

Mothers for a Christian Nation

The Quiverfull Take on the Future of American Christianity

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Abstract

Believers of the American Quiverfull movement reject all forms of contraception. They promote having as many children as God is willing to give and raising these children to be righteous Christians, with the explicit purpose of creating a Christian nation. The movement has no central institutions: believers communicate online, through blogs and forums.

This article investigates where the Quiverfull movement can be situated within the realm of American Christianity as well as its relation to modernity. By using Moojan Momen's fundamentalism-liberalism spectrum to locate the movement on the map of Christianity, the article argues that the Quiverfull position can be best understood by relating its standpoints on gender and family politics to those of American evangelical fundamentalist churches.

Yet Quiverfull stances do not entirely fit the fundamentalist frame. The Quiverfull focus on a biblical future, rather than a biblical past, sets this movement apart from evangelical fundamentalism. Though the Quiverfull movement is small now, its tactics and strategies might provide Christian fundamentalists with new perspectives on growth and the preservation of Christian morals. Rearticulating their biblical convictions online in modern ways, Quiverfull women are working towards a modernity that is transformed to be wholly Christian, one baby at a time.

Keywords

Fundamentalism – USA – modernity – blogging – gender – Quiverfull – Christianity

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The Bible clearly lists children among blessings from God. It also acknowledges financial wealth as a blessing. Yet I've never met any couple that takes specific measures to limit God's financial blessing in their lives although most want to limit His blessing of children. What kind of a commitment to eternal things is that? Children are eternal; wealth is not. . . .

On the score of welcoming new members into the human race and potentially God's eternal kingdom, we Christians have generally messed up big-time. And this mess-up is across the board — laity, clergy, other Christian leaders and non-leaders alike. For the sake of our future, we'd better start getting it right.

NANCY WEBSTER, blog *Above Rubies*¹



Introduction

Nancy Webster is one of many women writing for *Above Rubies*, an online Christian forum where Quiverfull ideas are propagated. The phenomenon of women writing about their children and their marriages online is a relatively new one. According to Emily Crosby, who researched the field of Quiverfull 'mommy blogs' for her MA thesis, the function of these blogs is twofold: they create communities in which experiences can be shared and they provide platforms for the dissemination of ideas on motherhood.² Since the 1990s, women identifying as Quiverfull promote their 'feminine ideologies' online, through blogs, message boards, homeschooling communities and online bible study groups.³

Quiverfull believers reject all forms of contraception. They consider it to be a Christian duty to have as many children as God is willing to give, in order to

1 Nancy Webster, 'Your Biblical Worldview: What's Missing?', website *Above Rubies*, 11 February 2010, accessed 18 December 2013, <http://aboverubies.org/en/articles/english-language/family-planning/941-family-planning-your-biblical-worldview-whats-missing>.

2 Emily D. Crosby, *A Quiver Full of Mommy Blogs: Ideological Subversion and Reinforcement of Mothering Models Online*, Indianapolis: Indiana University, thesis, 2011, 3, 91.

3 Some examples include blogs like *Raising Arrows*, www.raisingarrows.com, and *Deep Roots at Home*, www.deeprootsathome.com, sites such as *QuiverFull Digest*, www.quiverfull.com, and its popular forum, www.proverbs31.org, www.tituszministries.com and communities on homeschooling and childraising, like *Heart of Wisdom*, www.heartofwisdom.com, and *Raising Homemakers*, www.raisinghomemakers.com.

raise them to become building blocks of a righteous Christian nation. Their blogs, with names like *To Love, Honor and Vacuum*, *Radical Homemakers* and *Raising Godly Tomatoes*, contain personal testimonials and advice on all aspects of womanhood. Most focus on how women should raise their children and how they should behave towards their husbands: submissive, joyfully serving and obeying them at all times. Their outlooks on life are reminiscent of days long past, a time when the women's emancipation movement did not yet exist and there was no such thing as separating church and state. However, their presence online suggests their avid participation in the modern world. How can this typically Quiverfull attitude be properly understood, in terms of its relations to American Christianity as a whole and to modernity?

