> What is more, the repetition promoted by both reality TV and the Quiverfull movement is structured similarly: some difference or variation is allowed; indeed, it is necessary to introduce variation to maintain interest in the message being conveyed. It is which differences that are allowed, and how those differences are permitted to manifest, that is carefully controlled in both contexts.

The interaction between personality and gender identity is something that gets emphasized on *19 Kids and Counting*, *Counting on*, and *Bringing Up Bates*. As mentioned above, each of the older Duggar daughters is frequently assigned a main trait—a trait that always is able to easily fit within the rubric of “feminine”—that sets her apart from her similarly aged siblings. From early on in the show, it is clear that the Duggar girls are all expected to pursue a life plan that focuses around being a helpmeet to a husband, having as many children “as God allows,” and functioning as a stay-at-home wife and mother. The traits that are highlighted all fit with this vision.

As viewers watch the Duggar daughters grow up, they are offered the possibility of being captivated by two things: suspense regarding whether one of the daughters will choose to buck the Quiverfull way of life and the ability to watch each daughter translate the role she has (been) chosen to fill in a way that reflects her own personality and style. These two options work in tandem: the more the daughters do not buck the trends their families set, the more the suspense builds. Show producers play on the suspense, as do Hollywood gossip columns, because the suspense brings in viewership. The Duggars, too, benefit from the

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<sup>232</sup> See, for example, the work of reality TV scholar Bill Nichols.

suspense, because it attracts viewers and increases their ability to display their lifestyle and religious values. Should one of the girls break away from family norms, the Duggars' goal would be negatively impacted; if one does not, the strength of their convictions and the success of their methods in raising their daughters to share them is underscored that much more.

It is noteworthy that, as yet, the only family member to significantly break family norms is Josh Duggar, and his break with norms has been portrayed as the result of giving into temptation, not as an intentional attempt to break with Quiverfull principles. In May 2015, several media outlets, beginning with *In Touch Magazine*, reported on the fact that Josh Duggar had, according to an Arkansas police report, molested several of his sisters and a female babysitter when he was 14 and 15 years old. Alongside discussion of his actions, media outlets noted that Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar had decided to keep their son out of the criminal justice system, sending him instead to a Quiverfull-run rehabilitation program.<sup>233</sup> When this scandal broke, Quiverfull adherents generally supported Josh; shortly thereafter, it became public knowledge that he had had an account on Ashley Madison, a website designed to facilitate marital affairs, and that he had, in fact, been unfaithful to his wife, at which point Duggar lost his support in the Quiverfull community.<sup>234</sup> The wider Internet

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<sup>233</sup> For details, see *In Touch Weekly's* "Josh Duggar Chilling Molestation Confession In New Police Report" and *USA Today's* "Timeline: Duggar sex-abuse scandal."

<sup>234</sup> See Esther Lee's *Us Weekly* article, "Ben Seewald's Dad Michael Seewald Rips 'Pretender' Josh Duggar in New Blog Post: He Lived a 'Lifestyle of Evil'" for more information, including extensive quotes from Michael Seewald's blog post condemning Josh Duggar, which has since been removed from his blog.



response to both parts of the Duggar-related scandal was largely one of condemnation, with accusations of hypocrisy common.<sup>235</sup>

When the Duggars faced Josh's original behavior, they faced a conundrum between mainstream social values and Quiverfull ones. To report Josh to the police would have broken with Quiverfull convictions that it is families and churches who should deal with the sinful behavior of a minor, not states; to refuse to report him to the police was to break with mainstream cultural values that could jeopardize their growing reality TV ministry (the molestations occurred prior to the airing of *17 Kids and Counting* but after the airing of the first *TLC* special, *14 Children and Pregnant Again*). They chose to keep faith with their Quiverfull values (which were, it must be noted, the underlying cause of their television appeal) and to keep the matter of Josh's actions private within their family and community. This decision allowed their family reality TV franchise to continue until the information was leaked in 2015, leading to the cancellation of *19 Kids and Counting* (Bowerman).

It did not take *TLC* long to launch *Counting On* as a follow-up to *19 Kids and Counting*. *Counting On* mostly excludes Michelle and Jim Bob from footage and entirely excludes Josh from being displayed on air. Despite the interruption Josh's scandal caused in the Duggars' TV presence, however, it only served to emphasize the validity of the suspense viewers feel in regards to whether the Duggar children will remain in the fold: if Josh, who held a reputable Family Research Council position and showed the payoff possible from his family's lifestyle, could fall, who might be next?

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<sup>235</sup> See, for example, Matthew Rozsa's *The Daily Dot* article "Josh Duggar's hypocrisy is part of a much larger cultural problem."

In addition to the spectacle of suspense that the Duggars offer, they share, along with the producers of their show, an investment in one of the key strategies of the reality TV format that they follow: the deployment of this matrix of similarity and difference to simultaneously elicit identification and distance from audience members. The utilization of this strategy has been discussed at length in Chapter 2 as it is applied to the issue of modest dress; here, it is worth mentioning again to call attention to the fact that this strategy is mutually beneficial for show producers, sponsors, and Duggars alike. The show and its characters constantly shift between engaging in behaviors and relationships that are likely similar to their viewing audience—family outings, the daily responsibilities of running a home, etc.—and demonstrating subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) deviations from the norm with respect to those behaviors and relationships. This approach taps into the affectual response of viewers; as Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn explain it, “the winning group formula for a reality TV show appears to be a combination of the typecast, the banal, and the exceptional” (603). Reality TV seeks to give viewers what they expect, while teasing them with the occasionally realized possibility that they’ll encounter something that surprises them.

As an example, one of the repetitive aspects of the production approach to *Counting On* is the fact that the producers frequently ask the young adults in the family questions designed to interrogate their familiarity with mainstream popular culture. On E2S4 of the show, for example, the producers ask several of the adult-aged children what the DJ-ing technique of “scratching” is. With the exception of Jessa, who provides a tentative and awkward correct answer (Jessa has, with her husband, spent time in the recording studio of Christian hip-hop artist Flame), none of the interviewees are able to provide a correct answer. One of the older Duggar brothers explains that scratching is “what you do when you have an

itch.” Such answers are common responses in these interview sessions.<sup>236</sup> Such moments offer multiple possible reactions simultaneously: a viewer not familiar with the particular popular culture reference being highlighted is invited to share a moment of identification with the young adult Duggars, while a viewer with greater familiarity with the reference might marvel at the isolation from popular culture that seems to characterize the lives of the Duggar siblings.

In these moments, both the show producers and the Duggar family are able to achieve their goals, which both align and differ. For both groups, maintenance and increase of viewership is important: any strategy that successfully engages the audience is desirable. From a production standpoint, it seems as though this style of interview question is meant to be somewhat mocking (though the show is not structured in such a way as to make such moments seem malicious, as sometimes happens in more overtly sensationalized reality TV contexts). The Duggars indicate awareness of their own innocence, and even of their own ignorance. However, they are always careful to treat that ignorance with good humor. For them, it serves the purpose of reminding their viewers that they are “in the world, but not of the world,” simultaneously offering them the opportunity to imagine that it might be possible to have a satisfying life without engaging deeply with popular culture narratives. Even if they show is making fun of them, in other words, they are able to use that fact to their advantage,

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<sup>236</sup> This is a strategy that was also used frequently in the earlier seasons of *19 Kids and Counting*. In Season 2, for example, the producers frequently inserted on-screen lists into the show to demonstrate how the Duggars’ recommendations for media like books and movies differed from the recommendations of more mainstream sources.

by calling attention to their lack of need to give into the social pressure of conformity that underlies that mockery.<sup>237</sup>

In moments such as these, *Counting On* and other shows that highlight Quiverfull families call attention to the differences that such families tend to have vis-a-vis mainstream viewers; those moments of difference are always sandwiched into moments with which a large majority of viewers are able to identify—exploring romantic relationships, family outings, the chance to eat an interesting meal, etc. The shows work to highlight the way in which Quiverfull families achieve what might be called a kind of non-normative normalcy.<sup>238</sup>

The reality TV structure is, in many ways, an ideal medium for not simply the spreading, but also the demonstration, of the Quiverfull lifestyle. In its ideal form, the Quiverfull lifestyle remains consistent and repetitive, with accomplishment recognized as the ability to successfully perpetuate the cycle of reproductive futurity that will ultimately result in the Christianization of the country and, later, the world. Reality TV is an effective medium for displaying this form: in its repetitiveness, it offers the Duggars the opportunity to convey the message of their lifestyle over and over again, its consistency highlighted in the small changes made between each episode. If the Duggars are able to successfully demonstrate that consistency, especially in a way that highlights its multi-generational nature, then they are able to underscore the success of their family's mission. At the same time, reality TV elicits

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<sup>237</sup> When analyzing the ways in which *19 Kids and Counting* and other Quiverfull-focused reality TV shows approach their audiences, it is important to keep in mind the likely parameters of their target audience is pulled from particular segments of the TV-viewing population.

<sup>238</sup> It bears noting that the tabloid attention given to the families highlighted in these shows--almost always the Duggars, rather than the Bates--does not follow this strategy; instead, it consistently works to create scandal around the Duggars (see the majority, if not all, of the articles cited in this dissertation's bibliography). The non-normative normalcy seen in the show, on the other hand, rests heavily on banality--the Duggars are presented as too boring to be truly scandalous. In tandem, the tabloid attention and structure of the show work to create a matrix of suspense.

pleasure in the audience by offering the predictability of the same formula being fulfilled over and over. It would serve the Duggars' purpose if such pleasure, over time, were translated by the audience into an interest in the lifestyle that the show depicts.

Another way in which reality TV and Quiverfull lifestyle and culture dovetail is through the surveillance culture prevalent in both contexts. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Duggars have created a culture within their home in which people are rarely alone; each child who leaves the home takes a buddy with them, whether that trip is a local errand or an extended missionary trip halfway around the globe. Such surveillance sometimes extends to the Duggar parents as well; in S5E6, viewers are shown Jim Bob's internet use being monitored by then pre-teen Joy-Anna.<sup>239</sup> For the Duggars to be subject to the surveillance of the TV crew cameras is, therefore, not as invasive as it might be for a family not structured around a surveillance culture in which individual privacy is seen as threatening rather than desirable. On the level of regular monitoring, such surveillance is merely an extension of the status quo with which all members of the Duggar family are familiar.

Despite the familiarity of surveillance culture to this Duggars, however, there are important differences that need to be noted. The first is the gaze of the audience carrying out the surveillance. As they act out their lives before the camera, the Duggars are not, after all, only being surveilled by each other; that reality is augmented by the awareness that both crew and television audience are agents of surveillance: the Duggars are not only being surveilled, but their surveillance itself is being surveilled.

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<sup>239</sup> It appears that both Duggar parents are not subject to the same level of surveillance: during Josie's first year of life, during which her health is constantly at risk, Michelle often spends multiple days at a time alone with Josie.

The second is the permanence of the surveillance. If one behaves in a way not becoming a Duggar when only other family members are around and the camera crew is not, that deviance from family norms is dealt with privately. When such a behavior occurs on camera, it becomes a permanent record, a stepping out of line that can be returned to and re-lived as often as the family desires it to be. Furthermore, the stakes of being surveilled on camera are higher. On-camera surveillance may be an extension of the status quo but it is also different because the reasons behind the surveillance are different: within the family, surveillance purports to prevent stumbling into sin; without the family, it serves to turn the family into examples of their values and worldview.

The Duggars occasionally express some tension over the issues of interpretation and authenticity that are raised by their show. Towards the end of S5E14 of *19 Kids and Counting*, for example, Anna Duggar expresses some defensiveness about her personal choices, articulating that her use of cloth diapers makes her behavior ecologically friendly despite the fact that she drives a Hummer rather than a Honda. It is unclear whether this defensiveness was anticipatory in nature or whether she was responding directly to some criticism that she had already received. In addition, the Duggars often assert that what people see on their show is entirely a reflection of their everyday lives. In S5E19, Michelle and Jim Bob are addressing a large church-based audience. Michelle explains that “people come up and say ‘Oh, I love your show,’ and...I think in my heart, “Okay, Lord, it’s not a show. It’s really not--it’s our life, it really is.” At the end of the same episode, in the context of the book signing that the family did after their lecture, Josiah Duggar noted that the experience was odd, because, “basically, they watch you a lot, and they basically already know you.” The Duggars insist that their show is an accurate representation of their lives, while at the same time expressing an awareness

that not everyone watching will see their lives through the same lens that they themselves do.

There are occasional moments in the show wherein the Duggars need to explicitly convince their audience that they are getting a chance to observe their life as it happens and not a scripted version of it. The tension this creates is seen, for example, in S5E15, “Duggars on Fire,” in which Jana and Jill show uniform skirts they have made to the fire chief. In explaining how awkward they felt doing that, Jana Duggar noted that “in reality television, usually the crew just films what we are doing day in and day out. But, every once in a while, they’ll give an idea, and Frank the camera guy suggested that we go and show the chief at the fire department the skirts that we’d made.” In this moment, Jana explicitly calls attention to the fact that she and her sister engaged in an activity at the behest of the camera crew. She therefore calls attention to the fact that the show is not 100% organic and that the camera crew can be active participants in the creation of the show, rather than strictly passive observers.

Jana’s decision to reveal this information can be understood through another authenticity issue that arises during the episode, this one focused more on the authenticity of the Duggars’ self-portrayal as strictly sticking to Quiverfull values. As they are interviewed, Jill and Jana explain that they usually show their new clothes to their mom, not to men. In her own interview segment, Anna explains that the reason for that is that “Guys really don’t care about those types of things.” This discussion attempts to cast the awkwardness as the result of stepping outside of gendered norms, and while this may be the case, it is also important to consider the potential variation of the Duggar’s audience, and the way that Jill and Jana may be speaking to multiple facets of it.

The surveillance the Duggars are under is not only conducted by their general public TV audience, but by their Quiverfull one as well. Michelle and Jim Bob note that, when they attend homeschool conferences sponsored by the IBLP, they are often approached by families who know who they are from watching their show (S2E12). They are often told that they are an encouragement; being an encouragement to other Quiverfull families means sticking to Quiverfull principles and presenting them on air. The Duggars, therefore, are constantly needing to keep a balance between presenting information in a way that draws a lay audience in and clearly signaling to people of likeminded belief that they are true to their common faith.

The incident with Jana and Jill in “Duggars on Fire” presents a moment in which striking that balance becomes particularly hard. A lay audience might not find the Duggar girls’ decision to show the fire chief their altered uniforms all that strange--after all, he has to approve any changes made within the department. A Quiverfull adherent, however, might find the decision concerning. Jill and Jana have specifically called a man’s attention to a part of their body other than their countenance. Preventing such attention is a main focus of Quiverfull dress because of the Quiverfull concern with defrauding men, and is understood as “creating desires that cannot righteously be fulfilled” (S2E3). The excessive anxiety that Jill and Jana express may well relate to their own sense that they have betrayed their principles; the discussions of why women wear skirts that is so prominent in the episode may be the Duggars’ attempt to recast the narrative. When Josh explains that no one is going to be distracted by Jill and Jana wearing pants in the context of a fire, he may be explicitly addressing the Quiverfull audience, explaining the reason for this exception to modesty and also reminding them that firefighting is a serious business, and that the fire chief is not likely to be focused on the dress of his members even outside the context of a fire. When Anna



discusses that women wear skirts to show deference to men, she may be stating a principle usually not explicitly discussed by the Duggars on their show in order to recast the actions of the girls in an attempt to highlight their proper submission to authority.

Reality TV serves a final, connected role for Quiverfull families: documentation. Documentation plays an important role within larger Quiverfull culture: all reality shows that focus on Quiverfull adherents (*19 Kids and Counting*, *Counting On*, *The United Bates of America*, and *Bringing Up Bates*) feature many moments in which the shows' subjects discuss the importance of making and recording memories.<sup>240</sup> Events such as graduation and birthday parties, family excursions, and summer picnics are routinely referred to as opportunities for making memories. In *Bringing Up Bates* S4E19, for example, Kelly notes that pictures of the family are important because "we'll never be like this again."

Documenting things as they are in the moment are an important part of preserving memories. Memories are, in turn, important in Quiverfull culture because they are records that preserve moments of victory: after all, in the Quiverfull movement, a new child born is a new soldier for the Lord, a new marriage is the possibility of one's legacy of birthing soldiers expanded, and a new grandchild is the realization of that possibility. These moments of instantiations are both signs of God's plan progressing and God's favor being bestowed, whereas the periods between are the day to day grind of making those moments possible. Even as documentation makes creating a record of the path to ultimate victory with the coming of Christ possible, it also invites a nostalgia that focuses on the fact that, while some day "we'll always be like this," that day is not today. The yearning to live in the perfect

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<sup>240</sup> Michelle mentions the concept of "making memories" in the second *TLC* special on the Duggar family, *Raising 16 Children*. This concept has been a mainstay throughout the Duggars' on-air history.

moment is partially a future-oriented yearning: Quiverfull adherents believe that day will arrive with the coming of the kingdom of Christ. It is also a moment that carries with it regret for a present that is rapidly slipping into the past—the perfect moment to come will not be the one that the family has created, and the family can be only a pale imitation of the family that is the perfect church.

Within the Quiverfull context, then, documentation is simultaneously about progress towards the ultimate goal and the deferral of that goal. It offers a pale imitation of the goal by capturing a specific moment within the family project and removing it to some extent from its historical context by freezing it in time; it also offers an ongoing set of proof that the Quiverfull family can point to for the purpose of demonstrating its constant commitment to its values and its project. Each child, as long as they are living up to the Quiverfull ideal, becomes proof of the family's mission.

Documentation also functions to extend the act of witnessing to nonbelievers. Each photograph, each page of each book, each segment from each reality TV episode—each moment the Duggars themselves are creating the possibility of being witnessed by others in some way—serves as an ongoing form of witnessing to the world. Moments, through the process of documentation, become eternal.

