

## *Introduction*

When I tell people I am writing a book about the Quiverfull movement, many immediately assume I mean the Duggar family. The Duggars do not call themselves “Quiverfull,” yet they are, for better or worse, the public face of Quiverfull in America. Millions have watched their TLC reality show, *19 Kids and Counting*, in voyeuristic fascination over the past several years. With a firm commitment to male headship, a willingness to bear nineteen children (so far), and educate all of those children at home, the Duggars have lived out in front of the cameras the Quiverfull ideal. I have heard more than one mother call the Duggars “Quiverfull royalty.” But, as a “royal family” with a reality show, the Duggars are about as representative of Quiverfull families as *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* are representative of housewives. There are similarities, of course, but they only go so far.

The reaction of scholars and theologians to my research tends to be very different. When I explain that Quiverfull refers to evangelical Christian families that practice patriarchy, prolific childbearing, and homeschooling, often words like “fundamentalist,” “lunatic,” or “brainwashed” get thrown around. The women of the movement in particular are often accused of being uneducated, insane, and even masochistic. One scholar questioned the legitimacy of trying to make this kind of religious practice intelligible. “They’re just crazy,” he said dismissively. “They really are just crazy.”

But that’s not all there is to say. Human beings are infinitely complex creatures, especially when it comes to their religious practice. Surely theologians and scholars of American religion can do better than the simplistic conclusion, “They’re just crazy.”

Provoking both fascination and revulsion, the lived religion of the

Quiverfull movement is the subject of *Quivering Families*. In this book I seek to make the Quiverfull movement understandable to outsiders and explore what there is to learn from their way of embodying the family in contemporary America. Before going any further, however, some introduction is in order. What is Quiverfull exactly? And why am I writing about them? And what could they possibly have to say to those interested in theology?

### ALL SCHOLARSHIP IS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

All scholarship is autobiographical and this is no less true for me. I came across the Quiverfull movement in the early days of my doctoral studies. Their particular instantiation of the family caught my attention for a number of reasons. As someone with a background in American evangelicalism, I was struck by the seriousness with which Quiverfull women take their commitment to stay-at-home motherhood. This is, of course, a common theme in evangelical culture: motherhood is a woman's highest calling and women are often enjoined to forgo careers to devote everything to it. But it seemed to me that Quiverfull mothers devote themselves to this ideal with unparalleled zeal. These women not only stay at home with their children full time but also have a lot of them—and then homeschool all of them. This is not to mention the men, who sign on to support a homeschooling mother and a large number of children on a single income. The Quiverfull movement appeared to be an embodiment of all of the evangelical ideals about the family taken to their most logical and enthusiastic conclusion.

I was also eager to know what Quiverfull families look like on the ground. It is one thing to write about the joys of homeschooling, receiving every child as a gift, and the God-ordained purpose of the family, but it is quite another to live those ideals, day in and day out, within the confines of the private family home. Moreover, I suspected that there is quite a bit of difference between the way spokespersons of the movement describe their work and the way Quiverfull mothers experience it in real life. For instance, what would average Quiverfull mothers have to say about pastor Doug Phillips's sermonizing about the "glories of motherhood"? And how would they respond to Nancy Campbell's insistence that the home is their "battle station" in the culture wars? The appearance of widespread cultural agreement

is often just that—an appearance. I wondered what Quiverfull culture would look like when its families were examined more closely.

I was also intrigued by the number of women who, when telling the story of their “conversion” to the Quiverfull way of life, spoke of their own mind changing first and then their husband’s. It was by and large the *women* who led the way into Quiverfull—a counterintuitive trend for such a stridently patriarchal movement. My curiosity was piqued: Is this patriarchal movement really a mother-led, mother-powered phenomenon? If so, what does that say about their patriarchal ideology? And why exactly would women sign on to such a grueling embodiment of Christian motherhood and family in the first place? I have enough respect for the intelligence and agency of women to reject simplistic notions that Quiverfull mothers are simply “brainwashed” or “just don’t know any better.” No, these are intelligent, thoughtful women who have knowingly signed on to a vigorous practice of motherhood. I wanted to know if women really were leading the way and, if so, why.

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

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

This personal narrative is meant not only to tell the reader how

this book began but also to establish from the start that I do not pretend to approach the topic of the Quiverfull movement from a place of detached objectivity. I am a mother of three who has experience with the demands of pregnancy, nursing, and childrearing—all of which were at their most intense while I was completing my doctoral studies—and I cannot feign an unbiased point of view on these subjects. My thoughts on marriage, children, and family were inevitably formed in the crucible of that experience.

I am also a Christian theologian with an approach to theology shaped within the American evangelical context. Though US evangelicalism is no longer a comfortable fit, evangelicals remain my primary theological interlocutors. This means my research has been conducted with certain evangelical sensibilities, including a concern for the use and interpretation of scripture and an interest in the experiential aspects of women's lived religion. While some may see my roots in American evangelicalism as a drawback, I found my evangelical background served me well as I sought to listen closely to Quiverfull families and understand their way of life in a nuanced and sympathetic way.

In addition, I have spent the past few years working out a place for myself within the Anglican tradition. My move into a sacramental, liturgical, and more tradition-oriented context has affected the way I evaluate Quiverfull theologically and biblically. Arguably the most important influence on my work has been a new appreciation for the doctrine of the incarnation. Because of the theological centrality of the incarnation, I am compelled to assert that there is truth and goodness to be found even in ideologically problematic locations. It is precisely in the concrete stuff of daily life, with all of its tensions and difficulties, where I expect the transcendent to be manifested. Moreover, my theology of grace leads me to pay attention to the forms of life that Christians find compelling and through which they sincerely seek to follow Christ. There is grace to be found in these locations. To affirm that the Quiverfull way of life is graced, however, requires the simultaneous affirmation that it is no doubt imperfectly graced—perhaps acutely so. Still, I contend that Quiverfull families, in all of their imperfect complexity, can provide a site for fruitful reflection on the Christian family today.

Also, I am a theologian with deep convictions about the essentially egalitarian nature of the Christian vision for male-female relationships. Due to these convictions, I am troubled by the patriarchy of

Quiverfull discourse and its implications for women and their children. My critique of Quiverfull is broader than the matter of gender roles, but I cannot deny that my egalitarian sensibilities influence my perspective on the movement as a whole. I will make some claims about the surprising way women's agency works within the lived religion of Quiverfull families, but I want to be clear from the start that I have no desire to "baptize" the Quiverfull family discourse and declare Quiverfull mothers "anonymous feminists." Still, I am convinced by the work of Mary McClintock Fulkerson and R. Marie Griffiths, among others, that women's agency, even within the most patriarchal contexts, can be exercised in unexpected ways.<sup>1</sup> I will elucidate some of those ways in the following chapters even as I cannot deny my fundamental unease with the gender ideology of the movement as a whole.

Finally, I write as a white, middle-class woman and US citizen—an identity that comes with certain privileges, as well as blind spots. Though I have tried to write with a degree of self-awareness, I am certain that both my privilege and blind spots will be visible in the following chapters. There is no doubt more to say about the Quiverfull movement, especially those whose subject positions are located outside the presumed Quiverfull norm: white, American, and middle to lower class. I hope my work inspires others who are better suited to take up those critiques.