In order to answer these questions, I will first briefly describe the Quiverfull movement and its main viewpoints. Second, to locate the movement's place within Christianity, I will make use of Moojan Momen's fundamentalism-liberalism spectrum. In *Understanding Religion*, Momen considers the division between liberalist believers and fundamentalists central to each of the great world's religions, especially in the modern age; according to Momen, religions in the present times have had to become more flexible than in previous centuries.⁴ His scale, in which fundamentalism and liberalism form the extremities of a wide range of religious beliefs and practices, is a detailed instrument for situating this relatively new movement's relations to American Christianity as a whole. Third, zooming in on the movement's gender politics as representative of its relation to modernity, I will demonstrate how the Quiverfull position might provide a unique perspective on the future of American Christianity in its preservation and propagation of conservative Christian values in thoroughly modern ways.

A Quiver Full of Children

Because the Quiverfull movement within American Christianity is relatively young and still very much in development, little research has been done on the history and origins of the movement. Janna Frieman, a political science student, wrote a thesis on the reactionary politics of the movement, entitled *The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world*. She explains that the term 'Quiverfull'

4 Moojan Momen, *Understanding Religion. A Thematic Approach*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications 2009: 363.

is derived from a Bible verse (Psalm 127: 3-5), in which children are likened to arrows and deemed to be direct blessings from above:⁵

3. Lo children are an heritage from the Lord:
And the fruit of the womb is his reward.
4. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man;
So are children of the youth
5. Happy is the man who hath his quiver full of them:
They shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in
the gate.⁶

The name Quiverfull refers to the most distinctive characteristic of the movement: women (and men) have the duty to accept all life that God is willing to give, by means of having children. The goal is not merely to have as many babies as possible, as is sometimes suggested in popular accounts of Quiverfull life, but the rejection of contraceptives is emblematic of the movement's call to completely hand over one's life to God's will.⁷ Obviously, the rejection of birth control also has important political and social dimensions. Nancy Campbell, one of the movement's influential preachers, frames this in terms of spiritual warfare: Christians are to have lots of children, in order to bring more sound Christian voters into this world and thus combat non-Christian influences in society. Referring for example to the increase of the Muslim communities in Europe due to a somewhat higher than average European birth-rate among Muslims, Campbell calls upon European Christian women to combat the 'danger of Islam' by giving birth to citizens that support a Christian nation.⁸ Men are explicitly encouraged to become 'patriarchs' and establish their own righteous 'dynasty', while keeping the political ramifications in mind.⁹

According to journalist Kathryn Joyce, the roots of the movement lie in rural North America, where in the 1970s and 1980s *Titus 2 ministries* became popular amongst a number of denominations.¹⁰ *Titus 2* gives guidelines on how to

5 Janna Frieman, *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Rules the World: Constructing Oppositional Consciousness and Collective Identity in an Anti-Feminist Backlash Movement*, Haverford PA: Haverford College, thesis 2011, 34.

6 Ps 127: 3-5, King James Version.

7 Frieman, 37.

8 Interview with Nancy Campbell in 'A womb is a weapon', BBC documentary, 21 May 2013.

9 Frieman, 38.

10 Kathryn Joyce, *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement*, Boston: Beacon Press 2009, 45.

conduct a Christian family life. Some of verses (Titus 2: 3-5) focus on specifically on gender roles and summon older women to teach younger women to live a godly life, centring on loving their husbands and children. Older women are expected to school younger women on the 'lost art of homemaking': this is their 'ministry'.¹¹ Since the 1990s, when internet access became more and more common, these older women started blogging about their experiences, linking up with popular homeschooling sites, pro-life communities and online Bible study groups.¹² An example of such a Bible study group can be found at www.proverbs31.org, where women who identify with the image of the 'wife of noble character' as depicted in Proverbs 31: 10-31, share their experiences. The popular Quiverfull blog *Above Rubies* also derives its name from Proverbs 31; verse 10 reads: 'Who can find virtuous wife; for her price is far above rubies'.

The Quiverfull movement has no central institutions that produce doctrines and the community is not clearly delineated. According to Crosby, the network of blogs maintained by Quiverfull mothers, is the first and foremost way in which members make their 'private morality' known and contact like-minded believers.¹³ Women like Nancy Campbell and Rachel Scott, who was featured on most major American television networks (ABC, CBS, Fox News) to talk about her book *Birthing God's Mighty Warriors* (2004), are actively spreading the word about the numerous benefits of living the Quiverfull lifestyle, but they are not in any way responsible for Quiverfull doctrine. Quiverfull beliefs are sanctioned and sustained online, in a wide variety of blogging communities.