Of course, as mentioned above, this process is not without its dangers for the Duggars. Just as every moment of Christian example becomes enshrined in a format that can be viewed or engaged with endlessly, so too can every moment of falling short. Falling short does not, however, automatically mean failure; the Duggars are, after all, trying to use their imperfect humanity as a way to appeal to and win over their audience, so as long as moments of falling short can be corrected and learned from, they can be used to the Duggar family's

advantage.<sup>241</sup> The Duggars can demonstrate, through their show, the grace of God that leads straying sinners back to the path of righteousness.

Ultimately, Quiverfull emphasis on both documentation and genealogy come together to form a key aspect of Quiverfull ontology. Quiverfull ideology wants to trace itself in an unbroken line both forwards and backwards: forwards in the generational cycle that allows an ever increasing number of followers to come into existence, backwards in that each ancestor fills the same role as his/her descendant and also in the sense of returning to radical roots. There are, in Quiverfull ideology, a consistent set of foundational moments that invite a nostalgic return (Jesus, the Reformation, the Puritans, the personal moment of salvation, the moment of marriage, the moment of each child's birth, etc.). These moments seem to contain a tantalizing combination of potential and realization that can never quite be returned to but are always yearned for—a combination that, in part, explains a host of Quiverfull trends, including the passion with which certain Quiverfull families pursue more children and struggle when the mother's childbearing years come to an end (such as when Jim Bob and Michelle considered the possibility of adoption after she failed to get pregnant in the aftermath of miscarrying the pregnancy that came after 19th child Josie's birth), and the repetitive structure of the Quiverfull year—days organized around a set spiritual ritual, years punctuated by attendance at IBLP and ATI events, etc.

The Duggars, then, are always working on a project of building a future that will eventually return humans to a past state of perfection, the state they enjoyed before humans committed the first sin; once that state of perfection has been achieved, humanity will no

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<sup>241</sup> *TLC* has significantly accommodated this possibility for the Duggars by creating *Counting On*, which as of the completion of this dissertation had just finished its sixth season.

longer be involved in a condition of unfolding history; rather, their being will be static, fixed in the way God intended for all eternity. This is, in part, what it means to be in the world, but not of it: the Duggars, and by extension all Quiverfull adherents, are forced to engage with historical progression, but their goal is ultimately to stop that progression by helping to usher in the eternal, atemporal kingdom of Christ. This mission, which focuses on the mechanism of return to a better past and which rejects all aspects of human culture that they see as getting in the way of that return, is fundamental to the Quiverfull project. And as we will see in the next section, it is also fundamental to the way that the Quiverfull movement privileges the concept of Western culture in general and American culture in particular.

To better understand the way that the Duggar family and other Quiverfull adherents see themselves as fighting to instantiate a historical process that actively works for, rather than against, the godly eternity that they imagine, it is important to understand the historical influences to which they trace their community. Ultimately, those historical influences—almost entirely men of high standing within important moments of the Christian church—can be understood as good readers; opposing, worldly influences against whom those men fight are bad readers, whether through being deceived or through active design. The next chapter, on Quiverfull understandings of history, will interrogate exactly who counts as a good or bad reader and how Quiverfull adherents see history as an unfolding process of opposition between good and evil.

## Chapter 4

### **Quiverfull History: Establishing the Unbroken Path of Righteousness through Reading**

*“Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal nexus of various moments of history. But no state of affairs is, as a cause, already a historical one. It becomes this, posthumously, through eventualities which may be separated from it by millennia. The historian who starts from this, ceases to permit the consequences of eventualities to run through the fingers like the beads of a rosary. He records [erfasst] the constellation in which his own epoch comes into contact with that of an earlier one. He thereby establishes a concept of the present as that of the here-and-now, in which splinters of messianic time are shot through.” Walter Benjamin, Theses on the Philosophy of History<sup>242</sup>*

### **Introduction: The History of the Quiverfull Movement**

In the above quote, Walter Benjamin describes a historical methodology that he believes has revolutionary possibilities: instead of starting with past events and tracing his way through them from one to the next, slowly completing a historical connect-the-dots picture that can only be seen when all of the past dots are connected, the historian with revolutionary consciousness begins with the image (constellation) that he sees, and seeks to understand how the particular dots (stars) that make up that image have come to be associated with each other to create an image that appears in the present (sky). Such a method of historical study would provide a much more successful, and purposeful, foundation from which to imagine a new way of engaging with the world. It would, in essence, give

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<sup>242</sup> The work is also referred to as “On the Concept of History,” which is how it is listed in the bibliography. The quote is the entirety of Addendum A.

revolutions much more inspiring and directed visions from which to work than the old method of history was capable of doing and make the historian a more active participant in the process of engaging with the past.

As he explicated his theses on history, Benjamin clearly had in mind revolutionary historians steeped in Marxist materialism, but the method he outlines in the above-quoted statement is one that might be adopted by a variety of revolutionary thinkers invested in a variety of ideological projects. This chapter will attempt to explicate how the Quiverfull movement engages in historical reading practices that are much more in keeping with Benjamin's above description of revolutionary history than they are with traditional understandings of history. It will also seek to explore how Quiverfull readings of history work to structure the specific foundations that create the boundaries of Quiverfull community. It will reinforce the fact that those boundaries are constructed through readings that are fundamentally oppositional in nature: Quiverfull adherents understand themselves to hold the keys to the correct reading of the world, while those not included in their ranks read erroneously and in such a way that seeks to destroy the order that God has instantiated in the world. Ultimately, it will work to uncover the foundations from which the Quiverfull movement seeks to create a societal revolution that they see as both a return to a godlier past and as a step further in accomplishing God's ultimate plan for humanity.

### **Section 1: The Rosary of Quiverfull History**

To begin to see how Quiverfull readings of history deviate from traditional historical approaches, it will first be helpful to provide an outline of how such a non-Benjaminian history of the Quiverfull movement might be constructed. A full-fledged, academic history of the

development of Quiverfull ideology and practice would be a book-length work in its own right; the following outline is mainly designed to give the reader a sense of what the beads on the rosary of that history would be and how they would connect; as such, it will not examine those beads in any great detail.<sup>243</sup>

In all likelihood, an academic history of the Quiverfull movement would begin with the Protestant Reformation.<sup>244</sup> Though it is certainly the case that some of the most significant doctrinal ideas that structure the core of Quiverfull belief first arose prior to the Reformation—Augustine of Hippo, for example, very clearly expressed the view that salvation is possible only through the grace of God in the 4th century C.E.—it is the Protestant Reformation that made those ideas take a front and center role in European and, subsequently, U.S. history.<sup>245</sup> The emphasis that the Protestant Reformation put on the fact that only faith in God, given through the grace of God, could lead to salvation directly challenged the authority of the Catholic Church, which presented a model of salvation that required active engagement with the Church’s structure and hierarchy.<sup>246</sup> In challenging the

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<sup>243</sup> It is important to note that a traditional, academic history will not simply ignore the object seeking to be historically understood as it traced that object’s historical creation; a good historian must have detailed familiarity with the object of study in order to know how to investigate that object’s path and trace its story. However, a historian tracing the origins of the Quiverfull movement would be very likely to do so in a sequential order, careful to trace causation from one step to the next, because if any step were missing, then the picture created by connecting all of the numbered dots would be incomplete. It is this understanding of historical causation that is primarily at issue here.

<sup>244</sup> There is a strong possibility that a history of the Quiverfull movement wouldn’t get written for several decades: the academic discipline of history is relatively reluctant to produce work on events or phenomena that are currently unfolding, as it maintains a surprisingly steadfast belief in the clarity of vision about the past that occurs from the vantage point of the present.

<sup>245</sup> As Diarmaid MacCulloch notes about Augustine, “Augustine called a human being such as himself a ‘lump of perdition’--a lump of lostness. There is nothing that a lump of perdition--people like you and me--can do for our own salvation. We need God to do it all” (4). MacCulloch goes on to explain that this view “is the basis of the Protestant Reformation. It was saying loud and clear what Augustine had said long before” (4).

<sup>246</sup> See John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

church's authority, it reinvested that authority elsewhere: primarily in the text through which God is believed to have revealed his will to humanity, the Bible, but also in significant amounts to the reader of that text, who would thenceforth be expected to engage with the text directly and, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit actively working in his or her life, gain a deeper understanding of God's nature and his will for humanity.<sup>247</sup>

After explaining the overall significance of the Reformation and explaining how it created members of the faithful who were actively engaged in creating and spreading new versions of theological understanding, an academic history of the Quiverfull movement would likely detail some of the different interpretive structures and church denominations that the Reformation produced, with a close focus on the development of Calvinism and of Baptism, as these are the primary branches of Reformation Christianity to which Quiverfull adherents belong. The history would examine theological differences, such as disagreements on whether salvation is predestined for certain members of humanity ("the elect"), as well as geopolitical conflicts that occurred between those groups, with a special focus on conflicts that contributed to the movement of peoples. Because the Quiverfull movement has its home in the US, there would likely be a strong focus on the Calvinist and Baptist groups that emigrated to or developed in the United States. Both Puritanism and the Great Awakening would therefore receive significant elaboration, with the Great Awakening receiving particular attention as a force of religious populism and expansion.<sup>248</sup>

Once this academic study had done sufficient work to establish the historical background of the Quiverfull movement's predecessors, it would begin to shift to a study of

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<sup>247</sup> See John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

<sup>248</sup> See, for example, Christopher H. Evans' *Histories of American Christianity: An Introduction*.



its development within a more modern context. To do so, it would devote some attention to the demographic clustering of Calvinist and Baptist churches in the US (noting that Baptists are disproportionately located in the US South, with Calvinism-inspired churches in greater numbers in the US North), to the further splintering of both groups (such as splits between branches of the Presbyterian church and the development of the Southern Baptists), to the periods of resurgence that both groups experienced, and to their major intellectual and social contributions to 19th and early 20th US society.<sup>249</sup>

Having firmly established the way that Calvinism and Baptism were woven into the fabric of US culture and society, this academic history would turn to the emergence of Quiverfull thought and practice. As such, it would give particular attention to the documented decline in churches as center points in American community in the mid-20th century and the Christian response to that decline.<sup>250</sup> Specific focus might be given to the rise of the religious right, with particular attention invested in the Christian evangelical and Reconstructionist movements. It would also focus on the social and cultural factors that led many Americans to respond positively to the efforts that Christian groups made to reassert their influence on American society, and it would likely end with a summary of Quiverfull beliefs and practices, as documented by early Quiverfull writings and other textual artifacts that tied into that sociocultural analysis.

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<sup>249</sup> For a readily accessible source, see *PBS's "Timeline: Faith in America."* For more scholarly sources, see Evans' *Histories of American Christianity* and George Hawley's *Demography, Culture, and the Decline of America's Christian Denominations*.

<sup>250</sup> Again, see George Hawley's *Demography, Culture, and the Decline of America's Christian Denominations*.

The sequential logic of this interpretive model is clear. For a contemporary, academic historian operating in a traditional mode, the Quiverfull movement must be understood as the result of an ordered set of causal events, those in the further past leading to those in the more recent past leading to those in the almost-present.<sup>251</sup> Furthermore, there is an already established set of knowledge through which understanding of the Quiverfull movement must be filtered: historians must build their studies on prior historiography, carefully taking into account the already extant, dominant narratives—the previously identified causal chains—that structure the past. Their own contributions must be in line with those narratives, even when they offer corrective understandings of them. The authorities that traditional historians recognize are the authority of the historians who have come before them and the causal authority of the past.

Such authorities are significantly different from the ones that Quiverfull adherents recognize. The next section will examine how the Quiverfull movement weaves its historical understanding. From the outset, it is important to take note of the fact that Quiverfull adherents don't reject outright the kind of historical sequence that a traditional historian might endorse; like traditional historians, they are willing to endorse the idea of a chain of past events that have a direct influence on the present and the future.<sup>252</sup> However, they do not endorse the idea of approaching the past with a kind of neutral empiricism that recognizes the authority of those who have previously applied the same methods, nor do they believe

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<sup>251</sup> This is not how all historians conduct historical research; it does, however, remain the dominant model within the field. Benjamin has been an influential voice in the last 20 years within the discipline of history, but his thinking has not caused a fundamental reassessment of historical practice within that discipline.

<sup>252</sup> Such influences do not have an influence, however, on the ultimate trajectory of humanity; rather, they impact how specific humans and groups of humans experience their time on earth, with a direct connection to the extent to which those humans are following God's plan for humanity.

that the narratives created by such authorities should be heeded as producing an accurate picture of the world. Rather, Quiverfull adherents approach the past as the record of a conflict whose causes—the rebellion of Satan in heaven, and the fall of Adam and Eve on earth—and outcomes—the ultimate victory of God and the restoration of his faithful—are already foreknown. Therefore, interpretive structures that are applied to history are seen as authoritative only to the extent that they reflect this already established worldview. Furthermore, Quiverfull adherents look to certain moments of the past as foundational not because of their location on the causal chain, but because of their relevance to what Benjamin would call the “here-and now” of the present and to the vision that they have of the future.<sup>253</sup> Put another way, they look to the past to provide evidence and backing of the present vision that they have already established.<sup>254</sup> That vision is almost always given to new Quiverfull adherents as an already packaged whole: they are, in effect, told what the constellation looks like, and then asked to study the stars in order to see how they have been put together to form that constellation. Such a way of reading the passage prioritizes certain elements over others, sometimes to the complete exclusion of the latter.

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<sup>253</sup> It is not entirely possible to assess the extent to which Quiverfull adherents approach history consciously using this framework. Some clearly make the ability of the knowledge and wisdom that can be garnered from the past to advance their current vision the main focus of their historical study, but this does not necessarily mean that they understand themselves to be starting from the present and constructing their interpretive matrix directly through that structure.

<sup>254</sup> This is not to say that some members of the Quiverfull community haven’t come to their beliefs by reading Christian thinkers from the past. Instead, the argument I am making is that now that the Quiverfull worldview is well-established, it continues to assert its authority by bringing in moments and ideas from the past as support that specifically supports that worldview, while other moments or ideas are ignored or recast to avoid the possibility of an contradiction or added complexity in that worldview.

## Section 2: The Quiverfull Present Seen Through the Quiverfull Past

It is quite rare to find an active Quiverfull adherent who will self-identify as belonging to the “Quiverfull movement.” This is because the term both connotatively identifies such adherents as members of a minority subculture and verbally targets only one core belief among several, collapsing the complexity of the belief system in order to focus on the spectacle of abnormality that accompanies some of the significantly large numbers of children than many adhering families have. To solidify their mainstream relevance—and their historical normalcy, including the normalcy of their large families—Quiverfull adherents tend to refer to themselves simply as Christians. Accompanying this labeling practice is a belief that those who follow Quiverfull practices are the modern emissaries of the true word of God and the descendants of the emissaries who have gone before; all those who tend to belief systems that deviate fall outside the proper boundaries of the term “Christian.”<sup>255</sup>

It is this interpretation that structures the Quiverfull approach to history: adherents of the belief system hunt through the past to find thinkers whose interpretation of the Bible matches their own and then use those thinkers to bolster their own worldview. This is not a new method; the following quote from 19th-century British Baptist Charles Spurgeon, a hero to many modern Quiverfull adherents, exemplifies that fact: “The old truth that Calvin preached, that Augustine preached, that Paul preached, is the truth that I must preach today, or else be false to my conscience and my God. I cannot shape the truth; I know of no such thing as paring off the rough edges of a doctrine. John Knox’s gospel is my gospel. That which

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<sup>255</sup> As discussed previously, they mean the term to have significantly different boundaries than those that would be identified in mainstream culture, in academia, or even among many other groups of self-identified Christians).

thundered through Scotland must thunder through England again” (Kindle location 2 of 225). A modern-day Quiverfull adherent could easily write an almost identical quote; they would simply need to add the phrase “that Spurgeon preached” to update it.<sup>256</sup> Their belief system would tell them that they have been convicted by God of the same truth as have the “great men” referenced by the quote, and the fact that their belief is truth is understood to be demonstrated by the fact that it recurs throughout the ages.<sup>257</sup>

For Quiverfull adherents, the similarities that occur among the writers listed above do not occur because those men experienced historically similar factors: there is no sociocultural explanation for why the beliefs they adopted spoke to them that would satisfy. Instead, the significant overlap in their beliefs is seen as evidence of the inalterable truth that God has imparted to modern-day Quiverfull followers; the reason that those beliefs occur when they do is that they are functioning to rebuke a Christian community that has fallen away from God’s word. This, in turn, is exactly how Quiverfull adherents see themselves functioning: as living examples of the benefits of following God’s true word in a world that is seriously given over to corruption. It is God who instantiates the important moments in history, because he functions as a general strategically rallying his troops against the enemy. Satan’s troops are once again amassing on the field and threatening God’s territory; Quiverfull

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<sup>256</sup> Such a modern-day adherent might well be a Duggar: Charles Spurgeon is a particularly influential figure to the Duggar family. Jessa (Duggar) Seewald has posted Spurgeon quotes to her Instagram account, such as “Brethren, we shall not adjust our Bible to the age but the age to our Bible,” and Jessa and her husband Ben named their first child Spurgeon in honor of him. See Jessa Seewald’s Instagram account, @jessaseewald.

<sup>257</sup> It bears noting that there are significant theological differences between Augustine, Knox, and Spurgeon; Quiverfull adherents are, however, less than interested in such theological differences because, as discussed in the previous chapter, their engagement with theology is always filtered through relatively static ontological principles. This means that they are likely to privilege the similarity among men whom they believe represent their lifestyle and core values rather than to focus on their differences.

adherents must look to the previous battles to learn how best they should fight the ongoing war against evil.