## WHAT IS QUIVERFULL?

What is the Quiverfull movement exactly? The term *Quiverfull*, used both by outsiders and insiders, comes from the language of Psalm 127:3–5: "Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents

1. Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); R. Marie Griffiths, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). See also Elizabeth Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); Brenda Brasher, *Godly Women: Fundamentalism and Female Power* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997); and Christel Manning, *God Gave Us the Right: Conservative Catholic, Evangelical Protestant, and Orthodox Jewish Women Grapple with Feminism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

in court.”<sup>2</sup> This psalm is referenced in Mary Pride’s early book *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality*, but Rick and Jan Hess popularized it in their book *A Full Quiver: Family Planning and the Lordship of Christ*, which was published in 1990.<sup>3</sup> The Hesses argue strongly for viewing children as an unqualified blessing and childrearing the primary work of the Christian marriage. Though *A Full Quiver* has been out of print for some time, their book seems to have been the catalyst for the widespread use of the term *Quiverfull* for those who eschew family planning. Those who adopted the Hesses’ perspective began to describe themselves as Quiverfull (i.e., “We are a Quiverfull family”). This led to the creation of a website devoted to the subject, Quiverfull.com, which also offered the *Quiverfull Digest*, an email newsletter available by subscription.<sup>4</sup> Quiverfull.com came online in 1995, which suggests that within five years of the publication of *A Full Quiver*, the term had become popularized and adopted by many families to describe their way of life—enough families, at least, to support a website and monthly newsletter. The internet also allowed for its popularization through the proliferation of merchandise using the Quiverfull moniker.<sup>5</sup> Members of the media picked up the term, too, as reports began to surface on Quiverfull practice.<sup>6</sup> By the time Kathryn Joyce published her book *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement*, in 2009, the word had been in use for about ten years.

What do people mean by *Quiverfull*? Joyce and other outsiders who write about Quiverfull families typically have in mind conservative Christians that have intentionally large families and believe

2. Unless otherwise noted, I use the New International Version (NIV 2011) of the Bible.

3. Rick Hess and Jan Hess, *A Full Quiver: Family Planning and the Lordship of Christ* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990).

4. It seems that Quiverfull.com has not been updated since 2011, which calls into question the usefulness of the website as a site of ongoing activity for Quiverfull families today. But, there is no doubt that it has been a location for networking and information sharing among Quiverfull families up until recently.

5. See, for example, the variety of things available at <http://www.cafepress.com/quiver-full-gifts>, including bibs and hats imprinted with “Militant Fecundity” and tongue-in-cheek T-shirts that say, “Birth control is for sissies” or “Yes, they’re all ours.” Interestingly, Café Press groups other merchandise with their Quiverfull materials, including the categories *patriarch*, *antifeminism*, and *modesty*. This is indicative of the way that the beliefs and practices overlap among people who participate in Quiverfull discourse.

6. See, for example, the following articles: Newsweek Staff, “Making Babies the Quiverfull Way,” *Newsweek*, November 12, 2006, <http://tinyurl.com/ybqdbwlt>; Kathryn Joyce, “Arrows for the War,” *The Nation*, November 27, 2006, 11–18; Ted Gerstein and John Berman, “When Having Children Is a Religious Experience,” January 3, 2007, <http://tinyurl.com/y8yln7jw>.

in some kind of “Christian patriarchy” (or “male headship”). Some also emphasize the long-term goal of transforming or Christianizing American culture through a major demographic shift.<sup>7</sup> When families call themselves Quiverfull, they are typically referring to their willingness to have as many children as possible (that is, as many children as God gives them). Such families may or may not assign to their reproduction the goal of cultural transformation, but all of them would eschew birth control. In all of these accounts of Quiverfull, the focus is primarily upon the practice of prolific childbirth—or, to be clearer, a constant openness and willingness to bear as many children as their married union produces. Thus, for insiders and outsiders, the term *Quiverfull* pinpoints both a practice (not using birth control and being open to many children) and a belief (children are an unqualified blessing—the more the better), which is often linked to Christian patriarchy.

The complicating factor in discussing the term *Quiverfull* is that in recent years the label has taken on distasteful stereotypes due to a number of public scandals. For this reason, many families today, despite affirming the practices and beliefs indicated above, reject the label *Quiverfull* due to its negative connotations. Deborah Olson, a Quiverfull mother we will meet later, wants to be careful about the designation: “I’m not part of anything purposefully. I’m very conscious about not following individuals. But that doesn’t mean that if you were trying to do a sociology project that I’m not going to get grouped with other people like this. . . . But any group of people that you write about will have divisions within them.”<sup>8</sup>

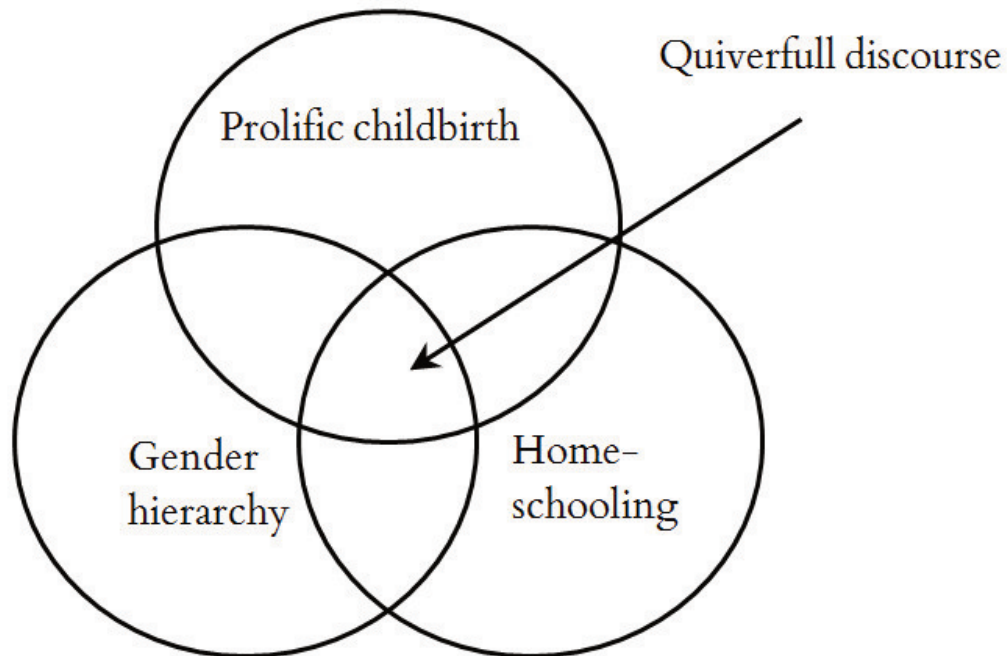
In this book I use the term *Quiverfull* to refer to families who participate in three practices: homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and pronatalism.<sup>9</sup> Homeschooling refers to the practice of educating one’s children in one’s home rather than in traditional brick and mortar schools. The mother in the private family home conducts the vast majority of Christian homeschooling and the practice is central to everyday life. Pronatalism is the academic term for the Quiverfull

7. See, for example, Libby Anne’s distinction between Quiverfull and Christian patriarchy in “Christian Patriarchy/Quiverfull,” *Love, Joy, Feminism*, <http://tinyurl.com/p6fxhaw>.