Both Frieman and Joyce interpret the Quiverfull movement as a 'backlash movement'. They perceive the movement to be a reaction to change of gender roles after the second feminist wave in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁴ The notion that gender might be, at least in part, a social construct, is blasphemy to this type of movements. In the view of Quiverfull and like-minded movements God has created man and woman separately, for 'separate' purposes.¹⁵ This belief is foundational for the conviction that the wife is to be submissive in every way to her husband, who makes all decisions.¹⁶ Crosby defines family roles this way: 'fathers are seen as shepherds, mothers as sheepdogs, and children as

11 Joyce, 46.

12 Frieman, 39.

13 Crosby, 61.

14 Frieman, 32, 35. Joyce: x, 52.

15 Frieman, 35.

16 Frieman, 36. Joyce, 47.

sheep', with God being the overseer of it all.¹⁷ The drastic stance against contraception can thus be understood as a response to the separation of sex and procreation, which Quiverfull believers attribute to feminist activism and the arrival of the birth control pill as a contraceptive. The movement blames the second feminist wave for what they call 'abortion mentality', which they consider to be the cause of many of the problems of the modern world: its visible signs such as adultery, abortions, divorces and homosexuality are merely the tip of the iceberg.¹⁸

The Quiverfull Stance on Bible and Tradition

Momen's fundamentalism-liberalism spectrum will be employed in order to locate the Quiverfull movement within American Christianity. The first of Momen's 'characterizations of difference', involves the role of the scriptures. According to Momen, fundamentalist believers look upon holy scriptures as an absolute and unchanging truth.¹⁹ This may include a literal interpretation of biblical texts, but the key point in this attitude to scripture is that the Bible is believed to refer to actual situations, involving real people.²⁰ The texts describe historical events that happened to people that lived in the past and should be understood as applicable to people living now. Momen describes the liberal believer's attitude to religious texts as the conviction that the meaning of scripture is not fixed, but must be reinterpreted in every age, to meet the concerns of that particular age.²¹ The importance of the scriptures, then, lies in their symbolic significance and the richness of its possible interpretations, rather than in any correspondence to reality. For fundamentalist believers, the importance of the Bible is not so much in its symbolic value, but in the way the text provides answers to all question, now equally as much as it did in the past.

The role of the Bible in the Quiverfull movement cannot easily be overestimated: many Quiverfull mommy blogs specifically use the term 'biblical motherhood' to refer to their way of childrearing.²² Joyce lists the unconditional acceptance of Bible's authority as the primary condition for committing

17 Crosby, 68.

18 Frieman, 35.

19 Momen, 364.

20 Momen, 364.

21 Momen, 366.

22 Crosby, 30.

to Quiverfull principles, all of which claim to be 'bible-based'.²³ Quiverfull believers maintain that life needs to follow the biblical rules, and not the other way around: the Bible provides believers with guidelines and rules that are just as relevant now as they were in the past. This is a decidedly fundamentalist conviction.

When assessing the role of religious tradition, Momen distinguishes between conservative and radical or evangelical fundamentalists on the one hand and liberal believers on the other. While conservative fundamentalists believe that both tradition and scripture are unalterable and inerrant, evangelical fundamentalists, according to Momen, regard only scripture as sacred.²⁴ Liberal believers generally consider adapting the religious tradition to changing social circumstances both logical and desirable.²⁵

Quiverfull believers belong to a variety of different denominations and thus represent a variety of traditions. And although Quiverfull positions pertaining to abortion and birth control often coincide with evangelical fundamentalists' doctrines regarding pro-life issues, there is no such thing as a Quiverfull 'institution' that functions as custodian of the tradition.²⁶ This means that Quiverfull believers — unlike conservative fundamentalists — do not necessarily jointly adhere to a tradition that could be deemed equally as important as the scriptures. However, it is clear that they cannot be identified with the liberal end of the spectrum either, since they subscribe to the idea that life should conform to the unchanging and infallible demands of the religion, rather than adapting religious beliefs when circumstances change. Quiverfull believers might thus be considered evangelical fundamentalists, yet they do not fit that mold, either.