It is important to note that, as they are introduced to previous “battles” in the process of being taught to engage with the present day, Quiverfull adherents are rarely introduced to history in the kind of systematic way that our imagined history textbook is constructed. Instead, their introduction to history is done in a way that is very similar to the way that new Quiverfull adherents, whether children or adults, are introduced to Biblical interpretation and doctrinal principle: incrementally. With children, one of the key ways through which history is introduced is through biography. Quiverfull children are regularly exposed—through ATI homeschooling curriculum materials, but also through additional resources made available by the IBLP and other Quiverfull institutions—to biographies of individuals, both male and female, whom Quiverfull thinkers have identified as having followed Quiverfull principles. A family might listen to the stories of John and Susanna Wesley to teach their children about the wide impact a couple that follows godly principles can have on the world, inspiring men to evangelize and women to work alongside them by encouraging them in their ministry and bearing their babies. They might read the story of John Newton, author of *Amazing Grace*, to learn how God can work miracles in the lives of even the most resistant non-believers. Quiverfull children will not, of course, be exposed to the biographies of any individuals who did not end up following a Quiverfull-approved faith or lifestyle, and they will grow to see both the course of history and the purpose of their own lives through the examples of the figures offered up to them as paragons of faith and virtue.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> One of the regular speakers at ATI Conferences, Shelley Hendry, focuses entirely on biography, offering apologies for their necessity in Quiverfull education and also retelling them in the form of

It is only when children have sufficiently been inculcated with the Quiverfull worldview that they are exposed to more complex historical interpretation and, as noted in previous chapters, such exposure is carefully monitored. A Quiverfull adherent who is deemed ready to learn the basic structure of Marxism (so as to be able to identify and oppose it) will not do so by reading Marx's work directly; instead, that Quiverfull adherent will be introduced to secondary works that purport to debunk Marxist principles.<sup>259</sup> Adult converts to Quiverfull ideology are exposed to ideological reprogramming that explains to them why their previous ideas were not mere mistakes—they were actively planted in their understanding by the devil, in order to create stumbling blocks in their minds to lead them away from correct understanding.<sup>260</sup> They are discouraged from directly engaging with any source that might have a misleading influence: direct sources such as Marx, but also indirect sources, such as contemporary television programming, that have thoroughly integrated Marxist ideology. Instead, they are given many positive examples to read, with negative examples scattered throughout, and always within the framework of Quiverfull interpretation.

Among the many Christian authors valued by the Quiverfull movement, Augustine, Calvin, Paul, and Spurgeon are all influential writers who offer insight about how to continue

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dramatic monologues. In her 2016 speech "The Importance of Reading Biographies to Your Family," Hendry explains the importance of biographies using the following analogy: "Your children are on a journey for life. What shall we put in their suitcase?" She then goes on to praise the following figures and texts for the value of their biographies: John Knox, Stonewall Jackson, *Pilgrim's Progress*, Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, Robert E. Lee, Mary Schlessler, Charlie Colson, Charles Spurgeon, and Corrie Ten Boom. Again, the spread of figures—religious thinkers, foreign missionaries, Jewish converts, Holocaust resisters, and Confederate generals—is instructive.

<sup>259</sup> This method can be observed first hand in Anna Sofia and Elizabeth Botkins' *So Much More*, referenced in earlier chapters.

<sup>260</sup> See, for example, the *Basic Seminar* and the *Advance Seminar* taught by Bill Gothard.

waging war against “the Enemy” (with special preference given to Paul, as he is canonized within the Bible itself), and Quiverfull interaction with all of them can demonstrate the pattern of historical understanding and interpretation in which they engage. It is, however, the treatment that Quiverfull adherents give to 17th-century Presbyterian Reformer John Knox that is perhaps the most illustrative of that pattern. Of all of the texts written by Knox, one of the most central to the Quiverfull movement is his *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. Scholars typically read this treatise by Knox as a condemnation of Catholic rule that strategically used contemporary ideas about the proper roles of men and women to bolster its claims.<sup>261</sup> Quiverfull interpreters, however, tend to focus primarily on Knox’s cautions about the danger of women having authority over men, using those cautions to establish the continuity of their understanding of godly authority structures.

This is best seen in the Quiverfull-created documentary *The Monstrous Regiment of Women*. Produced by the Gunn brothers, and narrated by Emily Gunn, the wife of Colin, the Gunn brother who serves as cameraman and sometimes interviewer, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women* is an insistent condemnation of modern-day feminism that is analogically structured around Knox’s treatise. Beginning by providing a brief biography of Knox and explaining the impetus behind its treaty, the film quickly explains why it believes the treatise to be a relevant example for modern Christians. As Emily Gunn explains it, “And this is where I agree with Knox. The unchanged, infallible Bible unites Christians today with those of years past.” The Bible is an ahistorical foundation of truth and Knox, according to Gunn and her

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<sup>261</sup> This is not to say that Knox was not sincere in identifying female rulers as problematic, merely that his main focus in his treatise was not a denigration of women.



fellow filmmakers, is a reader of the Bible who understands its proper (read, Quiverfull-compatible) framework. She continues, “Many misunderstood Knox’s essay, because they were without his Biblical understanding on faith and life issues. So when we approach today’s problems, we wish to borrow his Biblical perspective and apply his blast against those who rule in the wake of his monstrous queen.” Gunn emphasizes the importance of beginning with a Biblical framework and applying the framework to Knox’s essay and its relevance to contemporary issues. For her, the historical conditions and applications of Knox’s treaty are almost unimportant. It does not matter that the context in which Knox wrote—that of a monarchical government in which acceptable religious belief and practice were largely dictated by the state—is drastically different from her own. Knox’s writing adheres to core principles and, as such, his words can be applied, sometimes directly, sometimes through analogy, to contemporary conditions and contexts. Because the ground of Knox’s arguments is the same as the ground of Gunn’s own, namely the Bible, the difference between the contexts in which those arguments are made hardly bear relevance.

Indeed, the film makes scant reference to the actual words of Knox’s treaty. Instead, it focuses on second phrase in his title—the “monstrous regiment of women”—and uses it as a jumping off point for discussing the harmful ways in which women are “ruling” contemporary American society. Those methods of rule range from social structures that provide space for women to pursue careers other than wife- and motherhood to female politicians in positions of power. The film, which was released in 2007, is particularly eager to villainize then presidential hopeful Hillary Rodham Clinton—it contains clips of several different women referring to her as “angry” and “not a likeable woman”—but it villainizes other politicians as well. For example, the film offers the following clip from Quiverfull help

meet and author Jennie Chancey: “God created men for leadership...and he clearly tells us in his word that when women are in leadership it’s a sign of a curse on a nation.”<sup>262</sup> This quote is immediately followed by a montage of female political leaders, beginning with a picture of Nancy Pelosi. Such women are monstrous, and as such, their example offers a warning about the dangerous situation in which the contemporary United States has put itself by abandoning godly principles.<sup>263</sup>

This sequence of criticisms of female politicians reveals the underlying pattern on which the film is patterned quite clearly. John Knox’s treaty focuses on a sequence of female rulers in England and Scotland during the 17th century; the Gunns’ film focuses on instances of female “rule” in contemporary American society. According to the Gunns, both texts share a common ground in the Bible’s pronouncements against women assuming any position of leadership. The Quiverfull Gunns start from their interpretation of a particular Biblical teaching (an interpretation that was laid out in the previous chapter in the discussion of how the Botkins and Mary Pride deal with the Israelite judge Deborah) and go searching in history to find a sympathetic viewpoint; they then apply their own interpretation to that viewpoint, ignoring any historical differences that would be considered important by a traditionally trained academic historian, in order to create historical contiguity in service of their

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<sup>262</sup> With Stacy MacDonald, Chancey is the author of a 2007 book called *Passionate Housewives Desperate for God*, in which the case for the wife-as-helpmeet is laid out in detail. She is also the main force behind the Quiverfull blog *Ladies Against Feminism*. Chancey also makes an interview appearance in Anna Sofia and Elizabeth Botkins’ *The Return of the Daughters*.

<sup>263</sup> As can be seen from this example, Quiverfull readers use analogy as structure for understanding in negative ways as well as positive ones.

understanding that history is, at its root, the unfolding of a pitched battle between God and the devil.<sup>264</sup>

The above pattern is also applied to situations in which women enjoy political equality with men. Consider, for example, Emily Gunn's description of voting in American society: "The men of the suffrage era were willing to abdicate their Dominion role, to the extent that they were ready to give up one half of their electoral power to women...the 19th amendment can be seen as the point in American history when the father ceased to sit in the gates as the representative of his family's interests." In this moment, Gunn takes a Biblical reference and finds a way to analogize it to the present day: important matters were decided among men at the city gates in Biblical times, and important matters are decided at the ballot box in the present day; therefore, those spaces serve the same function, and we can understand women's suffrage a direct attack on patriarchal authority and therefore a direct attack on God's plan for humanity.<sup>265</sup> In this instance of Quiverfull reading, the Bible is used simultaneously as a scriptural and a historical document, and the basic pattern remains the

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<sup>264</sup> It needs to be noted that though this strategy of history shares similarities to the one that Benjamin lays out in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," this chapter is not arguing that the approach is identical. Benjamin, after all, does not advocate for reading history out of context or blatantly rewriting it to fit an already established interpretive framework. Instead, he argues for looking at a present moment and understanding how that present moment engages with aspects of the past to create its matrix of meaning. The Quiverfull method of engaging with history follows Benjamin's in that it starts from the present and explicitly seeks to understand the past through the lens of that present moment; it does not, however, maintain the self-reflexivity that characterizes Benjamin's approach. That said, it also bears noting that Quiverfull readers of history do not see themselves as reading out of context; rather, they believe that all context needs to be filtered through their already extant interpretation of the world. There is a fine line between applying a theoretical framework as a useful tool of analysis and using a theoretical framework as a way to ideologically control the boundaries of relevant history.

<sup>265</sup> It seems, from a set of selected scenes aired on *19 Kids and Counting*, that at least some Quiverfull women do vote in elections. This, of course, would be determined at the family level by the male heads of household, but it is likely that even Quiverfull adherents who ultimately opposed a political system in which women are enfranchised see it as necessary for women to vote in the current system, because doing so will expedite the process of creating a more godly political system. In other words, women need to vote now so that they can lose the vote later.

same. In *The Monstrous Regiment of Women*, the Gunns begin with the basic principle that women should not rule over men (a principle that was elaborated upon in the previous chapter) and then strategically craft an interpretation of a historical document that engaged with the question of men's vs. women's authority in a way that renders its understanding of women and rule identical to their own. They then use it to bolster the worldview with which they began, applying its lessons analogically to situations in the present day.<sup>266</sup>

The method of historical interpretation engaged in by the Gunns was very direct and clearly based on a specific set of written texts; Quiverfull adherents also use a similar pattern of engagement in situations that are less direct and less concretely tied to written artifacts. Kathryn Joyce discusses one such situation in the opening to *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement*, her 2009 book that remains the strongest extant investigation the underpinnings of the Quiverfull movement (and, to date, one of only a handful of book-length works specifically addressing Quiverfull beliefs and culture in any sustained way). That situation is a Quiverfull-sponsored celebration of the settling of the Jamestown colony.

According to Joyce, Quiverfull adherents, with the Vision Forum as the organizing institution, held their celebration of Jamestown to offset the politically correct, anti-Christian commemoration of the colony that had been recently sponsored by the federal government (19). That commemoration had discussed the founding of Jamestown as an event with a mixed legacy, calling specific attention to the ways in which colonization adversely affected

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<sup>266</sup> It should be noted that the strategic crafting in which the Gunns engage need not be fully intentional: they might not be explicitly setting out to apply a circular logic. Instead, such an approach may well be fully embedded in their worldview and, as such, not something they consciously access. It is impossible to know simply from viewing their film, but the issue of intent bears little relevance to the underlying structure of the pattern in which they engage.

the local native peoples (20-21). Objecting to that characterization, Vision Forum held an event that they called the “Jamestown Quadricentennial: A Celebration of Our Providential History.” As Joyce explains it, the event was “a key example of the Vision Forum drive to create a fully Christ-centered, religious worldview for homeschoolers to draw on. Through speeches, sermons, and guided revisionist history tours through Old Jamestown, the celebration paid homage to a number of favorite themes, including God’s providence in settling the nation and the belief the early colonists were a God-chosen and God-led people with a special holy mission” (19). For the Quiverfull adherents involved in this event, it was essential to emphasize that the founding of Jamestown was done in the name of spreading God’s kingdom and, as such, it was a specific act of Dominion. According to Joyce, who attended the event, Doug Phillips, founder of Vision Forum and active leader of the week’s events, directly referred to that Dominion vision, asserting that “the settlers brought with them not just the gospel, but also a ‘dominion vision for establishing a land of freedom’” (24). For Phillips and the Quiverfull event attendees, Jamestown served as an example of a moment of triumph in the Christian war for the world, one that tied such triumph to the future United States.

In keeping with their pattern of historical engagement, the Quiverfull adherents involved in this event were actively working to apply their Biblically filtered vision of the past to the present day, intentionally using the United States as a link between the two time periods: “It was a live demonstration of the ideal society that ministries like Vision Forum have in mind when they exhort their followers to revive the culture: a return to values not even of the Victorian Age but of the Puritan societies represented by the Massachusetts Bay Colony and their European brethren who lived under religious law in Calvin’s rigidly pious Protestant community in sixteenth-century Geneva” (20). As Joyce correctly identifies, Quiverfull

adherents generally laud Puritan society as being the most godly form of society within US history—they find the Victorian era to be significantly corrupted, rife as it is with feminist activism, social reform movements, and shifting cultural mores—though they also point to a Christian heritage that extends well past the Puritan era, as they read both the American Revolution and the early republic as having been heavily structured on Biblical principles.

Though such periods are held up as models from which contemporary Quiverfull adherents should learn, Quiverfull adherents are careful to point to the fact that their project is one which continues to build upon godly foundations. In the words of the Botkin sisters, “There were many wonderful, Biblical aspects of American society 200 years ago, due to that society’s strong Christian heritage...We should not aspire to merely duplicate a previous era, but rather to build on its good points and learn from its bad ones” (105). American society moved away from its Biblical aspects, after all; there must, therefore, have been underlying issues that enabled that to happen. The Botkin sisters wish to do better: “We, in a sense, are also pioneers. We should not try to cling to a bygone era—rather, we should try to build something new, something greater and more Biblical than has ever been seen in any past society”(105). Earlier models of society are to be used carefully and as cautions: they demonstrate what godly Christians were doing right, but they also demonstrate the previous ways into which Christians have fallen into the trap of the enemy.

As is the case with doctrinal issues, the proper approach to engaging with history is repeatedly reinforced within Quiverfull culture. Above we have seen examples of that reinforcement in both book and film contexts; Quiverfull adherents are also exhorted and encouraged to understand history in a particular way in public forums. IBLP-sponsored conferences and audio messages play an especially important role in this process; Embassy

Media, the IBLP's subscription-based audio and video file repository of speeches, sermons, and messages, contains explicit sections devoted to history, American law and government, spiritual warfare, and worldview, all of which have direct relevance to Quiverfull interpretations of history. One such message is discussed below; it reveals how the oppositional understanding of history and a carefully selective review of the past are linked within Quiverfull reading practice.

In his 2016 ATI Family Conference Series speech "Principles of Reformation," David Barton, the founder of WallBuilders, an organization devoted to "presenting America's forgotten history and heroes, with an emphasis on the moral, religious, and constitutional foundation on which America was built," employs instances of Christian reformation that he has identified from the past as models from which to create a set of guiding principles for how Christians can bring about reformation in a contemporary context (*WallBuilders*). In doing so, he highlights key moment in which he believes that the forces of good were actively engaged in the process of reclaiming worldly territory for God, including the emergence of John Wycliffe, Jan Hus, and Jerome of Prague in the late medieval period, the work of Martin Luther and John Calvin, the Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening, and the turn-of-the-20th century revival movements that caused many Americans to re-engage in Christian religious practice. Barton discusses the fact that such moments of revival would be better understood as moments of reformation—periods in time when the Christian church is refocused on its appropriate goals and aims. He also suggests that such moments are necessary for the creation of civilizations that reflect God's plan for humanity, telling his audience that "America would not exist" had not George Whitefield devoted his life to converting the unconverted and encouraging the flagging believers in the English colonies. Here, Barton clearly

demonstrates the link that Quiverfull adherents identify between God’s plan for humanity and the United States: in the Quiverfull view, the United States is the most reformed society and, as such, is the society with the best chance of solidifying and expanding Dominion throughout the world. It is the Christian United States from which Quiverfull adherents begin the process of amalgamating their historical knowledge and understanding.

Using his view of the close interconnection between godliness and American-ness, Barton derives five “principles of reformation” that he believes are key to restoring America to its proper trajectory: developing a sense of duty, learning to think, engaging in incrementalism, being offensive-minded, and developing a trans-generational vision. He argues that Christians must follow these principles in order to accomplish God’s vision for the world, and he suggests that Christians are at a turning point: either they can adopt a reformation mindset and match or surpass the progress that their forebears made against God’s enemies, or they can refuse to do so and allow humanity to continue traversing the path of anti-Christian decline. Barton’s principles are structured around a strategic, self-abnegating viewpoint that prioritizes the ultimate end—achieving God’s kingdom on earth—above anything else. They are also based on the idea that modern Christian society (or, at least, what used to be Christian society) is in desperate need of reform. In both of these ways, his principles are dependent upon the oppositional, black-and-white framework to which Quiverfull adherents ascribe.

Barton’s first principle, developing a sense of duty, makes this clear. In explaining this principle, he holds that Christians need to commit to “doing what [they] don’t want to do.” He explicitly ties this principle to the military, which he identifies as an upright institution in the United States because of its ongoing commitment to duty in the face of other institutions



which have given up such an orientation.<sup>267</sup> Barton also offers a warning to Christians who do not pursue duty, by using the following quote that he attributes to John Witherspoon, a member of the American Continental Congress, “The sum of the whole is that the blessing of God is only to be looked for by those who are not wanting in the discharge of their own duty.” For Barton, Christianity can only triumph through the sacrifices of its adherents.