8. Stacy McDonald, a leading voice in the Quiverfull subculture, began to separate herself from the term long before the scandals involving Bill Gothard and Doug Phillips. On December 12, 2010, McDonald said the following on her blog: “Am I ‘Quiverfull’? No, I think I’d rather be ‘Jesus-Full,’” (<http://tinyurl.com/ycr4vpyb>).

9. For a helpful discussion of three contemporary accounts of practice that come to bear on the discussion of discourse, see Mary McClintock Fulkerson, “Practice,” in *Handbook of Post-modern Biblical Interpretation*, ed. A. K. A. Adam (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), 189–98.

desire to have many children. It doesn't simply mean someone who loves children or even wants to have a large family, but specifically refers to a family seeking to have as many children as possible. Gender hierarchy refers to their practice of male headship and belief in a gender-based hierarchical arrangement in the home, church, and world—one where men, in general, lead and women, in general, support and follow them. Each of these things—homeschooling, pronatalism, and gender hierarchy—entails certain beliefs, which emerge from particular biblical texts, but more importantly, they are lived out in daily life. Together, they make up the threefold discourse at the heart of the Quiverfull movement. If we can conceive of homeschooling, pronatalism, and gender hierarchy as circles in a Venn diagram, then it is at the center where the three circles converge that the Quiverfull discourse is located:



Participants in this discourse are also participants in a subculture of evangelicalism. Thus, individuals and families can be Quiverfull; and these individuals and families, by participating in certain cultural institutions, are participants in the Quiverfull subculture. Both the families and the subculture are identifiable as Quiverfull because of the presence of all three aspects of their discourse: homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and pronatalism. In this definition, I am expanding the scope of the term as it has been used to this point. Rather than see



militant fecundity as the focal practice, I include homeschooling and gender hierarchy as well. Moreover, the three practices demarcated by the term *Quiverfull* may or may not include an orientation toward the goal of cultural transformation. And I use *Quiverfull* for teachers, leaders, authors, bloggers, and families at the grassroots level, regardless of whether they use it to describe themselves.<sup>10</sup>

The first element of the Quiverfull discourse is homeschooling. I argue in chapter 1 that the Quiverfull movement as it has come to be recognized today is a subgroup that developed over the past forty years within the broader networks of the Christian homeschooling movement.<sup>11</sup> While Joyce and other commentators focus almost exclusively on the patriarchal and pronatalist practices of Quiverfull families, it is important to see that homeschooling is just as central to their lived experience. For families on the ground, the practice of homeschooling is the primary structure within which their way of life is ordered. The production of a large family is not an end in itself. The couple's "militant fecundity"<sup>12</sup> is for the purpose of rearing godly Christian children who will carry on the faith and transform society in the decades and centuries to come, something pastor Voddie Baucham calls "multigenerational faithfulness." This phrase

10. Due to the negotiations taking place around the application of the term *Quiverfull*, it would, perhaps, be preferable to use another word. But, I have been unable to find a label that encompasses and properly names the combination of three practices outlined above. At this point, it has been almost twenty-five years since *A Full Quiver* was published, and the term is now part of the vernacular of American evangelicalism. Also, it continues to be used by journalists and bloggers. And, perhaps most importantly, it retains the symbolic link to Ps 127:4, which is key to the lives of the families under consideration in this project. Thus, I will retain the term *Quiverfull* as a shorthand for persons and families who participate in the three practices of homeschooling, gender hierarchy, and pronatalism, as well as the subculture they have produced, all the while cognizant of the fact that I will sometimes do so in the case of people who would personally eschew the label for various reasons.

11. Adult Quiverfull daughter Libby Anne, of *Love, Joy, Feminism*, confirms my interpretation of homeschooling's centrality to Quiverfull discourse: "Christian Patriarchy/Quiverfull is made up of a loosely connected group of organizations that promote extremely strict gender differences, submission to the family patriarch, and raising up armies of children for Christ. These organizations have gained a great deal of influence in the Christian segment of the homeschool movement, and evangelicals and fundamentalists who homeschool encounter Christian Patriarchy/Quiverfull, sometimes unwittingly, through homeschool literature, conferences, and leaders. This is how Christian Patriarchy/Quiverfull gains its new recruits." Her post clarifying the differences between evangelicals, fundamentalists, Christian homeschoolers, and what she calls "Christian Patriarchy/Quiverfull" is illuminating: <http://tinyurl.com/y8n3jz44>.

12. David Bentley Hart, "Freedom and Decency," *First Things*, June 2004, <http://tinyurl.com/ya8vd4yc>. One can find merchandise emblazoned with the words "Militant Fecundity" at the website Café Press. Virtually anything, including baby bibs, coffee mugs, and underwear, can be imprinted with a slogan showing one's commitment to prolific reproduction.

expresses the desire that all of their children continue in the Christian faith for multiple generations. While other homeschooling families might point to academic excellence or college readiness as the focus of homeschooling, Quiverfull families have as their primary goal the transmission of their Christian faith to the next generation.<sup>13</sup> And Christian homeschooling is the crucial means by which this training is carried out. Although curriculum and pedagogy vary considerably from family to family, the central practice is the same: the education of children is undertaken as the primary responsibility of parents and conducted within the home.<sup>14</sup> Thus, while there are many homeschooling families that are not Quiverfull, there is no such thing as a Quiverfull family that does not homeschool.

Gender hierarchy is also vital to the daily practice of Quiverfull families. In chapter 1, I say more about the roots of their gender ideology in evangelical history, but for now it will suffice to point out the link between homeschooling and gender hierarchy. Mitchell Stevens, in his groundbreaking work on the American homeschool movement, has observed that gender dualism—a rigid split between male and female roles or spheres—is ubiquitous and key to the Christian homeschooling movement.<sup>15</sup> “Ultimately,” he says, “it is conservative Protestants’ deep commitment to full-time motherhood that has

13. The concern for “multigenerational faithfulness” is another way of saying that their central concern is for the production of Christian children. This concern is rooted in studies over the past few decades that show a decreasing number of youth remaining in the church after they graduate from high school. Many such studies accuse secular state schools of being the primary problem. Based upon those concerns, Quiverfull families seek to do whatever it takes “to raise sons and daughters who walk with God,” in Voddie Baucham’s words. They devote themselves to a total lifestyle committed to biblical family values, trusting that if they do it “right,” their children will remain Christian.