Evangelical believers, according to Momen, often regard traditions as obstacles to return to the original 'pure' religion. This 'pure' religion can be attained (read: reconstructed) by 'returning to' the holy texts, going back to the initial stage of the religious community.²⁷ The Quiverfull position, however, is not merely one of striving to revert the world to the way it was before the onslaught of modernity and feminism, as Frieman and Joyce claim. Laura Harrison and Sarah Rowley describe this clearly: 'Far from looking backward to a fantasy period of traditional values, then, Quiverfull is a thoroughly modern movement that looks primarily not to the past, but to a future populated by true believers — and one that uses modern communications to spread that

23 Joyce, 15.

24 Momen, 369.

25 Momen, 368.

26 Frieman, 39.

27 Momen, 369.

message.²⁸ It is this forward-looking focus, which is at the centre of the Quiverfull beliefs regarding the relation between fertility and political clout, that distinguishes Quiverfull believers from evangelical fundamentalists.

Quiverfull: Social and Political Figurations

Momen's spectrum also looks at the social and political figurations of religious traditions. One of the key points of difference between liberals and fundamentalists is their attitude towards those that are of different faith. Liberals, according to Momen, emphasize the relativity of most religious truths; they maintain that an intolerant attitude towards believers of other religions or those that practice Christianity differently is contrary to the true spirit of the religion itself.²⁹ Fundamentalists, however, regard other religions as the being the result of error. Believers of the same faith that support a more liberal position, tend to be to accused of contaminating the true religion with 'imports from the secular world or other cultures' and moral laxity.³⁰ Momen argues that the critical perspective of most fundamentalists towards the modern world is not so much concerned with modernity itself, but rather with 'modern, relativizing liberal trends in religion'.³¹ That is to say, fundamentalists do not oppose the changes in the modern world *per se*, and often embrace modern scientific and rational development, but do strongly reject religious convictions and practices changing as though they were culturally determined. This resistance to relativizing trends in is apparent in the way Nancy Webster urges all righteous Christians to remain true to God's commands in the opening quote of this article: 'this mess-up is across the board- laity clergy, other Christian leaders and non-leaders alike.'³²

Kathryn Joye defines the Quiverfull movement explicitly as a 'retreat from and rejection of modern society', primarily describing Quiverfull women as aiming at 'a return to something far older'.³³ Her understanding of the Quiverfull movement centres on this interpretation: it is a 'backlash' against modernity. This corresponds to the attitudes Nancy Ammerman depicts in her

28 Laura Harrison and Sarah B. Rowley, 'Babies by the Bundle: Gender, Backlash, and the Quiverfull Movement', *Feminist Formations* 23/1 (2011), 58.

29 Momen, 370, 371.

30 Momen, 370.

31 Momen, 370.

32 Webster 2010.

33 Harrison and Rowley, 50. Joyce, ix.

work on American fundamentalism and the modern world. Ammerman argues that the opposition between the chaotic modern world and the orderly world of God defines the fundamentalist's world.³⁴ Evangelical believers, according to Ammerman, attempt to accommodate modernity, without compromising their basic doctrines, while conservative fundamentalists resist modernity in almost all its forms.³⁵ Both do this by refusing to grant it legitimacy in social structures, creating congregations in which religious certainty can take the place of modern doubts; the church becomes an 'all-encompassing sacred canopy' in which belief is possible.³⁶

Harrison and Rowley refute Joyce's interpretation of the Quiverfull movement as a 'backlash movement', fundamentalistic with regard to its stance towards the modern world, claiming that Quiverfull believers don't reject modernity, but *rearticulate* it.³⁷ Far from wishing to retreat or compartmentalize their faith, the Quiverfull movement advocates reforming current society to fit the movement's standards.³⁸ They engage with modern culture in thoroughly modern ways: TLC's *19 Kids and Counting* is a popular reality show depicting Quiverfull family life, Quiverfull mothers are very active and visible online and there is even a lively Quiverfull film tradition.³⁹ By purposefully inserting their worldview into the secular and/or liberal sphere, Quiverfull believers aim to transform modern society, rather than accept it partly and/or reject it.⁴⁰ Of course, they also aim to transform modern society by actively employing their fertility, believing their convictions will gain grounds with each child they raise to be an upright Christian. This is not a retreat, nor a backlash against modern society. Rather, Quiverfull believers engage intensely with it, in attempt to transform the world to obey God's word.