One necessary sacrifice that Barton identifies is a return to a more rigorous educational curriculum that teaches children “how to think.” Barton argues that the level of American education has declined in step with the increased de-Christianization of the United States; he provides his audience with examples of 19th- and early 20th-century math and English questions to materially demonstrate that decline.<sup>268</sup> Alongside his strategic reading of history that allows him to claim a faithful Christian heritage constantly under attack, this is where he follows the Quiverfull pattern of reading history most closely. In his discussion of the importance of returning to the educational values of the past, he uses the past as a repository of analogical knowledge and instruction from which he can draw to verify the standards already in place within the Quiverfull movement; though it is not at all clear that the Quiverfull educational curriculum materials designed by the IBLP effectively teach Christians the strategic critical thinking that Barton values, that is certainly one of its intentions. For the IBLP, as for Barton, the most developed mind is necessarily the Christian mind.

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<sup>267</sup> Such a sense of duty is clearly demonstrated in Quiverfull principles about the importance of proper obedience to authority figures, though the word “duty” is rarely emphasized directly in other Quiverfull literature. As we have seen, however, militarized language is quite common in Quiverfull texts.

<sup>268</sup> Barton does not rigorously cite the examples that he uses, either in a way that would be recognized academically or even in a way that would allow his Quiverfull compatriots to look further into the examples that he offers.

Barton's remaining principles continue to illustrate the oppositional structure underlying his thesis: he argues that Christians need to work to make changes in society incrementally, but that they need to remain offensive-minded in their approach to the world.<sup>269</sup> If they do not, he cautions, the recent historical trend of Christian decline—"we've seen a lot of our rights as Christian citizens disappear in the last five or six decades"—will continue. His last principle, which emphasizes the importance of developing a transgenerational perspective, offers the hope that the tide might be turning. Barton provides statistics that support this view, though it is unclear from where he derives those statistics. He claims that 94% of millennials "respect monogamy and parenthood" and that 86% of them "respect marriage," and attributes this unlikely level of conservative values among millennials to the fact that more parents are engaged in the process of "child training" rather than the less rigorous, less Christian process of "child raising." For Barton, as for most Quiverfull adherents, the current moment is a turning point in which God's plan could be restored or in which the United States, and with it the rest of the world, could continue to be directed by the devil.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> In his speech, Barton makes the claim that the Civil War was a mistake and that Americans should instead have pursued a path of ending slavery incrementally. This approach reflects the ambivalence with which many Quiverfull adherents approach the issues of slavery and of race in general and likely reflect the fact that a significant proportion of the audience of Barton's message, both at this specific conference and generally, are white people who hail from—and compose—the conservative American South.

<sup>270</sup> As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Quiverfull adherents disagree on eschatological questions. Some are post-millennialists, who believe that God has tasked Christians with winning the world over for him. To those Quiverfull adherents, a return to the path of righteousness is an essential step in bringing back the return of Jesus, which will establish his thousand-year reign on earth. Other Quiverfull adherents are pre-millennialists, and believe that a rapture and a period of tribulations will occur prior to the millennium. For those adherents, the current "decline" of Christianity may be read as a sign that the end times are nearing, but there is still pressure to win as many souls for Jesus as possible. Even Calvinist Quiverfull adherents have a stake in this situation, as they believe in the importance of encouraging the faithful and creating a world in which there is as little temptation as possible.

As the above three examples demonstrate, the Quiverfull understanding of history is constructed from the same pattern that informs Quiverfull readings of the Bible as well as other texts: Quiverfull adherents start from a general principle or pattern that derives from and supports their overall worldview, and they seek to apply that pattern as they engage with source material, in order to more fully back up the principle they have established and to bolster their worldview. In the next section, I will offer a demonstration of how that worldview, the principles that undergird it, and the way those principles are deployed might be used to construct a Quiverfull-centric history.

### **Section 3: The Quiverfull Constellation of History**

If a Quiverfull adherent were writing a history book, then, that book might be structured in the following way. It might first begin with an assessment of contemporary Western culture, with a very strong focus on the history of the United States, since the vast majority of Quiverfull adherents endorse the myth that US history is providential history and that the European colonizers of the Americas and their descendants were and are God's (spiritual) chosen people.<sup>271</sup> The United States, and all of Western Civilization along with it, would be described as being endangered by its recent history of moral failing and its turn away from God's word. The rise of feminism, with its associated dangers—the normalcy of women serving as family breadwinners and workers outside the home, the legalization of

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<sup>271</sup> This is one of the reasons that a Quiverfull history would not significantly discuss parts of world that are generally considered non-Western. Perhaps an even more important reason is the fact that Quiverfull adherents generally consider non-Western societies (which they treat as overwhelmingly non-Christian, since the Christianity that is most common in most non-Western societies is Catholicism, which Quiverfull adherents do not recognize as doctrinally sound enough to be truly Christian) to be ensnared in a sinful, non-Christian societal structure.

moral calamities such as abortion and same-sex marriage, the normalization of divorce—and the turn to “statism”—government regulating and surveilling families, providing welfare benefits, restricting on the 2nd amendment, and limiting religious freedom—would be detailed to paint the bleak picture of the United States in the 21st century. Still, glimmers of hope would be identified—conservative politicians and judges such as Mike Pence and Neil Gorsuch occupying important federal positions, successful legislation limiting abortion rights, the spreading of Biblical patriarchal values among young people. Such dangers and hopes would be used to demonstrate that the current time is an important turning point: if Christians are vigilant and proactive, they might usher in an era of godliness never before seen in this country. If they are lackadaisical and afraid, the moment will be lost, and moral decline will continue at a fast pace.

After establishing the stakes, our imagined Quiverfull author would turn his (or, possibly her, but only if she had been charged to write by her father or husband) attention to historical evidence that demonstrates the cyclical nature of this situation. Christians, he would argue, have always been in this position. If the history were a comprehensive one, it would begin with the early Church—from the moment Christianity was instantiated, it would argue, Christians have been persecuted by the state, which knows that God’s plan for humanity would greatly weaken its power, investing it instead in the family and the church. The trials and tribulations of Christians in ancient Rome would be detailed, as would the triumph of Christianity becoming the official and only sanctioned religion of the Roman Empire.

This history would describe the fall of the Roman Empire as the consequence of its corruption—despite its late adoption of Christianity, Rome had been devoted to anti-Christian practice too deeply and for too long. The ensuing “chaos” of the “Dark Ages” would be seen

generally as a period in which Satan's opposing forces were on the rise. Church corruption and the development of doctrines not in keeping with God's plan—the hierarchical rule of the pope, prohibitions against clergy members marrying, superstitious ritual among the faithful—would be pointed to as signs of the logical consequences of turning away from Scripture. Our author might describe an occasional light in the darkness—the feudal system that placed authority in the hands of the male head of household, for example—but it would not be until the rise of thinkers such as John Wycliffe and Jan Hus that signs of the battle turning could be identified.

With the emergence of men like Wycliffe and Hus, our author would note that the tide was turning; Christianity was about to enter its most blessed state since the days of the early Church. First, however, Christians would have to weather the early modern reinvestment in the damaging ideology of humanism, which explicitly put the human at the center of the world rather than God.<sup>272</sup> Luckily, however, strong men would be given the grace of God needed to oppose such ideology. Following in the example of Wycliffe and Hus, men like Martin Luther and especially John Calvin emerged to combat the corruption of the church, to restore doctrine to its proper place, and to reinvigorate the role of marriage and the family within society. Calvin's theocratic society in Geneva would be pointed to as a strong example of a godly community, and significant attention would be given to the reforms instantiated by Presbyterians such as John Knox in Scotland and Puritans in England and early American

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<sup>272</sup> Having come to this historical research project already believing that humanism was the ideology of the devil, a Quiverfull historian would not attend to the complexity of humanism, not in terms of its complexity when it emerged as a way of engaging with the world, nor in terms of the strong influence it had on Reformation thinkers, nor in terms of the way that it has shifted in meaning--and contained multiple meanings--over time. In keeping with the Quiverfull pattern of textual engagement, our author would filter all understandings of humanism through his belief in its direct opposition to Christianity.

colonies. The return to close attention to Scripture and its availability to the general populace would be touted, as would the importance of the family economy, the birthing of large numbers of children, and the desire to structure all of society around God's principles.

The history would then shift to the developing United States, as the Quiverfull movement generally recognizes the United States as the fruition of the process begun by the Reformation. Significant attention would be given to the New England colonies of Puritans, though the majority of colonies would be cited as being founded by people who wanted to form a society that reflected God's principles.<sup>273</sup> The Great Awakening would be cited as evidence of God's influence on the development of history, and the example of men and women like Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, John Wesley, and Susanna Wesley would be discussed. Again, the structures of authority within society, and especially the family, would see a strong focus.

After outlining the process of colonization and making the case that it was a sign of God's plan for humanity beginning to be realized, significant attention would be given to founding fathers such as John Adams, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson, whose Biblical perspectives would be "reclaimed" from the "misleading" secular interpretations disseminated by most modern historians.<sup>274</sup> This section of the history would focus on establishing an interpretation of the personal and political writings of the founders—including the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution—that supported the idea that early

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<sup>273</sup> See, for example, the above discussion of the Quiverfull relationship to the founding of Jamestown.

<sup>274</sup> See, for example, Kathryn Joyce's discussion the Jamestown celebration mentioned above or David Barton's organizational website, WallBuilders. See also the lecture collection *A.D.: Twenty Lectures on the World Anni Domini* from Vision Forum's History of the World Mega Conference, especially the lectures by Marshall Foster and Geoffrey Botkin.

American values were identical to the values that the contemporary Quiverfull movement espouses. Evidence from their family and personal lives would also be provided, and events which helped the United States to become firmly established as a nation and to expand its territory would be read as signs of God's continuing favor.<sup>275</sup>

Having established the strong godly foundations of the United States, our Quiverfull history would then turn to describing how those foundations began to be eroded. The linked ideologies of humanism, Marxism, and feminism would be introduced, here: the middle of the 19th century saw the spreading of ideologies that worked to dismantle the Christian values of the United States. Reform movements such as the Suffrage Movement would be given special attention, though other movements, such as Prohibition or Abolitionism might be used as examples of how Christian men and women worked to improve their society while remaining true to their Christian principles. Slowly, though, they would be depicted as losing the battle; by the 1920s, our history would explain, Satan would be firmly in control, and Christians would be dismayed to witness women winning the vote, young women flaunting immodest behavior, New Deal policies setting the government over and above the family, and evolution and other anti-Christian ideas taking over education and culture.

Our Quiverfull history would paint these as dark times, but with God in control, not all would be lost. Brave Christian men and women would be portrayed as fighting against the growing corruption of the nation, and the development of Christian institutions such as The Moody Bible Institute, the Chalcedon Foundation, and the Institute in Basic Life Principles would be pointed to as signs that Christians were rallying. Attention would then shift to how

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<sup>275</sup> In general, Quiverfull adherents enthusiastically embrace the concept of Manifest Destiny, as it is in keeping with the Christian principle of Dominion and the idea that America is a nation blessed by God.

the Quiverfull faithful were using such institutions as bases from which to counter the anti-Christian takeover of the United States. The reader of the history would be exhorted to do his or her part, to not give up hope, and to actively work to restore and expand God's dominion over the country and the world.

Structurally, despite first appearances, such a history would not be particularly historical in the academic sense. While it would provide a discussion of past events, and would even examine the unfolding of those past events over time in a relatively consistent sequential order, it would not ultimately offer an argument that privileged historical development, because it would view traditional historical development as a humanistic attempt to attribute causality to humanity. Instead, it would offer an argument of a history based in periodic immanence, with God as the transcendental guarantor of existence, and humanity cycling through a process of bring God's immanence to light, repeating this process until and when God decided to end historical time together and integrate all of humanity into his eternal existence.

Ultimately, such a history would have more in common with Benjamin's model of history quoted above, in structure if not in spirit. For Quiverfull adherents, it is not the steady march of history that is valued; each epoch of the past does not function as a rosary bead with equal weight. Instead, it is the present moment—the moment in which the Quiverfull faithful are, in the here-and-now, in God's presence—that structures the Quiverfull understanding of history.<sup>276</sup> That history is not a linear progression; rather, it is a cyclical

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<sup>276</sup> There is some overlap between the moment of the here-and-now and the eternal, as Quiverfull adherents hope to mirror the perfect, eternal kingdom of God on earth as much as is possible. The here-and-now becomes a metaphorical representation of the eternal, joined to the eternal through a



instantiation of the battle between good and evil, which will end when God decides to bring about his ultimate victory. Until then, Quiverfull adherents must strive towards reaching the outcome they already know, an outcome modeled by their own faithfulness to God's design for humanity.

#### **Section 4: Conclusion**

History, then, is used by the Quiverfull movement to establish that the battle for God's kingdom goes well for Christians when they submit to his overall model of authority. When Christians are in a proper state of submission, they function as God's children: arrows in his quiver, warriors battling for God's victory. Having a clear set of historical events and representatives to point to as maintaining the same godly principles to which Quiverfull adherents ascribe allows them to understand themselves as descendants in a spiritual-historical genealogy of the righteous. Following this genealogical model of authority means that alternative sources do not need to be found: by sticking closely to this model, they are obeying God and giving deference to their heavenly father. In this model, difference functions primarily as an instantiation of sin: it is a sign of humanity's fallen state and their subsequent distance from God and their lack of submission to him. Quiverfull adherents are striving to return to the full authority and protection of the father, a protection that was forfeited in the Fall; those who do not strive to achieve the same goal cannot be counted among the ranks of the faithful.

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signifying chain made up of proximal here-and-nows in which the faithful have worked to fulfill and will continue to work to fulfill God's kingdom.

The mode of history employed by the Quiverfull movement therefore demonstrates the danger inherent in the Benjaminian model. Benjamin does, indeed, offer a way of understanding the past through the present that appropriately recognizes the fact that it is always from the perspective of the present that both causality and meaning are created. But that methodology can be put to multiple ends, and messianic time can be put easily to use by radical perspectives that actively seek to simplify the present, denuding it of its complexity and contradictions in the name of righteous ideology.

In the following chapter, I will look at the extent to which the Quiverfull movement is bounded by such righteous ideology. I will discuss how this goal of returning to the authority and protection of the Father structures the boundaries of Quiverfull community. The method by which that goal is achieved is, of course, the actualization of the text- and world-reading practice that has been discussed in the previous chapters. In this final chapter, I will use the understanding of that method that we have gained to elaborate how it determines the boundaries of community within a Quiverfull context. In the following dissertation conclusion, I will discuss the implications that the Quiverfull project has for broader American practices of reading and understanding the world.

## Chapter 5:

### Quiverfull Community: Inviting the Many, Including the Few

*“Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”--Benedict Anderson<sup>277</sup>*

#### Introduction

In a recent documentary focused on the daily life and beliefs of a religious family, one of the main subjects, Miriam, explains her philosophy regarding children: “Happy is the man that has his quiver full of them.’ I think a quiver of arrows is 12 arrows, am I right? And, uh, happy is the man that has 12 of them...I always felt a family of 10 would be ideal.” Her husband, David, explains that he and Miriam use no contraception: “We just rejoice when God gives us another child. There is no planning on our part.” David and Miriam have a clear, unequivocal stance on family planning: they don’t do it, because they leave the number of children that they will have up to God.

The featured couple outlines some of their other core principles throughout the hour-long film. They have no television or videogames, which matches their desire to “keep out the distractions, you know, so you can focus on principles of life, like family time together, reading the Bible.” They got to know each other in advance of marriage through the process of courtship—as David explains it, “Miriam had a conviction for a hands-off courtship, so we had a hands-off courtship...we didn’t embrace each other, we didn’t hug each other, we didn’t kiss each other, but we would sit together.” They value modesty as an important virtue; as Miriam explains, “I feel it’s very important to make the dress [her wedding dress] in such a

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<sup>277</sup> *Imagined Communities*, 6.

way that it adorns our inner spirit and not bringing out our, our, uh, bodily figure...it should be men are attracted to the heart, not to the figure.” She goes on to explain another reason that modesty is important for women: “As a woman, we can do a lot to not bring a man to lust. I feel us women don’t quite realize men’s battle with, it’s just, God made them with that nature. The natural instinct is there, but if we encourage it, it might make them stumble. I never knew the battle before my husband told me, you know, the battle that he had with women that had a lot of leg exposed or even the necklines.” David and Miriam believe in a patriarchal family structure, in which women are called to “be keepers at home, submissive to our husbands, and look well to the way of our household,” an order that Miriam describes as “the perfect order.” They use corporal punishment because that’s what they believe the Bible commands; Miriam explains that “there is selfishness in everybody that just needs to be broken,” though she notes that it’s important to have a relationship with a child before you “handle a child with the rod.” Their church group gathers at their home, because, as David explains it, church in the original Greek means assembly, and it is therefore important to focus on the gathering of the believers rather than on the physical location of the gathering.<sup>278</sup>

Despite their significant overlap with Quiverfull ideology, Miriam and David are not part of the Quiverfull movement. They are, instead, an Amish family. Both marriage partners grew up as Old Order Amish; as of the time the documentary filming was completed (around 2011, since the film was released in 2012), they remained members of that church. Per their own testimony, the views they express in the above paragraphs generally accord with Old Order Amish beliefs. Despite those beliefs, however, their status as good faith members of

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<sup>278</sup> All quotes in the preceding two paragraphs are from *Amish: A Secret Life*. BBC Cymru/Wales. 2012.

the church was tenuous: their critique of church hierarchy, their willingness to be filmed, their continued fellowship with former Old Order Amish who had been excommunicated from their church for doctrinal beliefs, and the fact that they had been re-baptized a year prior to filming could all be considered groups for removal from the group were they discovered. David and Miriam were part of a movement within the Amish community that questioned the focus on church rules and hierarchy that is present among the Old Order Amish.<sup>279</sup> The critiques that they level against the Amish order are similar to the critiques that Quiverfull adherents level against Christian groups, such as Catholics, who place a heavy emphasis on tradition and institutional hierarchy, and they share with the Quiverfull movement a desire to spread their understanding of the gospel in order to both save souls and to create a world order that matches the order that they believe God lays out in the Bible.