14. Libby Anne offers the following observation: “You can’t be Quiverfull and not homeschool. Currently, Quiverfull exists as a segment of the homeschool movement. The whole point is to let God give you lots of children to train up for his glory, and if that’s the point, why would you then send them off to the public schools to be indoctrinated into secular humanism? I mean, that’s how they phrase it, anyway. If you tried to be Quiverfull and not homeschool, you would be shunned, questioned, or made to feel left out by every other Quiverfull family” (Libby Anne, blogger at *Love, Joy, Feminism*, email message to author, August 10, 2012).

15. Stevens distinguishes between two different kinds of homeschoolers: “inclusives” and “believers.” Inclusives are homeschoolers from a variety of faith traditions and cultures who do not separate themselves for religious reasons. Believers are homeschoolers from conservative Christian backgrounds who tend to separate themselves from inclusives and form their own networks, co-ops, newsletters, and other organizations. Although the early homeschooling movement was inclusive in nature, “believers” now make up the majority of American homeschoolers. The story of this shift is told in Mitchell Stevens, *Kingdom of Children: Culture and Controversy in the Homeschooling Movement*, Princeton Studies in Cultural Sociology (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), as well as Milton Gaither, *Homeschool: An American History*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

made them such a ready audience for home education.”<sup>16</sup> One might even say that the conservative Protestant commitment to gender hierarchy (and the corresponding stay-at-home motherhood ideal) is the ideological fuel that powers Christian homeschooling.

Quiverfull families call their practice of gender hierarchy many different things, including *biblical patriarchy*, *Christian patriarchy*, and *male headship*. For the past few decades, many Quiverfull families have openly embraced the term *patriarchy* for its antifeminist valence.<sup>17</sup> But recent years have seen a slow defection from the term because of its association with disgraced public figures who have been denounced as too extreme.<sup>18</sup> In this book I do not employ the term *patriarchy* to characterize the gender dynamics of Quiverfull discourse. Instead, I use *gender hierarchy*, *gender dualism*, and *male headship*, depending on the subject under discussion. I do so in part to avoid the implication of a universal experience of patriarchy.<sup>19</sup> Also, I wish to avoid becoming entangled in the internal debates of Quiverfull and homeschooling families regarding the right or wrong application of the term *patriarchy*. Gender hierarchy, as I am using it, refers to the biblically rooted belief in male headship (the language of which comes from Eph 5:23), which posits a general principle of male rule in all areas of life, due primarily to the order of creation (Genesis 2), which is understood to teach both gender-based roles and a dualism of gendered spheres. As we will see in chapter 1, this way of envi-

16. Stevens, *Kingdom of Children*, 187.

17. There was even a *Patriarch* magazine published by Philip Lancaster from 1993 to 2004. Their website described their mission as follows: “*Patriarch’s* mission is to bring about a return to patriarchy, leadership by strong, godly men in every sphere of life” (*Patriarch*, <http://tinyurl.com/yafef9j>). Lancaster is a former associate of Doug Phillips who spoke at many Vision Forum events and homeschooling conferences around the country. He also authored the book *Family Man, Family Leader: Biblical Fatherhood as the Key to a Thriving Family* (San Antonio, TX: Vision Forum, 2003).

18. The scandals alluded to here will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5. Whether these denunciations are sincere or simply the result of a desire not to be associated with disgraced leaders remains to be seen. Prominent ex-Quiverfull and ex-homeschooling blogs call into question the denunciations of patriarchy now coming forth from leaders who have, in the past, certainly endorsed it. See, for example, the discussion at the website devoted to homeschooling graduates, Homeschoolers Anonymous: R. L. Stollar, “What ‘Christian Patriarchy’ Is Not,” April 28, 2014, <http://tinyurl.com/y8th82fx>.

19. The term *patriarchy* has a long history within a variety of academic disciplines as a way of naming the hegemonic structure of masculine domination. But recently, some academics, especially those working in gender theory, have called into question the usefulness of the term, particularly when it implies, in Judith Butler’s words, a “categorical or fictive universality of the structure of domination” in order to establish “women’s common subjugated experience” (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* [New York: Routledge, 1990], 5).

sioning the genders and their prescribed roles in the family has a long history in American evangelicalism. Within the Quiverfull discourse, though, the responsibility for education is added to women's primary responsibility for the care and nurture of children.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, along with homeschooling and gender hierarchy is the practice of pronatalism. *Pronatalism* names both the Quiverfull rejection of birth control and their desire to, in their words, have as many children as God chooses to give them. In practice, pronatalism has active and passive aspects. The choice not to do anything to prevent conception could be called *passive pronatalism*. Quiverfull wives reject the Pill, condoms, and other forms of birth control in order to leave control of their fertility to God. In this sense, pronatalism is about what a couple is *not* doing. On the other hand, the choice to have sex during the fertile times in a woman's cycle might be called *active pronatalism*.<sup>21</sup> The couple's choice for sexual intercourse when they know conception is likely moves beyond merely not preventing pregnancy to actively pursuing it. The active and passive aspects of Quiverfull pronatalism can vary depending on the couple and can fluctuate based upon a variety of circumstances in the family's life, including sickness and injury, financial instability, and more. No matter how the practice takes shape in the lives of Quiverfull couples, though, two convictions are constant: (1) the belief that God is in direct control of the conception of children; and (2) the belief that all children are an unqualified blessing or gift from God.<sup>22</sup>

20. One adult daughter of a Quiverfull family put it this way: "It is possible to be Quiverfull and yet not patriarchal, but from what I've seen that's very rare—very rare. Part of that is probably because Quiverfull sets itself up against feminism, and thus sort of actually invites patriarchy. But if you go through all of the Quiverfull organizations—Above Rubies, Vision Forum, etc.—every single one also endorses patriarchy. Every one. Joyfully, happily. A woman's place is at home having babies, submitting to her husband who in turn protects her and provides for her. It just all goes together" (Libby Anne, blogger at *Love, Joy, Feminism*, email message to author, August 8, 2012).

21. Tracking the fertile times in a woman's cycle and having intercourse based upon that cycle is often called Natural Family Planning (NFP) in Catholic circles. But even NFP is dismissed by the most ardent Quiverfull teachers as an attempt to usurp God's control over the womb.

22. Some, though not all, families have as the goal of their pronatalism the production of "arrows for the war" over American culture. Among many Quiverfull couples, the activist impulse inherent to evangelical Christianity works itself out in a transformative goal for their pronatalist practice. For these couples, it's not simply about having many children for their own sake, but also for the instigation of a massive demographic shift over the next few hundred years. See, for example, Kathryn Joyce, "The Quiverfull Conviction: Christian Mothers Breed Arrows for the War," *The Nation*, November 27, 2006, 11–18. The phrase "arrows for the war" originates with Nancy Campbell in her book, *Be Fruitful and Multiply: What the Bible Says about Having Children* (San Antonio, TX: Vision Forum Ministries, 2003), 79–90.