Politically, Momen states, fundamentalists tend to support the republican cause, while liberal believers mostly endorse left-wing politics, because of their attention to social issues.⁴¹ Momen adds that 'the fundamentalists' rejection of all doctrinal positions outside their own leads to highly demarcated, tightly

34 Nancy Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 1997, 188.

35 Ammerman, 188.

36 Ammerman, 212.

37 Harrison and Rowley, 50.

38 Harrison and Rowley, 50.

39 Harrison and Rowley, 50.

40 Harrison and Rowley, 51.

41 Momen, 394.

knit, highly committed, socially isolated communities.⁴² In this aspect, the distinction between liberals and fundamentalists leaves little room for identification of the Quiverfull movement with fundamentalism; the movement is highly active politically and socially, and does not isolate itself. It is important to note however that also other conservative American Christian movements, like the Religious Right, as discussed by Jonathan Hill, also do not tally with Momen's characterization of fundamentalists' politics. The Religious Right unites evangelical and non-evangelical Christians in the pursuit of socially conservative policies and is generally associated with the Republican Party.⁴³ Yet, the movement does not seek isolation, but rather attempts to transform the political domain by e.g. supporting and promoting conservative representatives in Congress, thus actively participating in the system in order to transform it. This attitude seems in line with the political ambitions of the Quiverfull movement; having a 'quiver full of children' is directly related to creating a Christian electoral clout.⁴⁴ Quiverfull believers speculate that, if Christians were to hand over their fertility to God, 'within a few generations a huge voting bloc of devout Christians will have veto power over ungodly or immoral policies and politics in America.'⁴⁵ Quiverfull Christians feel specifically called to be 'salt and light' (Matthew 5:13-16) and represent their faith and morality, both in politics and in culture.

Recapitulating, it is clear that to some extent the Quiverfull movement can be understood as belonging to fundamentalist Christianity, that considers the Bible as a text of absolute truth that defines and shapes daily life, and disapproves of the modern world's influences on what can be considered moral and just. The traditional view of fundamentalists as living in small, secluded communities, however, does not apply to the Quiverfull movement, which is very much present in this 'reprehensive' modern world, aiming to transform it to become more in line with God's kingdom as they perceive it. The Quiverfull position within the realm of Christianity has thus become clearer, using Momen's spectrum of liberalism-fundamentalism.

Locating the movement on the map of American Christianity, Quiverfull stances can best be related to American evangelical fundamentalist's positions. As explained above, the Quiverfull movement, although it is not

42 Momen, 394.

43 Jonathan Hill, *Zondervan Handbook to the History of Christianity*, Oxford: Lion Hudson 2007, 458.

44 Frieman, 39.

45 Frieman, 39.

part of any specific denomination, resembles evangelical fundamentalism closest ideologically, politically and socially. However, in its relation to modernity, the Quiverfull position is different from that of evangelical fundamentalists. Gender and family politics provide a very useful point of comparison between the two, since these have traditionally been the focal points of fundamentalist politics, as outlined by Shahin Gerami in her work on women and fundamentalism.⁴⁶ Comparing the way evangelical fundamentalists and Quiverfull believers deal with modernity reveals what the uniquely Quiverfull position might mean for the future of conservative Christianity.

Modern Choices

Betty DeBerg argues that Christian fundamentalism in the US has been influenced by social and cultural changes at the end of the 19th century. She suggests a direct connection between the rise of a fundamentalist movement and 'leaders and followers who were afraid and angered by social disruptions, chief among them vast changes in cultural gender ideology and the actual behaviour of men and women around them.'⁴⁷ Fundamentalist movements have responded to these developments, according to DeBerg, by legitimizing and securing patriarchal family relations, as well as 'rhetorically condemning and ridiculing' the new popular attitudes towards gender.⁴⁸

The idea that societal changes, and specifically those concerning gender relations, pose a threat to Christianity can also be found in the legitimization of Quiverfull gender roles. Popular blogger Lori Alexander identifies with the 'older women' in Titus 2 and coaches the readers of her blog *Always Learning*, as well as young women in her Bible study group. She writes of the contemporary ideal of marriage:

God has clearly commanded, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord . . . let the wives be {subject} to their own husbands in every thing." {Ephesians 5:22, 25}. This has never been easy for women in any age throughout history since our own natures are certainly

46 Shahin Gerami, *Women and Fundamentalism: Islam and Christianity*, New York: Routledge 2011, 30. Gerami argues that because fundamentalists consider women to be custodians of the tradition, gender politics are of crucial importance to fundamentalist movements.

47 Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism*, Macon: Mercer University Press 1990, 143.