David and Miriam's story documents two important trends. First, it demonstrates that many of the ideas associated with the Quiverfull movement resonate, sometimes deeply, with families and groups who do not easily fall under the Quiverfull banner.<sup>280</sup> It is not only

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<sup>279</sup> The extent to which this movement is endogamous is unclear; in areas with a significant Amish presence, there sometimes exist Christian ministry groups that proselytize to the Amish, considering them non-Christian, though many such ministries are created, at least in part, by former Amish. A prevalent ministry is Mission to Amish People (MAP), which explains the reason for their outreach on their website as follows: "from a spiritual standpoint, less than [sic] ten percent of the total [Amish] population understands the one true gospel of Jesus Christ as given to us in John chapter 3. The majority of Amish people focus on outward appearance, traditions, and church rules for salvation. Their belief in Jesus Christ is often head knowledge and part of a long list of do's and don'ts" ("Why a Ministry to the Amish?").

<sup>280</sup> The views of the Amish, especially Amish who are involved in reform efforts within their own community, accord closely with the vast majority of Quiverfull views. But even in groups with less in common--such as, for example, ultra-Orthodox Jews such as the Hasidim and fundamentalist (polygamist) Mormons--there are significant overlaps. The Brown family from TLC's *Sister Wives*, for example, expresses similar modesty standards for its adults as do members of the Quiverfull movement, follows courtship as an ideal way to arrange marriages, and promotes the primacy of the family.

Quiverfull adherents who oppose the use of birth control, advocate for homeschooling, believe in the patriarchal family as the basic unit of society, or deeply distrust government involvement in daily life.<sup>281</sup> The worldview that structures the Quiverfull movement maintains significant influence in sections of contemporary culture and discourse not encompassed by the Quiverfull movement.

Second, David and Miriam's story demonstrates the way in which individuals, families, and groups are excluded from membership in the Quiverfull community. While it is possible that David and Miriam might be able to transition into the Quiverfull ranks should they desire to do so, given their rejection of church hierarchy and traditions that Quiverfull adherents would likely identify as anti-Biblical, they would have to make a number of changes to their lives. In the meantime, more traditional Amish individuals and families would not only be excluded from the ranks of the Quiverfull, but from the label Christian as well. The overwhelming overlap in belief shared by the two groups is rendered void by the differences between them, which are viewed by Quiverfull adherents as a corruption too fundamental and deep-seated to permit common membership even under the umbrella of Christian.<sup>282</sup>

The way in which, from the perspective of the Quiverfull movement, differences between Quiverfull adherents and the Amish overwhelm similarities enough to exclude from the boundaries of community is directly demonstrated on S3E19 of *19 Kids and Counting*. The first half of that particular episode highlights a Duggar family visit to a New Order Amish

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<sup>281</sup> Indeed, it is not only the beliefs that overlap; it is also the ways that those beliefs are framed that overlap. Miriam and David use the term "conviction," which will be discussed in detail in this chapter; they also discuss men's struggle with lust as a battle, refer to corporal punishment as "the rod" (which they, like the Quiverfull movement, seem to use both literally and metaphorically), and use the word courtship to describe their process of deciding whether they wanted to marry.

<sup>282</sup> This method of excluding other groups from the Christian community was also discussed in Chapter 2.

family, the Yoders. The episode explores several similarities that the Duggars and the Yoders share, including a relatively strict gender-based division of labor, a commitment to nightly Bible reading as a family, and the belief that birth control should not be used because, in both Noah Yoder and Jill Duggar's words, "children are a gift from God." The Duggars and the Yoders are shown to relate amicably throughout the segment on which they are featured, enjoying their shared food and "fellowship."

Despite these similarities, however, it is the differences between the Duggars and the Amish family that the episode takes pains to highlight. In the interview portions of the episode, several Duggar family members, including Jill, Jeremiah, Jedidiah, and Michelle, all make a point of noting how different life would be without electricity. According to Michelle, "it was fascinating to meet an Amish family, and we wanted our children to experience that. The idea of living without all of the things that we have in our life that makes life a lot easier like electricity and those sort of things." This displayed inability to live as the Yoders do (despite the fact that the Yoders demonstrated that their home contained a modern gas range, oven, and refrigerator, running water, and battery-powered lamps that easily gave off as much light as electric lights, and despite the fact that the Duggars frequently tout their lack of dependence on digital technology) was consistent. Even when Jeremiah Duggar offered an explanation of the reason the Yoders don't use electricity in their home wherein he stated that it was because of concerns that allowing electricity into the home would allow other distractions into the home, the similarity between that view and the Duggars' avoidance of cable TV and frequent Internet use was not dwelled upon or even explicitly noted.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> This is, of course, at least partially the result of decisions made by the show's producers, who do not always have the same agenda as do the Duggars.

Perhaps most tellingly, the Duggars repeatedly depicted their engagement with the Yoder family as “fascinating.” The afternoon spent together with the Amish family was presented as a cultural experience for the Duggar children, and while the family acknowledged that they’d learned new information about the Amish and been able to see them from a new perspective, they still maintained the significance of their differences.<sup>284</sup> As Jill explains it, “I knew that sometimes we’d been compared to Amish. They were really nice and friendly, but, yeah, we’re not quite the same.” Asked by the producer interviewing her to provide information on why the Duggars had been compared to Amish people, she added, “A lot of times people think that we’re Amish just because of the large number of children and the way, like, all of us girls wear skirts and stuff.”<sup>285</sup> In this quote, Jill dismisses the strong similarities between the Duggars and the Yoders as being superficial in nature. Though Jill does not elaborate on the theological differences that inhere between the two families, she subtly hints that it is those differences that matter far more than more visible similarities ever could. Additionally, though no comprehensive system or structure of cultural difference between the two families is explicitly identified within the context of the show, Jill (in agreement with the rest of her family) also indicates that the Amish Yoder family could not

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<sup>284</sup> The Yoders, on the other hand, made attempts to indicate similarity, such as when Mary Yoder, the matriarch of the family, told the Duggars that they’d arrived as strangers but were leaving as friends.

<sup>285</sup> It is unclear in what contexts the Duggars are aware of having been compared to Amish people. One context that is known, however, is an incident that occurred in S1E1 of *19 Kids and Counting*, and which is referenced by both Michelle in an interview and by the production team in a video clip in the current episode under examination. In that clip, three women are amused by the Duggars’ process of loading into taxis in New York City, and explain that the family sticks out not only because of their size, but also because “they dress like they from the country or, you know, they upstate somewhere--Amish.” This, itself, is a telling moment of legibility, as it depicts the way that people who appear visibly rural and somehow alternative in origin to urban viewers can have their differences collapsed.



be considered part of the community to which the Duggars belong because of the differences in daily lifestyle and culture that they display.

Using these two examples as a jumping off point, the remainder of this chapter will focus on the bases Quiverfull adherents use to articulate the boundaries of their community. Those bases combine religious, social, and cultural elements that are united through Quiverfull reading and textual practices. Ultimately, such reading and textual practices are recursive in nature, predicated upon constantly returning to a rule set that is based in the ultimate authority of a God whose principles permeate all aspect of life and whose expectations can be found through a process of careful study of all objects as texts that reveal his intentions. In other words, for Quiverfull adherents, all aspects of the world are united under a single, dominant vision that God has called his creation to follow. Religion is not a separate category, but one that permeates, structures, and informs all aspects of daily life.<sup>286</sup>

### **Section 1: Religious Bases for Quiverfull Community**

Previous chapters have discussed the way in which Quiverfull adherents are taught to treat the Bible as the ground for a scavenger-hunt: they are provided with an interpretive matrix that functions as the scavenger hunt “list” and are instructed to complete their list by identifying key Biblical passages and understanding them in a way that reaffirms the interpretation that foregrounded their instruction. In this chapter, I will examine the fact that there is a specific event during which that reaffirmation process occurs for both individual Quiverfull adherents and families. That reaffirmation event rests on the concept of

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<sup>286</sup> To read more about this phenomenon in the context of the Quiverfull movement, see Kathryn Joyce’s *Quiverfull*.

“conviction,” a key aspect of Quiverfull reading practice, and one that contains connotations that strongly inform the underlying structure of Quiverfull community.

Through it is not always readily apparent, the concept of “conviction” permeates all aspects of Quiverfull life. This can be seen, for example, in the way that the Duggars understand the role of modesty in their family. In Chapter 1, I discussed Jessa Duggar’s explanation, contained in her family’s book *20 Kids and Counting*, of how the Duggar daughters understand their motivation for their modesty standards. She had explained that, “instead of being influenced by peer pressure, we’re guided by our family’s standards of modesty and what we read in the Bible” (103). Here, Jessa did not explicitly use the word conviction, but her references to authority—family and the Bible—indicate that it was at work. The underlying presence of the concept is made more visible in the words the four eldest Duggar daughters use to discuss modesty in their book, *Growing Up Duggar*:

Now, let us take a moment to chat about the Duggar girls’ fashion preferences and shopping habits. What we’re about to share are our own personal standards—not everyone shares the same convictions. Even families who share our Christian values may not share our same convictions about modesty. Daddy reminds us regularly that if the Lord shows *you* something from Scripture, then you have a responsibility to respond to that guidance. We simply honor what God wants our family to do. It doesn’t mean that what we do is for everybody. God convicts different people of different things at different times. (16, italics in original)

In this passage, the Duggars use the word “convictions,” or a varietal of it, three times. This centrality of focus indicates that the notion of conviction plays a significant role in the Duggar daughters’ relationship to the standards that they follow. Consistency between Jessa Duggar’s

explanation in *20 Kids and Counting* and her and her sisters' explanation in *Growing Up Duggar* is also present: in the current passage, as in the previous one, explicit reference is made to the important role both the Bible and the family play in creating those standards. The consistency demonstrated here is first and foremost a relationship to authority; the concept of conviction illustrates in more detail how that relationship functions.

At first glance, despite its repetitive use, the word "conviction" might appear to be used in, if not quite a casual manner, then one that does not quite rise to the level of structurally significant. After all, the connotations of the term "conviction" do not fully match the connotations of the other terms that the Duggars use. As in *20 Kids and Counting*, the authors of *Growing Up Duggar* often construct their vocabulary in a way that makes their modesty standards appear to be about personal choice between a number of equally desirable options; terms like "preferences" and "personal standards" and the phrase "it doesn't mean that what we do is for everybody," all present in the above quote, suggest that the Duggars girls' fashion decisions may be less than moral imperatives. The reader must bear in mind, however, that this is a familiar rhetorical strategy, structured around appealing to readers and piquing their interest in the Duggars' beliefs and lifestyles without going so far as to alienate them.<sup>287</sup> The moral imperative is present, there for the reader familiar with

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<sup>287</sup> It is also a strategy that is in keeping with the moral outlook taught in the ATI homeschooling curriculum. In *Wisdom Booklet 33*, which focuses on the character quality of "deference," clothing choices are explicitly discussed. That discussion includes a list of "basic responsibilities" that Quiverfull adherents have towards clothing, which are as follows: "to keep clothing clean, to wear clothing that is appropriate for the occasion, to dress modestly, to use clothing as a frame for a Godly countenance, to not judge others by their clothes" (19). Judging those who have not been inducted into the Quiverfull belief system by Quiverfull standards is forbidden not only because it might create a stumbling block in terms of that person's willingness to be receptive to proselytization, but because it is indicative of the sin of pride in the heart of the person who is doing the judging (see, for example, page 21 in the same booklet or the definition of deference listed on the front cover: "limiting my freedom in order not to offend the tastes of those whom God has called me to serve").

Quiverfull beliefs to see, but hidden from the readers to whom the Duggars are hoping to provide Christian witness on a more gradual, palatable level.

To understand the moral imperative undergirding this statement, it is necessary to recall that the core Quiverfull definition of “choice” significantly differs from more mainstream understandings of the same word. For Quiverfull adherents, choice is always understood to be filtered through obedience to God: one can choose to obey or disobey God’s commands. Consider the following explanation of freedom from ATI’s *Wisdom Booklet 33*: “Freedom is not the right to do what I want, but the power to do what I ought” (22).<sup>288</sup> Surface-level choices may not have a strong moral component—it can, for example, be equally acceptable to choose a green shirt or a blue shirt—but the underlying, important choice of whether those shirts conform to God’s design for clothing still pertains.<sup>289</sup> This means that certain clothing choices are always bad choices, because they disregard God’s design of modesty for attire, and therefore cause “the potential of influence and ministry we have in the lives of others [to be] diminished” (22). For more mainstream audiences, clothing choices might be determined by several factors, factors that change depending upon who is doing the choosing; for Quiverfull adherents, clothing choice is always dependent on the

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<sup>288</sup> This is a key focal point of the IBLP’s introductory seminars aimed at adults, as well. See Bill Gothard’s *Basic Seminar* series.

<sup>289</sup> In some instances, such superficial choices do have a moral component, if they are seen as potentially providing an opportunity to glorify God or further his mission work. If one color is more garish than another, for example, it might be rejected, because “dress should draw attention to our countenances, which should reflect the character of Christ. If a man were to wear hot pink socks or red and white striped pants, the eyes of others would most certainly go to his feet or legs and not to his face. When the size, style, fit, or accessories of a girl’s clothing detract from her countenance, she is not dressing according to the principle of freedom” (22).

underlying principle of obedience to God’s plan for his people.<sup>290</sup> Morality is present, and must be considered, in all cases.

The moral imperative being cited by reference to conviction is one of obedience to the revelations that one receives directly from God, which are in most cases mediated through the Bible and the godly family structure. This is encapsulated by the sentence included above that reads, “Daddy reminds us regularly that if the Lord shows *you* something from Scripture, then you have a responsibility to respond to that guidance” (16). Here, the Duggar daughters provide the reader with their belief that God directly guides each reader of the Bible on a personal journey that is tailored to him or her. This is a belief that matches ATI’s *Wisdom Booklet 33*, which teaches that “our clothing choices will be significantly affected as we transform our minds with Scripture and refuse to be squeezed into the mold of the world” (23). The truth of the Bible is, in this view, immutable, but the way in which each person becomes convinced of—or convicted of—that truth is flexible. Flexibility does not cancel out ideal paths—Jana, Jill, Jessa, and Jinger emphasize the fact that their understanding of scripture is guided by God through the wisdom of their father—but it does allow for God to work with a person’s unique circumstances and to guide them down the path of truth in the way that will most directly speak to them.<sup>291</sup>

How, then, does the concept of conviction play into this scavenger hunt model? Conviction, or being convicted, serves as an emotional response to the evidence that is

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<sup>290</sup> Within contents more mainstream than the Quiverfull one, modesty remains one possible factor involved in clothing choice. However, even when this is recognized, modesty is treated as a personal value or decision; one’s belief in modesty is not seen as something that can be dictated to others based on a clear, central source of authority.

<sup>291</sup> This example also demonstrates the fact that the Duggar family believes that God plays an active, highly personal role in each person’s life. In this view, God directly and intentionally designs the experiences and environment that each individual experiences.

presented to a person by God, through the Bible and through his followers (in the most ideal of cases, the obedient, Quiverfull family when one is a child), confirming that the evidence is true and that the interpretation it supports is likewise true. Conviction is not, it should be noted, an emotional experience that is understood to generate primarily from within the individual; instead, conviction is a judgment that is imposed from the divine and that the individual emotionally recognizes as valid (not on their own, but through God's grace as worked through the Holy Spirit). Conviction is, therefore, a juridical term, and its juridical nature structures the way that the Quiverfull adherent interacts with God.

The juridical nature of conviction clearly connects it to the salvation process that Quiverfull adherents recognize. According to Quiverfull belief, all humans are guilty of original sin: they are corrupt, fallen, and unable to live up to God's expectations on their own. This guilt structures the condition of humanity, and it can only be removed through the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross for the sake of all of humanity.<sup>292</sup> However, for that guilt to be removed, the guilty party—each, individual human—must acknowledge that guilt and ask for God's forgiveness. It is the acknowledging of this guilt—something that, again, comes about only at God's instigation in the heart of the sinner—that undergirds conviction. The person who would be saved must first be convicted by God as guilty and be led by God, through his grace, to accept that guilt as true.

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<sup>292</sup> It is worth mentioning that, in a dissertation focused on a Christian subgroup, this is one of only a few dozen uses of the name "Jesus." This is a textual choice that reflects Quiverfull ideology: within the Quiverfull movement, Jesus does not get discussed nearly as often as God or "the Lord." This practice of referring to their deity in a more formal way reflects the high credence given to the concept of hierarchical authority within the Quiverfull movement. Jesus is a name too intimate to make the majority of Quiverfull adherents truly comfortable.

This, in turn, undergirds the Quiverfull concept of election: a person who is chosen by God for salvation is a person who, having received pardon, knows him- or herself to be guilty and desires to have that guilt removed.<sup>293</sup> Receiving pardon from God removes guilt from the person in terms of the ultimate judgment that they face: the person has already been tried, found guilty, and forgiven, and they cannot be tried again for the same crime. Jesus, in dying on the cross, has borne the ultimate punishment for the convicted person's sins and sinful nature. However, God's forgiveness and correlative provision of redemption does not remove the fact that one who has been convicted has sinned and will continue to sin. Therefore, a person experiences not only the life-altering conviction that leads them to salvation, but individual instances of conviction throughout their lives.