For most Quiverfull families, the pronatalist practice emerges alongside of their convictions about homeschooling and gender hierarchy. It becomes a bit of a chicken and egg dilemma to discern which, in fact, comes first. Mary Pride, an early proponent of homeschooling, has published many books to help homeschooling mothers, as well as a number of monthly magazines.<sup>23</sup> Pride also promotes pronatalism, encouraging her readers to surrender their bodies totally to God's will for procreation. Thus, women who consult Pride for homeschooling assistance also receive instruction in pronatalism—if they are not committed to it already. This is how mothers Renee Tanner and Deborah Olson first encountered the pronatalist discourse. Renee found in Pride's book *The Way Home* a vision of homemaking that included pronatalism and homeschooling. And Deborah, through a search for homeschooling materials, came across *Family Driven Faith* by Voddie Baucham, a book that presented openness to many children and homeschooling as incumbent upon all Christian wives. If children are blessings, the reasoning goes, and a couple's primary means of influencing the world for Christ, then the more children, the better.

Still, it's important to make clear that not all families who homeschool are pronatalist or patriarchal. And not all families who are patriarchal are also pronatalist or choose to homeschool. Many Christian families practice one or two of these things without being Quiverfull. I am using the term in this book to refer to the families in which all three practices occur at the same time. Again, if these three parts are circles in a Venn diagram, then it is at the center where the circles converge that the Quiverfull discourse is located. Moreover, not all Quiverfull families conceive of and participate in these practices in the same way. So, in the case of homeschooling, some Quiverfull families will be very concerned about college preparedness and emphasize high academic achievement to that end. Other Quiverfull families do not consider college a foregone conclusion for their children and will emphasize the formation of godly character and education in practical skills for adult life. In both of these cases,

23. See, for example, the following books by Mary Pride: *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality* (Fenton, MO: Home Life Books, 1985); *All the Way Home: Power for Your Family to Be Its Best* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1989); and *The Big Book of Home Learning*, 3 vols., 4th ed. (Chandler, AZ: Alpha Omega, 2000). Her magazine, *Practical Homeschooling* (formerly *HELP for Growing Families*), is in its twenty-second year.

homeschooling is a primary reference point for their cultural action, but families embody that commitment in different ways.

In the case of pronatalism, some Quiverfull families have never and will never seek to limit or space their children. They attain the Quiverfull ideal in practice, regardless of how they feel about their choice to do so. Other Quiverfull families, while believing that all children are gifts from God, will struggle to adhere to the strict no-limit ideal. They will utilize family planning methods at various times, but often feel guilt and shame because they are falling short of the ideal. Again, the pronatalist discourse is key to their way of life, but the families will interact with and exercise that discourse in different ways. Thus, while defining Quiverfull as a three-part discourse of homeschooling, pronatalism, and gender hierarchy, Quiverfull remains dialogic.<sup>24</sup> That is to say, Quiverfull is something that is always emerging and a matter of constant debate.<sup>25</sup>

## QUIVERFULL AND EVANGELICALISM

It is also important to recognize that the Quiverfull movement is very much embedded in the evangelical culture in America. There

24. William Garriott and Kevin Lewis O'Neill have posited a "dialogic approach" to the anthropology of Christianity. This approach turns the focus toward the problems that Christians themselves encounter within Christianity. That is to say, Garriott and O'Neill encourage scholars to pay close attention to the way Christians debate Christian identity: "For as the numerous historical and ethnographic accounts of Christians and Christianity demonstrates, setting the terms for determining what and who counts as a Christian has been an incessant preoccupation of Christians and Christianity . . . since its inception." Thus Christian identity is *dialogic*: something that is constantly emerging through dialogue and debate—among elites and laypersons alike—over the correctness of particular teachings and practices (William Garriott and Kevin Lewis O'Neill, "Who Is a Christian? Toward a Dialogic Approach to the Anthropology of Christianity," *Anthropological Theory* 8, no. 4 [2008]: 381–98). I discovered Garriott and O'Neill's approach to this question while reading James Bielo's ethnography of an evangelical subculture: *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity* (New York: New York University Press, 2011). Bielo draws on the dialogic concept in his account of emergent evangelicals. "Rather than focus on what makes them discrete," he says, "we focus on what continually enlivens them to be in dialogue with one another" (Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 202).

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

would be no Quiverfull without American evangelicalism.<sup>26</sup> As I will explain in chapter 1, the Quiverfull movement emerged over the past forty years within the networks and organizations of the Christian homeschooling movement. Not all homeschoolers are Christians, but Christians are the most vocal and activist homeschoolers in the country. Homeschooling grew into a nationwide phenomenon in large part due to the activism of Christian families (mostly mothers) who created a plethora of local, state, and national organizations and networks for its promotion. Then, starting with teachers like Bill Gothard and Mary Pride and the families that adopted their approach, the threefold discourse of gender hierarchy, pronatalism, and homeschooling emerged in the 1980s as a discernible subculture. Today, enough time has passed that Quiverfull families can speak of first- and second-generation practitioners.

The necessary sociological research has yet to be done to accurately quantify the Quiverfull movement, but conservative estimates are that the number of adherents is in the tens of thousands, making Quiverfull a minority among Protestant evangelicals.<sup>27</sup> Most Quiverfull families operate on the margins of their church and community (unless the father happens to be a community or church leader). But, through the work of Kathryn Joyce and others, this minority has received significant attention from journalists and other interested observers in recent years. The popularity of the Duggars' reality show, not to mention the scandals surrounding their oldest son, Josh, has also contributed to the recognition of the Quiverfull movement. It might seem that the renown of Quiverfull in America is disproportionate to their small numbers. But we should not overlook their persuasive symbolic power among evangelicals. As Joyce says, "The movement is . . . significant for representing an ideal family structure that many conservatives reference as a counterexample when they condemn modern society. Not every family has to be Quiverfull in the sense of having eight children for the movement to make an impact."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, while Quiverfull families are a minority in evangelicalism, they remain an instantiation of what many evangelicals

26. Many outsiders characterize Quiverfull families as "fundamentalist," while others use the more neutral term "evangelical." I will employ evangelicalism and evangelical throughout. But, I am going to save my reasoning for this choice and the discussion of the relation between evangelicalism and fundamentalism for chapter 1.

27. This estimate comes from Joyce, "The Quiverfull Conviction," 11.

28. Kathryn Joyce, *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement* (Boston: Beacon, 2009), 171.

say is the ideal family. Quiverfull women, in particular, embody what many believe is the ideal of Christian womanhood: stay-at-home moms, open to bearing many children, focused on discipleship, and submissive to their husbands. While conservative evangelicals are prone to criticize strongly those perceived as too “liberal,” they are happy to support those who apply the Bible more stringently than they do. “Too conservative” isn’t really a problem. As a result, some evangelical leaders are pointing to the Quiverfull way of life as an example worth emulating.<sup>29</sup> It is the deep symbolic resonance of the movement within the broader evangelical culture that, among other things, points us toward the need for understanding. Furthermore, the persuasiveness of the Quiverfull symbolism suggests that their practice of the family is a direction in which more conservative evangelicals are likely to move in the future.<sup>30</sup>