In the initial instance of conviction, the sinner-to-be-saved is presented with evidence that they are guilty. That evidence can be brought to the person's attention in a variety of ways; bringing that evidence is one of the primary goals of the Quiverfull evangelist. He or she acts as a witness of their fellow humans' guilt, presenting it to them and allowing the Holy Spirit, God's prosecutor, to broker a deal between the guilty party and God, the Supreme Judge with the knowledge that, as long as the guilty party pleads guilty, punishment is cancelled. Quiverfull missionaries therefore serve as both emissaries of guilt, convincing their fellow humans that they are sinners, and as ministers of mercy in the face of that guilt, explaining to those fellows that there is the possibility of eternal forgiveness if only they will

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<sup>293</sup> As mentioned previously, Quiverfull adherents disagree on who qualifies for election and whether that decision is made by God in advance. Some Quiverfull followers believe that salvation is open to all and that God reaches out to each individual to offer it; others believe that God reaches out only to the ones that he has chosen to save from eternal damnation. Quiverfull adherents do, however, broadly agree on how the process of salvation works within the elect individual.

acknowledge that guilt and accept God’s judgment. In subsequent instances of conviction, ones in which the stakes are perhaps less high but addressing the guilt is nonetheless not considered any less necessary, members of the Quiverfull community work to encourage their fellow humans to admit their ongoing sins, to beg God’s forgiveness, and to gain “victory” over those sins. That encouragement happens through spiritual guidance, with such guidance occurring within the contexts of the relationship between parents and children, the relationship between husbands and wives, the relationship between siblings, relationships found within a church context (especially relationships between people in similar life roles), institutions aimed at providing opportunities for Quiverfull fellowship and edification, and textual materials, written, visual, and audio, that are made available to fellow Quiverfull believers.<sup>294</sup> Such guidance takes (Quiverfull interpretations of) Biblical texts as its basis, seeking to demonstrate what the Bible says (again, something that has already been determined by Quiverfull authorities), to show the individual or family how their life does not accord with that teaching, and to help them to correct their behavior or lifestyle so that it better reflects God’s teaching and enables his plan for humanity, Dominion, to be carried out more effectively. Encouragement is the term most often used for this process, likely because Quiverfull adherents see their lives as battles in which they must fight temptation, keep themselves apart from the ways of mainstream society, and work to bring God’s Dominion to a sinful world.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> It is worth noting that such guidance is almost always hierarchical in nature. This is in large part because, as documented earlier, hierarchy is built into almost all key Quiverfull relationships.

<sup>295</sup> See S2E12 of *19 Kids and Counting* for a discussion of how “encouragement” works within Quiverfull society.



The centrality of the concept of conviction also demonstrates the eventfulness of election; in other words, salvation is a process that works on a historical axis, unfolding over time. Conviction is an experience that can be traced to a particular moment. Salvation becomes an event that can be located in a specific instance of time, and each smaller-level conviction, too, functions as a temporal marker. History, then, takes on a providential function—it is necessary for the redemption of humankind, though it remains tragic at the same time, since without the fall of humanity, there would be no need for a process of historical development that involved the sacrifice of the son of God or an ongoing spiritual war with God’s enemies. History also becomes, as discussed in the previous chapter at some length, a process that can be understood as producing two outcomes: the salvation of the elect and the damnation of the lost. In this way, though history unfolds over time, its broad strokes are already determined, as are its ideals. Even as history proceeds, its historicity becomes erased under the sign of the eternal or the damned.<sup>296</sup>

When the Duggars discuss their convictions about modesty, therefore, we can understand them to be expressing that their clothing choices are the direct result of their having been convicted by God that clothing choices that don’t accord with Quiverfull principles (which Quiverfull adherents understand to be *the* clothing principles that God lays out in scripture) are indicative of sin. When they explain that others, even those with similar Christian values, do not necessarily share those convictions, and that “God convicts different

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<sup>296</sup> Much of my thinking in this section springs from a conversation I had with my adviser, Wlad Godzich, several years ago. I want to acknowledge the importance of that conversation in structuring my understanding of the importance of the term “conviction” within the Quiverfull context and the fact that several of the terms incorporated in this section were first raised by Professor Godzich during that conversation.

people of different things at different times,” they are not, at heart, conveying a “to each his own” message (*Growing Up Duggar* 16). Instead, they are explaining that not all Christians have been convicted by God of the importance of his dress standards. Because they believe that these are the only godly standards of dress, they are suggesting that, at least in this area, their family has privileged access to a godly truth that other Christians may not have, because God has deemed the Duggars in need of and ready to receive that message, whereas other families lack one of those qualities.

This approach opens up significant tension within Quiverfull circles regarding the boundaries of Quiverfull community. On the one hand, the Duggars cannot be read as necessarily arguing that they are more godly than other Christians: because God guides people through the Bible at different paces and with different areas of focus, other Christians may be just as godly as they are themselves; the order in which they have been convicted of their sins may simply be different, and they may have strengths in areas in which the Duggars have weaknesses and vice versa. On the other hand, Quiverfull adherents believe that families who are following God’s will are materially and visibly blessed by God, whereas families who are not are not rewarded as extensively by God. Each conviction is, in a complicated calculus, a sign of God’s blessing, because it enables families to more closely follow God’s plan.<sup>297</sup>

Within Quiverfull circles, the individual life paths that families might decide to follow, reaping the associated rewards and facing the associated trials, is referred to as “Christian

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<sup>297</sup> This complexity is evident in the Duggar family especially when one considers fourth daughter Jinger. After marrying Jeremy Vuolo in late 2016, Jinger began wearing clothing, most notably pants and shorts, which did not match with the Duggar family’s clothing convictions. This fits within the Quiverfull model of wives submitting to their husbands—Jeremy Vuolo has openly stated that he does not believe that modest attire on the part of women requires foregoing wearing pants—but suggests that Jinger’s conviction was merely derivative from her father’s, rather than individual, the way the Duggars claim. See the article attributed to Free Britney from *The Hollywood Gossip* cited previously.

liberty.”<sup>298</sup> The concept of Christian liberty explains that people are free to organize their own lives as they see fit, as long as their organizational scheme fits within God’s ultimate plan and obeys his principles. Quiverfull adherents see this as the best path to success: God’s plan is based on his design for human beings; following that plan will be the best way to live a contented, impactful life. Quiverfull adherents are also able to use Christian liberty as a framework through which to assess other families and individuals: if their lives testify to their commitment to godly principle—that is, if they respond to the Bible and its interpretation in ways that indicate that they recognize their own guilt as sinners and freely accept God’s grace in the saving and sanctifying processes—they are part of the Christian (Quiverfull) community; if they don’t, they are fallen, and while it might be valuable, even required, to engage with them as witnesses to the truth, they cannot be welcomed into the fold of God’s kingdom, lest they corrupt those who have already been convicted and make them forget their guilt.

This structural prioritizing of conviction causes the boundaries of Quiverfull community to focus around exclusion rather than around inclusion. It is fairly easy for members of the Quiverfull movement to exclude individuals, families, and groups from their number definitively, based on interpretive differences in the way those groups approach the texts that Quiverfull adherents treat as most central to Christianity. It is, however, much harder to verify inclusion in the group, because verifying inclusion requires verifying the authenticity of one’s conviction. In other words, a member of the Quiverfull community is determined to be such through the witness of other members of the group. They are under constant surveillance to determine whether their actions and beliefs match the actions and

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<sup>298</sup> This can be seen in the language used by Jeremy Vuolo, which is quoted in the article mentioned in the previous footnote.

beliefs that are considered to be essential to the group. Those actions and beliefs are, in their turn, determined by a complex negotiation between Quiverfull patriarchs.

## **Section 2: Cultural Bases of Community**

*“Did not God Himself appoint our parents, native place, and friends? Could He not have caused me to be born with the skin of the Hottentot, brought forth by a filthy mother who would nurse me in her ‘kraal,’ and teach me to bow down to Pagan gods, quite as easily as to have given me a pious mother, who would each morning and night bend her knee in prayer on my behalf?”*  
--Charles Spurgeon<sup>299</sup>

Because Quiverfull adherents believe that all choices are choices that are made between following evil and following good, they do not restrict their understanding of community to shared conviction in religious matters; cultural practice, too, plays a large role in structuring the boundaries of Quiverfull community. Cultural practice of both the present and of the past are emphasized: Quiverfull adherents examine both the contemporary moment and history for signs of God’s favor and signs of his displeasure. Signs of God’s favor are read as demonstrating that the lifestyle and culture that people have embraced are godly; such signs include material reward, the success of planned endeavors, the development of cultural trends engaged in by modern-day Quiverfull adherents, and the spread of Christianity and its associated practices. Signs of God’s displeasure are read as indicated that a people is following a path that opposes God’s will, and include poverty, the collapse of planned

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<sup>299</sup> (Kindle location 53 of 222). Spurgeon is English, but the attitude helps structure American exceptionalism and needs to be understood that way for the Duggars.

endeavors, cultural trends that are seen as alien to modern-day Quiverfull adherents, and the spread of belief systems that oppose Christianity (some of which see themselves as doing anything but).

As discussed in the previous chapter, Quiverfull adherents generally see the United States as a land founded on principles that would allow the creation of a godly society if they were not constantly embattled by forces who want to wrest the country away from its founding principles. The United States, which is the nation that has come closest to aligning itself to God's will in its glorious past, is in a fallen state, and it is the task of righteous Christian families to redeem it, to either show the world what God's kingdom will eventually look like or, in the case of post-millenarian Quiverfull adherents, to usher that kingdom in more quickly. This perception results in the Quiverfull movement's alignment with conservative political narratives about social decline and the need for national salvation, an alignment that is not only used to structure the Quiverfull embrace of far right-wing political analysis and goals, but that also functions as a factor that determines group membership. In other words, to be a Quiverfull adherent, and therefore a true Christian, one must embrace conservative American politics as part of one's religious calling.<sup>300</sup>

The yoking together of Biblical interpretation and "traditional American values" is very clearly seen in ATI curriculum materials and often focuses on issues of individual and

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<sup>300</sup> In many cases, it is not simply a matter of alignment. Quiverfull adherents have been trying to "Make America Great Again" since long before Donald Trump or Ronald Reagan used the phrase to tap into (predominantly white) popular fears about the imperiled nature of opportunity in America. Indeed, Quiverfull adherents have been active participants in shaping conservative policy agendas in U.S. politics, through political lobbying groups such as the Family Research Council and Focus on the Family (which, though not specifically identified as Quiverfull, promote many of the same values and aims and employ many staffers who follow Quiverfull beliefs) and through direct participation in the governmental process (such as Jim Bob Duggar's brief tenure as an Arkansas state lawmaker).

family productivity.<sup>301</sup> *In Wisdom Booklet 34*, for example, significant resources are devoted to explaining to children why government programs that subsidize food are negative: “Throughout history, when governments have tried to replace God as the ultimate source of man’s provision, the usual result has been anarchy followed by totalitarianism. The later years of the Roman Empire and the French Revolution are examples of this. In the United States today, the ‘provider of daily bread’ takes many different forms, and there is a tendency to look to government rather than to God as our provider” (48). The booklet goes on to explain that the primary example of the U.S. government replacing God as the provider of food is the welfare system, which it identifies as having the five following consequences: “waste is encouraged, distribution is inequitable, greed is intensified, self-worth is damaged, initiative is destroyed” (48-55). Welfare, in this view, causes the country to run less effectively and less efficiently. Such results are eventually disastrous for the nation:

Economic disorder spreads because [welfare] contradicts the God-given principle of personal property as the incentive for each man to do his own work. Political and

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<sup>301</sup> Even issues that don’t seem immediately relevant--such as gun rights, for example--are part of the Quiverfull package. Partially, that’s because such issues tie into Quiverfull understandings of the role of families--if the father is to be the protector of the family, he must have the means to provide protection. It’s partially due to the fraught racial politics of the Quiverfull movement, which will be discussed subsequently. Finally, including such issues under the Quiverfull banner serves an important rhetorical function. For example, in S6E1, all members of the family except Josie, who is approximately a year old, are taken to the shooting range to learn about and, if approximately aged 8 or older, shoot handguns. When show producers ask Jim Bob about the family’s general stance on guns, Jim Bob responds with “I really desire our children to learn about gun safety...and how to shoot a gun for personal protection.” In this reply, Jim Bob effaces the extent to which guns are a part of the Duggar household; in other episodes, viewers observe engagement with guns, including Jackson acting as the Lone Ranger with a pair of fake pistols, a trip during which Jinger hunts turkey with her father, a time when Jill takes the younger children outside to shoot their BB guns, and Michelle’s 46th birthday celebration, in which she has to fire a revolver at a target made of balloons to reveal a clue about her next birthday surprise. Jim Bob and Michelle offer their viewers a familiar embrace of conservative values surrounding gun culture, which appeals to those audience members who serve as the most likely candidates to adopt Quiverfull values.

social discord arises because every special-interest group wants its share of the government subsidy 'pie.' The environment is permanently damaged because greed motivates people to ignore the long-term consequences of their decisions. Worst of all, spiritual bankruptcy ruins the lives of citizens who stop looking to God for their daily bread. (57)

The Quiverfull interpretation of welfare uses common conservative buzzwords—special-interest, initiative, personal property, and incentive, for example—to make the ultimate case that welfare is a ploy of Satan's that reorders society against the way that God intended it. Accepting welfare relief, or endorsing it as an option for people who are struggling, becomes not only a political *faux pas* but a sin that directly opposes God's plan for his kingdom.

How do Quiverfull adherents read the Bible in such a way as to arrive at the idea that government should have no role in feeding the people under its jurisdiction? *Wisdom Booklet 34* offers insight into that process. In fact, it devotes an entire section to the following question: "What consequences result when government provides daily bread?" (48). Primarily, this reading is based in the Quiverfull understanding of authority that puts providing for a family in the hands of that family's father. The booklet notes that "When Jesus instructed His disciples to ask their heavenly Father for daily bread, He was reaffirming the Scriptural principle that God is not only our Creator but is also the Sustainer of all life" (48). If the government gets in the way of the father—both the earthly one and the heavenly one—of providing for the family, then it usurps the father's role and authority. In the words of the booklet's concluding section on this question, "when a government takes responsibility for something God did not intend it to control, the results are disastrous" (57). To arrive at this conclusion, Quiverfull readers must begin with the already formed interpretation that there

are distinct, discrete roles for government to fulfill that must not overlap with the roles of the family.

Because of their basis in the idea that there are discrete jurisdictions of authority in all aspects of life, and because cultural practice is seen to demonstrate those jurisdictions of authority, the ties between the Quiverfull interpretation of Christianity and their commitment to conservative politics in the United States extend to what might be considered even the more trivial aspects of daily life. This is demonstrated by Gil Bates's speech "The High Price of a Sensual Girl," given at the 2013 ATI family conference and discussed in another context in Chapter 3. Discussing the lessons that can be learned from the story of Samson, Bates explains that Samson's long hair is not an excuse for modern boys to wear long hair; their hair, he is certain, is pleasing to God only if it short. Bates believes that different gender-based hair lengths are commanded by God in the New Testament; his reading is rooted in the specific interpretative practices through which Quiverfull adherents engage with their religious texts.<sup>302</sup> That interpretive practice produces an understanding of the Bible that is firmly rooted in a conservative understanding of American identity and culture.

Bates establishes that short hair is a must for men through his interpretation of I Corinthians 11:14-15, which reads as follows: "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for *her* hair is given her for a covering" (KJV). For Bates, a man with long hair is covering over the authority given to him by God, whereas a woman with long hair is accepting the

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<sup>302</sup> Quiverfull adherents are not the only religious group to turn to Biblical scripture to determine appropriate haircuts. This is something that is practiced by ultra-Orthodox Jews as well, and their interpretation of Biblical text leads them to a rather different understanding than the one put in place by the Quiverfull movement.



covering authority of her husband.<sup>303</sup> This interpretation, of course, does not derive directly from the passage in question, which does not explain the rationale for coverings being important for women but anathema for men; instead, it is a product of Quiverfull understandings of the roles of men and women—proper jurisdictions of authority that are derived from touchstone passages like Genesis 1-3 and Titus 2, discussed previously—which are then used to read all Bible passages in a way that furthers and fulfills that interpretation.

Such (understood as) key Biblical texts are not presented as the only available evidence; supplemental support is used to strengthen their status as foundational. They are supported by strategic historical research, provided by both Quiverfull adherents themselves and the interpretive authorities to whom they accord legitimacy. The issue of hair in particular was an issue for R.J. Rushdoony, a 20th-century theological thinker and advocate for an American government structured specifically around Christian principles, and one of the authorities who provides a significant amount of the Biblical interpretation on which Quiverfull adherents rely. In the first volume of his monumental *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, the title of which is a clear homage to John Calvin, Rushdoony addresses the issue of hair length in the following way: “Church councils very early censured long hair in men as a mark of effeminacy, as had the Romans before them. There is no evidence to support the usual portrayal of Christ and the apostles as long-haired men; the evidence of the age indicates very short hair” (388). It is not only the Bible that affirms the importance of short hair in men; it is also the practice of the wise men of the era, Christian and pagan alike.<sup>304</sup> By using the men of

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<sup>303</sup> See I Corinthians 11 for the Bible passage from which this belief is derived.

<sup>304</sup> In fact, by referencing the Romans, Rushdoony indirectly recalls us to American patriotism, as the Romans are so often pointed to as one of the U.S.’s most important political influences and as a parallel state that faced some of the same triumphs and challenges as does the contemporary U.S.

the early church and the Romans as authority figures, Quiverfull adherents frame their practices with through a narrative of contest over historical and social decline, positioning themselves as frontline warriors against a culture of decadence that has threatened godly people since the earth's creation.<sup>305</sup>

This concern over the appropriateness of specific haircuts for specific genders demonstrates that Quiverfull anxiety around cultural decline links the notion of social decline to gender, and especially to disappearing masculinity and femininity, which are in turn to be understood as God-given categories of authority. This attribution is seen in Mary Pride's previously discussed contempt for the men of Deborah's era, whom she believes have transformed into "dishrags" (144). It is also seen in the Botkin sisters' argument that women such as Deborah "needing to" lead is a sign of moral and cultural decay: "We have a special kind of God-given influence, and we can either use it for His purposes or Satan's. We can use it to pull ourselves and our culture out of this big mess. We can use it to encourage our fathers and the other men around us become men. We can do this by repenting from our natural inclinations towards feminism and becoming real women" (74).<sup>306</sup> In their view, the decline of masculinity is serious enough to function as a harbinger of the possible imminent destruction of civilization—traditional masculinity is, after all, coded as good, and therefore

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<sup>305</sup> Not all Quiverfull adherents agree on the issue of men's hair length, just as not all Quiverfull adherents agree that pants constitute immodest dress for women. On *Counting On*, for examples, viewers are able to observe Jill's husband, Derick, growing his hair out long. The reasons for the growth of his hair are not given, but he does have Jill cut his hair short when they return to Guatemala as missionaries, explaining that long hair might make him less effective in his ministry, due to the cultural norms of Latin America (S5E6). This issue is not one that is treated as significant enough to exclude one from the ranks of the Quiverfull, though it is significant enough to produce ongoing conversation within the Quiverfull movement.