As a result, despite their relatively marginal status, *Quivering Families* claims that the Quiverfull movement is very much a part of evangelical and American culture. Quiverfull families are “one of us” in many ways. Not only are they very much a part of the evangelical story in America but, as an ideologically inflected subgroup of American evangelicalism, they are also inheritors of important American and evangelical tendencies. Certainly, the Quiverfull lived religion is distinct on the American religious landscape today, but they are not so distinct as to be unique. Most investigations of Quiverfull thus far have emphasized their distinctiveness from American culture, but this book will emphasize their resemblance (without losing sight of the

29. For example, R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, applauds the increasing number of evangelicals questioning the practice of birth control. In a 2014 *Religion News Service* op-ed, he said the following: “Our concern is to raise an alarm about the entire edifice of modern sexual morality and to acknowledge that millions of evangelicals have unwittingly aided and abetted that moral revolution by an unreflective and unfaithful embrace of the contraceptive revolution” (R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Al Mohler Responds: The Evangelical Unease over Contraception,” *Washington Post*, January 8, 2014, <http://tinyurl.com/yc389vvh>). But, certainly not all evangelical leaders are happy to endorse Quiverfull practice. Wade Burleson, a notable Southern Baptist pastor, has been a vocal critic of Quiverfull theology and practice for some time. See, for example, Wade Burleson, “Exposing the Biblical Holes in Quiverfull Theology,” *Istoria Ministries*, November 4, 2009, <http://tinyurl.com/y7pw3d5q>.

30. This is particularly true among evangelicals within the Reformed tradition. Reformed leaders are showing a public friendliness to the movement, and Reformed-oriented blogs have begun to publish material very much in line with Quiverfull teaching regarding contraception, children, and motherhood. I also conducted interviews with at least two Reformed subjects who, while not adopting the Quiverfull label, happily espouse Quiverfull ideology. All of this together suggests to me that a further rightward shift may be in progress among Reformed evangelicals, motivated at least in part by the persuasive symbolic power of the Quiverfull family as presented in their literature and media.



specific things that make them different). As it turns out, a careful look at the practice of Quiverfull families can teach us a lot about ourselves.

## ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE STUDY OF QUIVERFULL

In the past few decades, there has been a proliferation of academic research on American evangelicalism across multiple academic disciplines. But this is the first book to address Quiverfull as a lived religion and the first to prioritize the voices of Quiverfull women. Key to both of these aims is the use of ethnography, a qualitative research method. Qualitative research methods seek to gather in-depth information about human beings and human behavior, particularly the *why* and *how* of such behavior.<sup>31</sup> For this reason, qualitative research tends to use smaller samples and usually the findings produced by the data collection are not generalized beyond the particular cases studied.<sup>32</sup> Qualitative research methods include questionnaires, focus groups, participant observation, interviews, and the analysis of archives and other written materials.<sup>33</sup>

Ethnography is a kind of qualitative research method. The word *ethnography*, derived from Greek, literally means “writing culture”—that is, the description of a people and their way of life. To be more precise, ethnography is “a process of attentive study of, and learning from, people—their words, practices, traditions, experiences, memories, insights—in particular times and places in order to understand how they make meaning.”<sup>34</sup> Ethnography is distinguishable from other qualitative methods due to the fact that it is almost always conducted in “natural” settings (often referred to as “the field”), in which the everyday language and behavior of people is followed as it occurs. Thus, the analysis that ethnographers produce is necessarily

31. For more information, suitable for use by theologians, see John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006).

32. Even this point is debated, however. See, for example, Bent Flyvbjerg, “Five Misunderstandings About Case Study Research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (April 2006): 219–45. Flyvbjerg argues that qualitative research findings may be used, in some cases, both for hypothesis-testing and for generalizing principles beyond the specific cases studied.

33. Michael V. Angrosino, ed., *Doing Cultural Anthropology: Projects in Ethnographic Data Collection*, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2007).

34. Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, eds., *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2011), 16.

inductive because explanatory theories emerge from the experience as it is observed in real life.

While the practice of crafting descriptive accounts of people and places goes back to antiquity, ethnography as we know it today emerged from the discipline of cultural anthropology. Arguably the greatest insight of cultural anthropology has been the concept of culture itself: “the idea that people’s behaviors, beliefs, interactions, and material productions were not random, but rather formed a ‘complex whole’ that was meaningful, logical, more or less consistent, and worthy of respect on its own terms.”<sup>35</sup> Of course, this concept of culture requires scholarly tools for the careful collection and analysis of the many details composing the cultures of the world. Today, the investigation of culture is carried out through ethnographic methods in a variety of disciplines. Most important for my purposes, however, is its increasingly central role in the study of religion and religious communities, especially evangelical Christianity.

In addition to the increasing use of ethnography for the study of evangelicalism, the past few decades have also seen a swell of academic research in the experiences and agency of evangelical Protestant women.<sup>36</sup> Utilizing a variety of theoretical approaches as well as ethnographic research within evangelical and fundamentalist groups, scholars have revealed that the experience of women within patriarchal movements is by no means uniform and very often defies tidy explanation. Some feminist researchers have even claimed that the women in their studies find avenues of agency and liberation within explicitly patriarchal environments.<sup>37</sup>

Feminist theologians have also complicated the manner in which we discuss women’s subjectivity and agency in conservative religious movements. Leading the way in this regard is Mary McClintock

35. Angrosino, *Doing Cultural Anthropology*, 2.

36. See, for example, Judith Stacey, *Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); R. Marie Griffith, *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Brenda Brasher, *Godly Women: Fundamentalism and Female Power* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Christel Manning, *God Gave Us the Right: Conservative Catholic, Evangelical Protestant, and Orthodox Jewish Women Grapple with Feminism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999); and Julie Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women: War Stories in the Gender Battle* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

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

Fulkerson, whose book *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology* (1994) uses poststructuralist analysis to offer a way to discuss women's agency in non-essentializing ways and conceive of the subject *woman* as possessing multiple identities.<sup>38</sup> Fulkerson's research shows that even women who do not identify as feminists have faith practices that have their own "registers" of resistance to patriarchy. Her work has challenged theologians (particularly feminist and liberation theologians) to reconsider their representations of women's experience.

There is no doubt that women are the primary actors in the Quiverfull subculture. Quiverfull centers the bodies and work of women in a way that even complicates their patriarchal convictions. Women are the mothers, homemakers, and homeschoolers focused on birthing and nurturing "arrows" for the Christian "war" over American culture.<sup>39</sup> The testimony of Quiverfull teachers is that their women are the most important agents of change, contributing to the goal of Christian dominion in the decades and centuries to come. Thus, sustained focus on the women of Quiverfull is a valuable approach toward understanding the movement as a whole.

Ethnography is well suited for research on the women of Quiverfull because they are arguably the least visible within the movement. Women are believed to be divinely ordained to be submissive wives and mothers, while men are called to be the leaders in the home, church, and society. Women operate the majority of Quiverfull blogs, and there are multiple publications authored by women and directed to a female audience. But many of these works are explicitly or implicitly stated to be under the "headship" of the women's husbands, which calls into question the extent to which the material is representative of women's experience. Moreover, works intended to promote and reinforce Quiverfull teaching are unlikely to include challenges to prevailing ideas and practices. So, if researchers want to know the lived experience of Quiverfull mothers, a method of study is needed that will take their stories into account.

Ethnographic methods also help researchers deal with the reality that the Quiverfull movement is thoroughly decentralized. There is no officially recognized leader and no governing ecclesial body

38. Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*.

39. This warfare language is especially prolific in the writing of Nancy Campbell, noted Quiverfull advocate and teacher, in her volume *Be Fruitful and Multiply*, as well as Rachel Giove Scott, *Birthing God's Mighty Warriors* (Maitland, FL: Xulon, 2004).

claiming Quiverfull as authorized practice. Quiverfull theology and practices are disseminated mostly by word of mouth, through books passed from person to person, blogs recommended by email or text message, social networking, and a variety of homeschooling publications and conferences. Furthermore, the daily life of the Quiverfull family necessarily operates in a way that is, for the most part, closed off from public access. While many Quiverfull families sustain their identity through online support groups and blogs, very often these sources are unavailable to researchers without going through a selective subscription process. It is insufficient, therefore, for a researcher to study only the notable teachers and authors of the movement. Though the texts produced by these thinkers are important—central as they are to the shaping of Quiverfull discourse—they cannot address the pertinent questions of the movement’s practical coherence and consistency in the lives of women and families on the ground.

So, I begin my ethnographic research with the anthropological axiom that despite appearances to the contrary, Quiverfull is not a monolithic, thoroughly consistent whole, but an internally fractured entity with permeable boundaries. Researchers can anticipate that while Quiverfull adherents may hold to certain shared ideas and practices, they do not necessarily agree as to the exact meaning of the ideas to which they appeal, nor do their practices look the same in day-to-day life. The only way to shed light on the shades of difference within the Quiverfull movement is to employ methods that allow for comparison between Quiverfull literature and the experiences of Quiverfull families.

### THE SCOPE OF MY ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

The ethnographic research that forms the basis for this book was gathered mostly through in-depth interviews with three Quiverfull mothers over the course of two years. I chose these women because of their enthusiasm about helping me and because they had social locations and personal stories quite different from one another. I met in person with Deborah Olson twice: once at a coffee shop and once in her home, where I spent the afternoon with her and her children. At the coffee shop, I took notes by hand. But in the home visit, I recorded our entire visit on a digital recorder, which I later transcribed. The rest of our interviews were conducted by phone with follow-up email correspondence for clarification. I met in per-

son with Carley Miller once, recording our conversation on a digital recorder, which I later transcribed. The rest of our interviews were conducted by phone with follow-up email correspondence. Because of her location in the Southwest, all of my interviews with Renee Tanner were conducted by phone.

Although I closely followed the prepared questions for each interview, I also improvised questions depending on the subjects raised by my informants. My open-ended interviews addressed issues related to marriage and gender roles, sex and reproduction, motherhood and mothering, children and childrearing, the nuclear family, church and family religion, and American culture and politics.

I also interviewed a number of others in the course of my research, including two ministers of so-called family integrated churches (more about family integrated churches in chapter 1), one adult daughter of a Quiverfull family, and one mother of a large homeschooling family who does not consider herself Quiverfull. These conversations were helpful especially as I sought to clarify the boundaries and chief characteristics of Quiverfull, but I ended up not giving sustained attention to these informants.

In addition to interviews, my ethnographic research also included a broad survey of Quiverfull print materials and Quiverfull blogs and websites, all of which can be found in the bibliography and will be referenced throughout. I consulted these resources in correlation with the data culled through interviews. In some cases, I drew topics from the print and internet resources for use in interviews or used the printed rhetoric to question the on-the-ground discourse of my informants. In other cases, I drew topics from my interviews to bring to the print and internet resources or used the points raised in my interviews to question what was offered in print. For example, when the Doug Phillips scandal broke, I asked my informants for their reaction. I discovered that none of them would characterize Phillips as a compelling teacher, and all of them were suspicious of his strident patriarchy—even before his fall from grace. Despite the fact that Phillips has garnered public attention and is often seen as a chief Quiverfull representative, the mothers in my research did not identify with him. This is important because, more often than not, popular-level writing about Quiverfull draws exclusively on print and internet resources. My inquiries about Phillips show that print and internet resources may not be representative of Quiverfull families on the ground. The use of books, websites, and inter-

views complicates our picture of Quiverfull as a movement, giving researchers a more accurate sense of this still-emerging evangelical phenomenon.

As with any project, mine has some limitations. First, I have focused almost exclusively on the experience and perspective of Quiverfull mothers. There are a number of reasons for this. The mothers are most certainly at the center of the Quiverfull movement. Their bodies and prolific work in the home literally and figuratively give life to the movement. Not only that, but, by their own testimony, mothers are often the ones who lead their husbands into the Quiverfull discourse. Many Quiverfull testimonies are built around the careful, prayerful persuasion of husbands, who often must be convinced by their wives in a way that is appropriately submissive and deferential.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, by virtue of their myriad responsibilities, Quiverfull mothers often don't have the time or ability to talk about their lived religion in a public way. Put simply, I wanted to hear the voices of women who do not maintain a public persona.

In addition to the focus on mothers, this book is limited in the number of critical themes examined. For example, I wish the important matters of race and class could have played more of a role in this book. Neither came up in an overt way in my interviews or the print and internet materials I surveyed. The matter of race is important in some segments of the movement, especially those focused on American demographic trends. Because the Quiverfull discourse is a generally white and middle- to lower-class phenomenon, there is need for a study that brings the subjects of race and class to the forefront. But for this first foray into the movement, my primary interests lie elsewhere. Still, it is important to keep in mind that whiteness and white experience is the assumed norm among Quiverfull families, and most would be categorized as middle to lower class.

In addition to race and class, this book does not give much explicit attention to the subject of homeschooling. There are many homeschooling subjects worthy of consideration: the curriculum used by mothers, the way homeschooling mothers cooperate with one another, the way children with special needs are educated, and the long-term consequences for homeschooled children. Indeed, sustained inquiry into how Quiverfull children are educated would add

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

to the growing body of research on Christian home education in America.<sup>41</sup> But, no book can do it all.

In the end, the ethnographic data offered in this book cannot be understood as representative of all Quiverfull families. This is particularly true of the three mothers that serve as my main focus. This sample size—if it can even be called a sample size—is too small. Also, simply by virtue of their willingness to talk to me, it is possible that these mothers are qualitatively different from other Quiverfull mothers. They may have more outgoing personalities or they may be less world-averse than their peers. Also, these women come from a limited portion of the United States, which certainly influences their theology and practice. Still, the research I have conducted is representative enough for a project of this kind. I am not offering an ethnography of the Quiverfull movement *per se*. But, I have brought together historical, ethnographic, and theological methods and applied them to the Quiverfull instantiation of the family. I present these findings convinced that what I'm offering is valuable for understanding the Quiverfull movement, as well as American evangelicalism as a whole.