<sup>306</sup> Becoming a real woman is a matter of conviction, in the way that the Botkins construe it in this quote. It is therefore rooted in the historical development of Christianity, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

anything that doesn't strictly align with it is seen as a choice for evil and a direct victory for Satan. Altered or diminished masculinity in men is a visible sign of a people disobeying God's commands, a state that often results in God destroying or diminishing said people.<sup>307</sup> Women are called to lead only when it is necessary for them to do so in order to return men to their proper roles of leadership—in other words, to their proper sphere of authority.<sup>308</sup>

Tellingly, the traditional masculinity that must be restored is understood and coded as Western, and especially American, masculinity. In the eyes of Quiverfull adherents, godly American males are the torchbearers of the authority and virtue that God invested in men; it is they who have kept up the model of masculinity that God lays out in the Bible, while other cultures and regions have allowed proper masculinity to fall by the wayside, if indeed they ever had access to it. The circularity of this method of reading culture is clear: Quiverfull adherents start with an already established value—real men have short hair, for example—then hunt for proof that such a value is backed up by Biblical and other authorities. Once they have found that proof, they codify it as a principle and teach it to subsequent generations and new Quiverfull adherents, beginning their teaching from the middle point at which it was established and eliding the fact that it derived from contemporary cultural values that did not look primarily to Biblical texts for justification.<sup>309</sup> New Quiverfull adherents and generations

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<sup>307</sup>It is seen in numerous lectures on Embassy Media, the media site sponsored by the IBLP, which devotes a notable percentage of their published sermons to issues of gender conformity

<sup>308</sup> This offers an explanation of how Quiverfull adherents justify women voting, when doing so goes against the Quiverfull ideal that fathers should represent their families within the political sphere. Women must vote because the country is in crisis, and they must temporarily assume leadership to return it to its righteous path.

<sup>309</sup> It seems clear that such elision is often subconscious: many of those who teach Quiverfull principles do not express awareness of how those principles were derived; indeed, such an awareness would likely undercut those principles and the Quiverfull project in general.

are “convicted” of the truth of the principle and go on to bear witness to that principle in their daily actions, beliefs, and evangelistic behaviors.

This circular process of integrating conservative American culture into the Quiverfull belief structure has important ramifications for the structure of community and the extent to which it is oriented around rooting out any corruption or pollution that might disrupt the model through which Quiverfull tenets are established. Individuals, families, or groups who do not fully embrace the interpretive structure of the Quiverfull movement cannot be welcomed into its ranks, because doing so would threaten the consistency and all-encompassing nature of that structure. For this reason, induction into the group must happen gradually and must be as totalizing as possible. It is clear why the most valued type of induction occurs through reproduction: earlier chapters have detailed the ways that Quiverfull families attempt to employ total ideological control over their children, indoctrinating them into this worldview so that it becomes the total lens through which they understand the world. In turn, it is clear why conversion is fraught: new members bring with them a host of outside influences and ideas that need to be conquered and, as much as possible, eradicated.

For this reason, the specific characteristics of new members invited into the fold are carefully monitored. This is demonstrated by the criteria families must fulfill to join ATI (discussed in detail in Chapter 2). It is also seen in the strategic way in which families like the Duggars introduce their beliefs, designing the majority of their public outreach to appeal to readers and viewers who likely already share some of their core values. It is seen by the way that cultural differences (such as those demonstrated by the Yoders, discussed above) are

seen, through their tie to religious beliefs but also on their own, as indicators of pollution that disqualify those who manifest them from inclusion in the community.

This last aspect of monitoring—attention to cultural difference and similarity that determines the extent to which an individual is a good candidate for group membership—has clear race-based implications. Quiverfull adherents are predominantly white, a fact that should come as no surprise to a person who has observed that the cultural values and practices they espouse as ideal are primarily, though not exclusively, valorized by conservative, white America.<sup>310</sup> And while the majority of Quiverfull adherents welcome individuals of all racial backgrounds into the Quiverfull movement, they do so with the full expectation that individuals who come from different cultural backgrounds will fully assimilate to the white, Eurocentric culture that structures Quiverfull life.<sup>311</sup> That, to them, is a key part of the project of Dominion: convincing the rest of the world that God has chosen Christian people of European descent to be the bearers of truth and goodness to the rest of the world. Put simply, Dominion is an all-encompassing, imperialist project that buys into the Christian “civilizing” mission that was rampant during 19th century imperialism in Europe and America. This can be clearly seen in the Charles Spurgeon quote that opens this section: the religious superiority that Quiverfull adherents believe they have been blessed with extends to

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<sup>310</sup> Indeed, it should also come to no surprise to those who have read the Charles Spurgeon quote that opens this section and who understand that Spurgeon is a key influence in the Quiverfull movement.

<sup>311</sup> To understand what fits into “good” American culture according to the Quiverfull model, it is instructive to pay attention to the aspects of U.S. patriotism in which Quiverfull families indulge. The Duggars and the Bates, for example, demonstrate the value they see in police, firefighting, and EMT services, by both directly participating in those services and by doing things such as baking cookies for local agencies involved in such activities. They also celebrate holidays like the 4th of July and teach American history (in a very revisionist way) to their children. Finally, both the Duggars and the Bates directly participate in the political processes of democracy, voting, running for, and serving in political office.

their culture, and while most Quiverfull adherents might not use racist language that is as blatant as Spurgeon's, on the whole they very much embrace the idea that white American culture has the ability and duty to bring uplift to the comparatively debased cultures throughout the rest of the world.<sup>312</sup>

The cultural imperialism that is demonstrated above and that is a key part of the mission of Dominion is fully displayed in both Quiverfull belief and practice. Often, belief in the superiority of cultures based in Western Europe (as interpreted by Quiverfull adherents) is explicitly stated. For example, the Botkins directly articulate a list of the societies they believe intrinsically hold the potential for alignment with God's will. Those countries are identified, in their terms, as Western nations, and include Western Europe, North America, and the British Commonwealth countries (Botkin and Botkin 5). Significantly, countries with Christian majorities that are predominantly Catholic or Orthodox, including Eastern European and Latin American nations, are explicitly excluded from the boundaries of the West, even though many such countries fall under the boundaries of the West in other definitional frameworks. For the Botkins, it is not only that the beliefs of Catholicism and Orthodoxy are manifestations of corruption and as such are actively anti-Christian that structures this conclusion, but also the fact that the culture created by those religions is polluted, unable to fulfill the parameters of God's will. It is no mistake that almost all of the countries included are countries that are treated as racialized Others within white American culture, both historically and presently.

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<sup>312</sup> See, for example, the Botkins' discussion of Dominion in *So Much More*.

This attitude is seen in practice on both *19 Kids and Counting* and *Counting On*. In some instances it is, if not subtle, then easily dismissed as a kind of buffoonish ignorance. Over the course of the fifteen seasons of *19 Kids and Counting*, the Duggars were documented taking several trips abroad, to Europe, Central America, and Asia. During these trips, viewers were able to observe many uncomfortable reactions to other cultures. In most of the trips, the culinary and dress practices of other cultures were often treated as spectacles on which to comment or experiences to brave and exploit [insert several examples]. In many cases, ignorance was almost enthusiastically embraced; for example, while traveling in eastern Asia, Jim Bob repeated insisted on greeting strangers with the Spanish word for hello, “hola,” despite the fact that those strangers were clearly of Asian descent. For Jim Bob, all cultural difference seemed to be clearly equated under the banner of “not mine” and he demonstrated no hesitancy in acting on that belief or in having it documented on camera.<sup>313</sup>

Such attitudes extend, in a somewhat more complex but no less clear way, to the Duggars’ missionary activities in South America. In S5E4, the Duggars bring Christmas gifts and the story of the birth of Jesus to a rural village in Guatemala. In the course of their engagement with the villagers, their mission leader, Mike Schott, the pastor who will eventually officiate at Jessa and Ben’s wedding, tells the camera that the gifts and gospel that the group brings to the village will make its people happier than they’ve been for a year. The Duggars and their

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<sup>313</sup> The Duggars do not only react in this way to cultures that center around countries other than the United States. Throughout both *19 Kids and Counting* and *Counting On*, show producers frequently offer the Duggars opportunities to demonstrate their lack of knowledge/awareness about certain aspects of American culture as well. For example, the Duggars’ demonstration of their general lack of knowledge about rap and hip-hop was discussed previously. The Duggars do not consider such music genres to be part of the “good” American culture that they recognize; they follow the beliefs taught in ATI that such music is inherently evil. The fact that rap and hip-hop are primarily derived from African-American influences demonstrates the way in which the Duggars’ understanding of culture ties into their understanding of race.

like-minded companions cannot imagine cultural or religious fulfillment that does not look like their own, and they attribute the violence and poverty currently endemic in Guatemala to the fact that Guatemala as a nation is not based on the values and beliefs that they themselves endorse.

Such attitudes extend to the missionary work that viewers watch Jill and Derick Dillard engage in on *Counting On* (which, hardly incidentally, is sponsored by the same organization managed by Mike Schott that previously sponsored shorter Duggar mission trips). While in Guatemala, the Dillards consistently discuss both how difficult life is for Guatemalans and how culture in Latin America is different from what they are used to. Occasionally, such discussions contain more positively framed elements—when they discuss, for example, how certain commodities are cheaper at the local market in Guatemala than they are in the United States (S3E9). More often, however, they discuss what they miss: certain items are not readily available, utility services are unreliable, and serious safety concerns exist. When they return to Arkansas for an extended time away from their mission, for example, Derick takes up jogging again, noting how thankful he is to be in America where it is safe enough to do so (S4E3).

It is not so much the individual observations that the Duggars and Dillards make that indicate their attitude of racial and cultural superiority—it is widely accepted that utility services are less reliable in rural Guatemala on average than they are in the rural U.S. and that crime rates in Guatemala are higher than crime rates in most regions of the United States. It is the way in which they frame these differences, and especially their own engagement with them, that is especially telling. The Dillards and the Duggars clearly talk about what they are doing as a noble sacrifice, as can be seen by the way they fawn over trips to the grocery store



or talk about the dangerous medical situations they risk while being in Guatemala (see episodes referenced in the previous paragraph). In the same way that they collapse American culture into an illustration of good and evil, with themselves always on the side of good, they collapse “Spanish culture” into a singular monolith that contains many positive elements but is ultimately corrupt and misleading because it does not prioritize Quiverfull values.

Though it is clearly demonstrated in the above examples, the Duggars’ race-and-culture based savior complex is most clearly seen in their discussions of adopting children, discussions that happen in the context of Guatemala, but also during their visit to China and in stateside episodes as well. In many ways, this is the most illustrative example of the extent to which culture plays a role in the Quiverfull worldview, as it demonstrates some of the underlying tensions within the movement (tensions that nonetheless help to structure the movement). Specifically, their general pro-adoption stance puts the Duggars somewhat at odds with the traditional teachings of Bill Gothard, longtime head of the IBLP and a figure to whom the Duggars offer much deference. The issue of adoption highlights both the imperialist project of the Quiverfull movement and the concerns the movement has over the dangers of inviting pollution into God’s kingdom as one invites more people to become members of it.

To understand the complex relationship to the adoption of children that exists within the Quiverfull movement, it is first necessary to understand why Bill Gothard cautioned against it. In a section entitled “Acknowledging Inherited Weakness,” from his *Anger Resolution Seminar, Session 8*, Gothard explains his belief in the concept of “generational sin,” which he defines as being the fact that sins committed by previous generations can directly impact descendants, giving them tendencies to sin in similar ways (115). He offers Biblical

backing for this idea, bringing in passages that he sees as demonstrating both original sin and generational sin committed in other contexts. Gothard explains that,

The most obvious example of the ability of the iniquity of the fathers to affect future generations is seen in the transgression of Adam. 'Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned' (Romans 5:12). Romans 7 contains a clear description of the laws of sin that continue to be in conflict with the desires of the mind. "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I' (Romans 7:15).  
(115)

He primarily uses this passage to establish the important influence of original sin within humanity; his understanding of generational sin primarily comes from a passage that he believes demonstrates that generational influence can be of a positive, non-sinful. He explains Hebrews 7:9-10--"Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him"—in the following manner: "In Hebrews 7, we are told that Levi paid tithes to Melchisedec. Yet, Levi was not yet born when these tithes were paid. They were actually paid by his great-grandfather Abraham at least 125 years earlier. Paul explains that Levi paid these tithes because he was actually in the loins of Abraham when Abraham paid them, and therefore, he was a physical part of the action" (115).<sup>314</sup> For Gothard, the meaning of these passages is that "we were, in reality, a part of them [our ancestors] when they committed the iniquities, and therefore, we have a

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<sup>314</sup> This interpretation is far-fetched: it is clear from even a brief read that the passage does not definitively indicate Levi's *physical* presence within his ancestor, Abraham.

responsibility to acknowledge that they were wrong” (115).<sup>315</sup> Because, according to Gothard, descendants were physically present (through DNA) in their ancestors throughout their lives, descendants carry on the direct legacy of their ancestors, whether that legacy is one of fulfilling or polluting Quiverfull ideals.<sup>316</sup>

In Gothard’s view, therefore, adoption can be at best a risky business. Kevin, an author on the blog *Recovering Grace: A Gothard Generation Shines Light on the Teachings of IBLP and ATI* explains Gothard’s fears in his article “Adoption: The Ultimate Act of Grace:”

When we adopt a child from another ‘spiritual ancestry,’ what are we bringing home? Will our child have the predisposition of a fireman or a Frankenstein, a hero or a monster? Adoption is a genetic ‘mystery bag’; because we don’t know the sin patterns of their parents, we can’t properly acknowledge their ancestral sins and be free of them. Gothard tells potential adopting parents to try to research the potential specific sins of the biological parents so as to confess them and negate their consequences.<sup>317</sup>

According to this interpretation, adoption is only a wise course if prospective parents can access information about the child’s ancestry (for example, if a child is a relative’s child, or in

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<sup>315</sup> It is, of course, the case that only part of the DNA involved in the creation of subsequent generations is present in any one person, since sexual reproduction’s purpose is to combine DNA from different individuals. However, it is possible that Gothard is either according primary significance to the paternal line or is justifying this claim through the idea that all of the marital pairings of one’s ancestors were both ordained by God and signify the cleaving together of what should be considered only one person (see discussion in Chapter 3 about the ontological status of the married couple within Quiverfull belief).

<sup>316</sup> To the extent that it is embraced across the Quiverfull community--something that is unclear due to the conflicting views about adoption that exist within it--this belief may indicate that Quiverfull adherents take a more radical stance on abortion than the traditional pro-life rallying cry that “life begins at conception,” since it suggests that each human’s life is already realized in the existence of their ancestors.

<sup>317</sup> *Recovering Grace* is an explicitly Christian blog that takes issue with Gothard’s teachings and seeks to reach out to current and former IBLP and ATI participants to offer them an alternative perspective on Christian teaching.

other limited circumstances), because it otherwise risks opening the family to dangerous pollution. Kevin, in keeping with the mission of uncovering Gothard's pernicious influence on Christianity that *Recovering Grace* supports, goes on to argue that Gothard has misconstrued Hebrews 7, that all people share the same heritage of original sin but not different heritages of sin inherited from one's specific ancestors, and that adoption is an act of grace that "pictures the heart of God" because it reflects the way that Christ has adopted his followers.<sup>318</sup>

The arguments made for adoption by blogger Kevin are arguments that resonate with many Quiverfull adherents, who, in their ongoing veneration of Bill Gothard, have to reconcile their belief that adoption can serve an important role in Dominion with concerns that adoptive children have the potential introduce pollution in the form of generational sin into the family. In general, the Duggar family seems to have adopted the former view: Jessa and Ben Seewald have been explicit about their intentions to adopt children, and Jill and Derick have noted the possibility that they, too, plan to do so several times. Michelle and Jim Bob also informed viewers of *19 Kids and Counting* that they were considering and praying about the possibility of adoption; though they did not proceed with the adoption of children from

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<sup>318</sup> Kevin also claims that Gothard had a history of advising parents with adoptive children who evidenced significant "generational sin" to give them up. He cites both case studies provided in Gothard's "Basic Care Bulletin 5: How to Make Wise Decisions on Adoption," which I was not able to access, and stories from adults who grew up in ATI contexts. Giving up such adopted children may not even be the worst case scenario for them--there have been several high profile cases in recent years in which parents who were found to have Quiverfull-related literature in their homes starved, beat, or otherwise abused their adopted children to death in the name of disciplining and correcting their sins. Those children were disproportionately of color and from non-U.S. backgrounds. See, for example, J. Bryan Lowder's *Slate.com* article, "Did the Disturbing Philosophy of *To Train Up a Child* Lead to Hana Williams' Death?"

outside their family context, they have recently taken custody of a relative's child and are raising him alongside their own children.<sup>319</sup>

Despite the fact that this conflict about the proper role of adoption exists within Quiverfull circles, and the differing conclusions at which Quiverfull adherents arrive, there remains an underlying shared understanding of the world that should be explored. For Quiverfull adherents who have strong hesitation about adoption, the primary concern revolves around ensuring that Quiverfull lifestyle and beliefs remain pure and unadulterated. For Quiverfull adherents who see adoption as a calling, adoption is about bringing children who are impoverished, not only materially but also culturally and spiritually, into the ranks of God's chosen people and providing them with the "riches" that results from following God's plan (as well as turning them into additional soldiers in the army of God's kingdom). Adopting a child from a country with a different culture or heritage means not only providing for a child's physical well-being, but also likely saving them from eternal damnation. Adoption is, for the Quiverfull adherents who engage in it, primarily a work of furthering Dominion. They are explicitly seeking to work as agents of God's empire, colonizing the heart of the child(ren) that they adopt.