## ETHNOGRAPHY AND THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

In terms of how ethnography and theology are employed together, there are two major approaches in the field of theological studies. Some theologians use ethnography to describe and then reflect on the expression of faith in a given time and place. This is theological reflection *on* ethnography. Other theologians argue that the contextualized faith of a particular people actually has something constructive to say for the work of Christian theology today. This is theology *from* ethnography. Although there are times when I draw theological insights from ethnographic data, my work in this book is more accurately described as theological reflection on ethnography. I use ethnographic research to better understand the theology at work in particular locations (Quiverfull families). Then, I engage that

41. That research includes the following: Gaither, *Homeschool*; Stevens, *Kingdom of Children*; Robert Kunzman, *Write These Laws on Your Children: Inside the World of Conservative Christian Homeschooling* (Boston: Beacon, 2009); Joseph Murphy, *Homeschooling in America: Capturing and Assessing the Movement* (New York: Skyhorse, 2014); and Melissa Beth Sherfinski, "Blessed Under Pressure: Evangelical Mothers in the Homeschooling Movement" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2011).

theology in a critical way. Though this book suggests there are places where the contextualized faith of Quiverfull families has something constructive to say for the work of Christian theology today, I do not attempt to flesh out those constructive elements in a sustained way. I do, however, critique the Quiverfull movement and show how their religious practice exposes important weaknesses in evangelical theology.

How and on what basis is my theological critique employed? As a theologian formed in the evangelical tradition, I am intimately aware of the assets and deficits of evangelical theology and I recognize both in the Quiverfull movement. As a scholar of American Christianity, I recognize within Quiverfull a continuation of themes and tendencies that have been present in American evangelicalism from early on. In both of these ways, my subject position leads me to contextualize Quiverfull within evangelicalism and offer observations on its continuity and discontinuity with what I understand to be American evangelical norms.

In addition to my own concerns, however, critique can also arise from two central objectives within Quiverfull discourse itself: witness and transformation. Quiverfull practitioners want to bear *witness* to the truth and goodness of the gospel before the watching world. In their way of life, Quiverfull families seek to show their neighbors the fullness of life that Christ offers his followers. Being a witness in this way depends on faithfulness. The family's job is to be faithful to their calling regardless of the results. They may not convince anyone in their lifetime to adopt their way of life, but their calling is to be faithful nonetheless. Lacking any obvious sign that their work is accomplishing a higher purpose, Quiverfull mothers often attest that they are seeking only to be a good witness—to be faithful in their own context to God's word, regardless of the perceived results. So, one way to evaluate Quiverfull practice is to consider to what extent their way of life offers Christian witness to the world.

Quiverfull practitioners also express a desire to *transform* American society and culture through their way of life. Quiverfull families seek to have a significant long-term impact on American society, both through the number of children they produce and the quality of children they produce. By having more children than their non-Christian neighbors, Quiverfull families expect Christians to outnumber non-Christians within a few hundred years. By having better-quality children—that is, better educated and more strongly



committed to their religious tradition—they also expect to have a slow, Christianizing effect on American culture. This transformative objective is often heard among Quiverfull elites (the key teachers and writers of the movement), who cast the vision for Quiverfull laity. The objective of transformation might seem counterintuitive given the concern for faithful witness. As I said, being a witness is unrelated to efficacy—that is, what the witness accomplishes. Being a witness requires faithfulness only, regardless of the consequences. But the objective of cultural and social transformation is very much dependent upon the matter of efficacy. Therefore, another criterion for evaluating Quiverfull discourse is whether or not Quiverfull lived religion is capable of accomplishing the transformation they desire.

### THE THESIS AND STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

*Quivering Families* covers a lot of terrain, but it advances one primary thesis: despite the apparent strangeness of their lived religion, the Quiverfull movement in America is both thoroughly evangelical and thoroughly American. What they offer in their family-focused vision for Christian life is far from countercultural, but part and parcel of the American culture they seek to stand against. That is to say, “they” are very much a part of “us.” As such, the Quiverfull movement serves as an illuminating case study of the weaknesses and blind spots of evangelical and American cultural conceptions of the family.

To advance my thesis, I have arranged this book into six chapters. In chapter 1, I tell the story of Quiverfull as a historical and cultural phenomenon. First, I offer a narrative of American evangelicalism as it pertains to gender, the family, and education, from the Victorian period to the present day. Then, I provide an examination of the Quiverfull movement as both a discourse and a subculture of American evangelicalism. As a subculture, Quiverfull has elite and lay levels, both of which are important to giving the Quiverfull movement its theological and practical cohesion. Also, the Quiverfull movement, like evangelicalism in general, is characterized by constant conflict and debate. In chapter 1, I explore these dynamics in more detail.

In chapter 2, I present the findings of two years of ethnographic research with Quiverfull mothers. The mothers’ stories offer outsiders a better sense of the variety within the Quiverfull subculture. Quiverfull mothers are not the monolithic automatons that some journalistic accounts have mistakenly suggested. The insight they provide

into the way Quiverfull discourse works on the ground offers vital material for the theological reflection in the chapters that follow. And perhaps more than anything else, the stories of Renee Tanner, Carley Miller, and Deborah Olson reveal the contextual give-and-take that occurs even within the very prescribed notions of Christian faithfulness in Quiverfull discourse.

Drawing on the historical and cultural analysis of chapter 1, and the ethnographic data summarized in chapter 2, chapters 3, 4, and 5 address the key themes of mothers and motherhood, children and childhood, and the family. Each chapter will do two things simultaneously: explore the ethnographic data more deeply and reflect theologically on those findings. The discussions found in these central chapters will reveal in their own ways the extent to which Quiverfull practitioners are distinct from and similar to their American neighbors.

Finally, in chapter 6, I conclude by arguing that Quiverfull families are responding to the challenges facing the family in the contemporary American context with a distinctly evangelical and American solution. Quiverfull families, like many today, look to the reordering of the private sphere to resolve what are fundamentally systemic problems. In so doing, they amplify some of the persistent tensions of evangelical religion, especially with modern American individualism. That is to say, Quiverfull subculture represents an extreme instantiation of broader, mainstream tendencies. Thus, Quiverfull women and their families are a manifestation of the impasse always faced by American Christians in discussions of the family: an eclipse of the communal and public through a focus on the individual and private. Ultimately, Quiverfull women and their families make it clear that evangelicals lack the tools to fashion a constructive answer to the instability of the American family and must reach beyond the bounds of the private home and evangelicalism to do so.

## A FINAL WORD

As I finish this introduction, one of my informants is giving birth. Though my primary posture in this book is that of a researcher, I can't help but be preoccupied with concern for her well-being. This pregnancy has been difficult and her health somewhat fragile. I am worried about her. I hope she and the baby will be all right. My distractedness is an important reminder that this kind of research can-

not be conducted in a thoroughly detached way. Even though I have sought to maintain a degree of objectivity, I cannot deny this book engages my heart in a way that other projects do not. I suspect that this has much to do with our shared faith as Christians and our shared experience as mothers. Our lives are very different, but we also have much in common. I have come to care about the women whose lives are explored in the chapters that follow. I hope that the women I have been privileged to know will recognize themselves in these pages. And I hope they know that I am forever grateful for their transparency and friendship.