Throughout the previous section, and in earlier chapters of this project, we have seen numerous examples of the caution with which Quiverfull adherents bring members into their community because of their fear that community unity and purity may be polluted. The upbringing that children experience is severely constricted in order to maintain the purity of their belief in Quiverfull principles through ideological control; the marriages that young

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<sup>319</sup> See Amber Belus's *In Touch Weekly* article, "Get to Know Tyler, Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar's Newest Son!"

people make are carefully controlled to ensure that ideological consistency is maintained;<sup>320</sup> the past history of converted parents is discussed only in vague terms with children and is treated as a battlefield in which evil reigned until it was conquered by good; the fellowship that Quiverfull families engage in mostly occurs with other members of the movement, with outsiders introduced primarily for strategic purposes. Ultimately, for Quiverfull adherents, community is not about individuals coming together to make common cause amidst their difference and diversity; instead, community is about eradicating all difference that does not directly further God's kingdom. The only difference acceptable within the Quiverfull concept is difference that allows for sameness to grow and spread (such as the gender difference that supports the Dominion mission in both reproductive and productive terms). In the following section, I will discuss the ramifications that this has for the structure of Quiverfull community itself and the way in which that structure engages with, influences, and sometimes echoes other forms of community that interact with the Quiverfull movement.

### **Section 3: Theoretical Implications for Understanding Community**

In many ways, the Quiverfull practice of community can be understood through the following quote by Jean-Luc Nancy, from his *The Inoperative Community*:

The lost or broken community can be exemplified in all kinds of ways and by all kinds of paradigms: the natural family, the Athenian city, the Roman Republic, the first

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<sup>320</sup> This is seen in Quiverfull courtship practices, but it is also seen in ATI lectures, such as the Gil Bates's lecture "The High Price of a Sensual Girl," discussed in Chapter 3, in which he claims that Samson should not have sought to marry a woman from outside his own people. In the Quiverfull context, this teaching applies because Quiverfull adherents consider themselves to be spiritually chosen by God, but the reference also harkens back to the idea of not mixing with cultural or racial outsiders and brings its influence into the Quiverfull movement.

Christian community, corporations, communes, or brotherhoods—always it is a matter of a lost age in which community was woven of tight, harmonious, and infrangible bonds and in which above all it played back to itself, through its institutions, its rituals, and its symbols, the representation, indeed the living offering, of its own immanent unity, intimacy and autonomy. (9)

Because it orients itself around the mythic events of Adam and Eve's fall from the Garden of Eden, the Quiverfull community is always incomplete and always corrupt, because no matter how hard it might strive to meet the requirements of God's law, it is always polluted by the presence of original sin. It can never realize its goals and its practices can never be the perfect reflection of God's plan that they strive to be, and it looks longingly back to the Garden of Eden to imagine a time when such perfect community might have been possible.

The Fall is, therefore, the defining limit of Quiverfull community; by prioritizing it, the Quiverfull movement takes Nancy's explanation of community one step further. Since it was the Fall that initiated the ruin of perfect community, in the nostalgic, return-oriented Quiverfull interpretation, it is only once the consequences of the Fall are eradicated that true community can exist. The consequences of the Fall were, first and foremost, the destruction of the perfect unity of the first couple, who are understood to in fact be one person, who himself reflects the image of God. The Fall created separation in this unity, creating a multiplicity of wills, desires, and behaviors that destroyed the perfect singularity of the perfect, Christian community. In the Quiverfull understanding, perfect community predates the founding of community outside the bounds of the marital couple; community that involves the entire fellowship of believers is something that is yet to be accomplished.

Thus, the yearning for unity of the ideal Quiverfull community is filtered through the extreme limit of the married heterosexual couple; it is, at the same time, undergirded by hierarchy. Though Quiverfull adherents do not deny that men and women have equal dignity and worth in the eyes of God, they place them in a very firm hierarchy structure—a hierarchy structure that mimics the authority structure between the Father and the Son within Quiverfull Christian belief.<sup>321</sup> There is mutuality in this hierarchical model: both parties have responsibilities and gain benefits from participating in it. That mutuality does not, however, negate authority, because authority is a structure that is put into place by God to guide people according to his design. Those who advocate egalitarianism are enemies of the foundations of Quiverfull community; only those who endorse and engage in the hierarchy laid out by Quiverfull interpreters can participate in Quiverfull community.<sup>322</sup>

In at least one way, however, Quiverfull community is oriented around a mutuality that is not primarily hierarchical in nature. That mutuality centers on the shared guilt manifested in the process of conviction, discussed above. One cannot be a member of Quiverfull community until one has been interpellated by God, through his witnesses and his word, as guilty of being a fallen creature.<sup>323</sup> Therefore, the people to whom Quiverfull adherents extend ministry and outreach cannot be active members of the Quiverfull

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<sup>321</sup> This hierarchical relationship between Father and Son is demonstrated in Jesus' Matthew 26: 39 prayer to his father in the Garden of Gethsemane in which he asks God to remove the upcoming burden of his crucifixion and submits to his will when that burden is not removed.

<sup>322</sup> *Wisdom Booklet 33* goes into significant detail about the dangers of utopian societal structures and they "actually" function not to equalize the resources to which people have access within a society but to replace the authority of God with the authority of the state.

<sup>323</sup> Conviction explains why "consent" is not a topic that is addressed within Quiverfull communities to any significant extent. Consent places the will of the individual in a place of primacy, usurping the primacy of the will of God. A Christian whose lens is conviction will not see consent as a desirable value, therefore; instead, consent is replaced with submission to the will and law of God.



community, even when they engage in fellowship with Quiverfull adherents, read their texts, or attend events sponsored by them. It is only when they become convinced of their own guilt that they can join the faithful, because it is only certainty of that guilt that can secure their place in the kingdom of God, on earth temporally and in heaven eternally.

Quiverfull community, then, is based on full submission to God's authority and its corresponding hierarchical structures in the hope of achieving an instantiation of God's kingdom on earth that, while it cannot realize perfection, can foreshadow that perfection. Submission is actuated through the recognition of one's guilt as a fallen creature and the subsequent elevation to the status of sanctified that happens through God's grace. To be authentically convicted, within the Quiverfull community, a person must demonstrate their embrace of Quiverfull reading practices. It is not sufficient, however, to understand or be able to strategically deploy those reading practices; a person must satisfy the community that their engagement with those reading practices completely structures their worldview and their actions.

Such a model demonstrates that violence exists at the heart of Quiverfull community. To be a true participant in shared Quiverfull identity and practice, one must seek to eradicate one's nature, replacing it with the nature of God. The violent structure of community is constantly reinforced in Quiverfull discourse: it is seen in the Quiverfull depiction of life as a battle between good and evil, the way in which the Quiverfull community characterizes itself as fighting against ongoing social decline, and the way in which it discusses fighting temptation and gaining victory over sin. It is seen in the way they treat their children and in their church functions of excommunication. Community is about cutting in the Quiverfull context; once the rot is removed, it is only the pure that remains.

This means that, despite any intimations made to the contrary, viewers of the reality TV shows that feature Quiverfull families—primarily the Duggars and the Bates—cannot be said to be engaging in any substantive form of community with the Duggars, despite possibly imagining such community, since such imagining must be mutual to effectively create community. What the Duggars and Bates do seek to create, however, is the potential desire for Christian community that can lead the viewer to being convicted by God and therefore inaugurated into the Quiverfull community. The suggestion of the possibility of community is therefore itself an aggressive act on the part of Quiverfull families, whether they use reality TV as a platform for their ministry of both conversion and encouragement, or whether they provide ministry that follows other formats.<sup>324</sup> Quiverfull adherents are religiocultural warriors who use a process of infiltration to introduce the possibility of community: they display numerous ideas, behaviors, and actions that share commonality and identification with more mainstream culture, but consistently offer hints at significant differences in their views. That difference becomes defining: to enter into the sameness of community, one must embrace it, flipping one's orientation so that one is different vis-a-vis the world and similar vis-a-vis the Christian community, and excising all corrupt elements of the former self. Resistance may not be futile, but it is inevitably damning.

This chapter has demonstrated that, within Quiverfull circles, the basis of community is an imperialist project that sees (almost all) forms of difference as signs of evil that disrupt

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<sup>324</sup> Reality TV in many ways provides an ideal ministry platform for Quiverfull adherents: it allows them to display their principles and practices in a venue that minimizes the possibility of pollution, as participants in the reality TV show do not have direct access to their viewers. The viewers can receive the information that the Duggars, Bates, and other families desire them to have without those families then being exposed to the evil influences and ideas of the world. Viewers are offered the appearance, but not the reality, of fellowship with the families that they observe.

the development of God's kingdom. Quiverfull community seeks to eliminate corruption in all its forms, including most instantiations of difference, doing violence to the person that seeks to join it in the name of purification. In the following dissertation conclusion, I will consider the impacts that both the underlying structure of Quiverfull community and its deployment of its most visible ministry platform, reality TV, have on broader American culture. Ultimately, I will make the case that the Quiverfull movement's ideas and practices have a greater effect on—and overlap more with—mainstream America than is commonly credited.

## Conclusion

*"The goal of literary work...is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text." -Roland Barthes<sup>325</sup>*

Over the course of my research, and particularly within the context of the classroom, I have discussed the Quiverfull movement frequently. As mentioned previously, most of the people I have talked to about the subject were not familiar with the term "Quiverfull" or the concept of "Biblical Patriarchy" when I initially introduced them; when, however, I made reference to the Duggar family or their reality TV show *19 Kids and Counting*, most of the people with whom I was talking had heard of one or the other. The Duggars had appeared on the radar of my interlocutors as a cultural oddity, a spectacle of what can happen when people take a particular idea or behavior to an extreme, but not as representatives of a larger cultural trend.

Correspondingly, one of my most pressing motivations for working on this project has been a desire to call attention to the fact that the function of such a spectacle as the Duggars is often to distract the viewer from the complex power relations and political maneuvering that is going on behind its scenes, working to create it and radiating out from behind it to impact connected but elided aspects of culture and society. As is seen in the case of the Duggars (as well as other Quiverfull families with a public presence), this enmeshment in power relations largely goes unnoticed by mainstream audiences and media organizations, who instead actively participate in the process of spectacle by feeding attention into it. Positive representation of the Duggars turn every moment of their lives, no matter how

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<sup>325</sup> *S/Z: An Essay*, 4.

repetitive or ordinary, into an event to be scrutinized. Negative representations of and investigations into the Duggars routinely seem to focus on elements of their lives calculated to make them appear shocking and perhaps even alien: media organizations provide exposés into the sexual molestation of several sisters committed by Josh Duggar or Internet articles calling attention to the fact that the Duggars make a startlingly lucrative salary from their show without ever commenting on how such situations connect to large social issues or trends.<sup>326</sup> By maintaining such a focus, they function to cover over some of the implications that the Duggar family and their reality TV represent by actively helping to turn the Duggars into a sideshow that can be understood as an exception to the regular rules of American culture and an example of a minority view and way of life that is to be mocked and avoided by the mainstream.

Such criticism of the Duggars only helps to obscure their participation in larger cultural trends. In fact, turning them into a kind of deviant sideshow is doubly distracting because of its strong investment in the boredom characteristic of popular culture-based spectacle. As Bill Nichols, a leading reality TV scholar asserts, by foreclosing the experience of representation and referent, reality TV creates a consciousness that is less able to recognize the possibility of progress and that experiences life processes as much more stagnant than historical. He lays this idea out as follows: “The historical referent, the magnitudes that exceed the text, the narratives that speak of conduct in the world of face-to-face encounter, bodily risk, and ethical engagement ground themselves harmlessly in circuits devoted to an endless flux of the very sensations they run to ground, a perfect balancing act of homeostatic

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<sup>326</sup> See, for example, The Washington Post article, “Josh Duggar molested four of his sisters and a babysitter, parents tell Fox News,” published on June 4, 2015.

regulation” (567). In other words, reality TV is structured in such a way that viewers perceive the broader cultural and historical trends to which reality TV points as being applicable only to the reality TV episode that they are watching. In this way, reality TV becomes representative of an alternate reality with which viewers can engage without effect, because it has no bearing on their own lives, even when it shares comfortingly similar elements with those lives. It is a spectacle, something different from their own experience that holds their fascination, which temporarily alleviates the repetition of the everyday without in any way seeming to participate in the construction of the everyday other than to populate its landscape as a passing distraction. The very spectacle of the Duggars—based on the idea that they are different from the audience who observes them—becomes routinized, creating a boredom that reinforces the ontological status of the Duggars as different and rendering them irrelevant to larger cultural situations.

This characterization carries through to the way that the Duggars are discussed in larger popular culture forums, even by their critics. The concerns that are raised about the Duggars tend to be fairly banal in the larger scheme of things, a fact that conspicuously matches the structure of their television shows, mired as they are in detailing the ennui of everyday Duggar life, and that returns the focus to them, increasing their capacity to serve as spectacle. Popular Internet-focused publications critical of the Duggars typically focus on the individual Duggars in the family—the molested sisters, the stay-at-home young women, the young children subjected to the harsh discipline of blanket training, the possible exploitation of the generosity of viewers in calls for financial support for missionary endeavors—rather than on the impact that the Duggars and their fellow believers are having on the larger

culture.<sup>327</sup> The Duggars, through the structure of their reality TV franchise, are understood to have material effects primarily on themselves, their immediate circle, and, in the most extreme of circumstances, their devoted fans.

This dissertation has documented the fact that viewers' perceptions of the Duggars, such as the ones discussed above, are often inaccurate. The Duggars are much more broadly connected to a larger community than their show's content and structure make clear; indeed, they are only a small part of the larger movement to which they belong, if nevertheless the most visible members of it. It has also documented that the Quiverfull community is made up of a wide range of members of society with varying incomes, varying religious affiliations, and various geographical locations. It has documented, albeit not fully, the extent to which the Quiverfull movement is integrated into its local, state, and national contexts by calling attention to the extent to which Quiverfull adherents actively pursue political and ideological involvement in those contexts.<sup>328</sup> It has, ultimately, documented the fact that the Quiverfull movement has a wider scope of influence than is often realized.

Though awareness of the widespread access to political leaders that the Quiverfull movement has is important, more important still is the way in which its ideology mirrors

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<sup>327</sup> Any review of *In Touch Magazine* or *TMZ* articles on the Duggars will demonstrate this amply. The exception to this rule is often those who were raised in the Quiverfull movement and who often have more deep-seated and widespread concerns (see, for example, the website *No Longer Quivering*). Such critics often, however, receive little mainstream attention, relegated to posting on blogs. When they do receive relatively mainstream attention, they often endorse an approach to the Quiverfull movement that uses some of its own tactics, especially its approach of eradicating differing worldviews, in opposition to it (see, for example, Kiern Darkwater's Autostraddle.com article, "I Was Trained for the Culture Wars in Home School, Awaiting Someone Like Mike Pence as a Messiah").

<sup>328</sup> For more extensive documentation of the reach of Quiverfull communities, see Kathryn Joyce's *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchal Movement*, frequently mentioned in the previous chapters. This dissertation has discussed the political careers and ambitions of various Quiverfull adherents, as well as Quiverfull participation in local community institutions such as police and firefighting forces.

ideology that is becoming increasingly prevalent or, at the very least, openly acknowledged in American culture. At the core of that ideology—which can be seen manifesting itself in blatant assertions of white supremacy, in the rhetoric of opposition to political correctness and “snowflake” culture, in assertions that separate spaces of safety and rejuvenation for the oppressed are, themselves, signs of oppression against those disallowed from those spaces, and in countless other ways—are the beliefs that difference needs to be eradicated in the name of maintaining cultural righteousness and purity and that the authority that rules society needs to be total and unquestioned. These beliefs, as so thoroughly demonstrated above, are not only growing in assertion in mainstream popular culture; they are also hallmarks of Quiverfull ideology.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to attempt to identify the causation that underlies such trends; indeed, such a project would be fraught at best, since attempting to identify causes for such complex social constructions often leads to scapegoating which, no matter how seemingly well-deserved, only serves to distract from the complexity and pervasiveness of such trends. It is therefore not at all my assertion that the Quiverfull movement should be seen as the root cause, or even *a* root cause, of such ideological threads in mainstream culture. Nor, however, should the Quiverfull movement be oversimplified as being the result of those threads. Rather, the consonance between the Quiverfull movement and those threads should be given close attention, because that consonance points to the fact that the underlying principles of the Quiverfull movement are some of the same underlying principles that structure the cultural ideologies based in self-righteous purity and exclusion that are becoming more and more obvious in the mainstream.



The argument I have made here that the Quiverfull movement and significant portions of mainstream American cultural ideology share a number of common threads does not constitute a call for a return to an imagined civility of discourse that happened in a public sphere oriented, in principle if not in ideals, to a small segment of societal elites. It does not constitute a call to direct action in the face of this set of cultural trends, though to address some of the manifestations of the ideology I have been describing, direct action may well be warranted. What it does do is constitute a call for awareness—an awareness that spectacle often serves to distract attention away from underlying power dynamics and their implications, an awareness that calls for cultural purity and the need for total authority are not only to be found in particular or (apparently) isolated communities, and, most importantly, an awareness that our own reading practices need to be carefully scrutinized, lest we, too, fall into a scavenger hunt model of understanding that causes us to confirm our own beliefs and negate the power of the discursive differences that make our society capable of pursuing its greatest potential. We must always be active writers—and not merely passive readers who carefully follow the rules of engagement laid down for us, following them to an always already ordained conclusion—of the cultural texts that we encounter.

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