48 DeBerg, 117.

more inclined toward insubordination than submission. But I think it is especially difficult in our generation, which seems intent on teaching women to be strong, independent, and stubborn.⁴⁹

Alexander pointedly illustrates the differences between Quiverfull gender politics and those in modern society at large. The idea of women submitting to their husbands' and fathers' leadership in all matters is in direct opposition to feminist ideas of gender equality.⁵⁰ The reactionary nature of gender ideals prevalent in the Quiverfull movement corresponds to gender politics common in American Christian fundamentalism as described by DeBerg.

The practical implications of these assigned gender roles also seem similar in both movements. According to DeBerg, fundamentalists assign different spheres of influence to the sexes, with man working in the public domain, outside of the home, and woman working at home, in the private sphere; fundamentalists justify this separation of spheres by claiming that men and women have vastly different emotional and moral characters.⁵¹ Quiverfull families appear to adhere to this division as well: women are strongly discouraged from pursuing a college education or jobs outside of the home, and men are considered to be providers.⁵² The call to submission, addressed by Alexander in the quote cited, is also common within most American fundamentalist movements. Likewise, in American fundamentalist movements men are seen as heads of the family, both spiritually and financially and expect complete obedience from their wives; this hierarchy is backed up by the Bible (Ephesians 5:21-24).⁵³ However, DeBerg considers the call for submission as part of an economical and domestic continuity that was disrupted at the end of the 19th century: fundamentalist believers wanted women to *return* to the state of obedience they were in, before the disruptions of the late 19th century.⁵⁴ According to DeBerg fundamentalists gender politics were essentially a response to social change.

Herein lies a key difference between Quiverfull Christians and most American fundamentalists. For Quiverfull believers, gender equality is not so much a development that has to be reversed or nullified, as a common state of

49 Lori Alexander, 'The Key to Blessing', website *Always Learning*, 22 July 2013, <http://lorialexander.blogspot.nl/2013/07/the-key-to-blessing.html>, accessed 23 December 2013.

50 Harrison and Rowley, 59.

51 DeBerg, 44.

52 Frieman, 36.

53 DeBerg, 16.

54 DeBerg, 16, 117.

affairs that believers ought to oppose, Bible in hand. The idea of a time long past (i.e. gender roles *used to be* biblical, in the past, and are now disrupted) that, according to DeBerg, is central to American fundamentalists beliefs, is not central to Quiverfull gender convictions. Harrison and Rowley argue that the Quiverfull movement cannot be seen as purely a 'backlash' against recent social developments (the second wave in American feminism, gay rights), since it is not autonomous from mainstream modern ideology.⁵⁵ The American fundamentalists' and the Quiverfull movement's attitude to gender is similar in that they arrive at the same relations (women at home, men in the public sphere) and both react to developments in society, yet their approaches differ: the Quiverfull movement is rooted in the modern world and its ideology, while American fundamentalism falls back on their idea of a past in which things were as they should be.

The particular Quiverfull approach results in another important aspect that sets the Quiverfull movement apart from American fundamentalism as a whole. Harrison and Rowley refer to the 'modern communications' that Quiverfull believers employ to spread the message of a future populated by true believers.⁵⁶ The ones broadcasting Quiverfull standpoints, as it happens, are mostly women, who are supposed to be 'keepers at home', although their using those modern communications (blogging, writing sermons online, running message boards) involves participation in the public sphere verbally.⁵⁷ In the fundamentalist tradition, women are lauded for their role as mothers and wives in the private domain.⁵⁸ The domestic sphere becomes a place of calling, a high honour.⁵⁹ Within the Quiverfull movement, motherhood and the domestic duties of wives are also celebrated as a woman's highest and most distinguished calling.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Quiverfull women are more than 'just' mothers and wives: they exchange opinions and experiences online through blogs and forums, coach other women and participate in discussions and dialogues amongst each other and in other, non-Quiverfull or even non-Christian spheres.⁶¹ They argue tirelessly for their right to submit and surrender their bodies and lives to their husbands and God, always insisting that this is a

55 Harrison and Rowley, 49.

56 Harrison and Rowley, 58.

57 Frieman, 52. Harrison and Rowley, 48.

58 DeBerg, 45.

59 DeBerg, 45.

60 Crosby, 32. Frieman, 36. Joyce, 47.

61 Harrison and Rowley, 48.

matter of choice: *choosing* to live life the biblical way.⁶² This emphasis on choice is thoroughly modern, according to Harrison and Rowley: life is fulfilling when it is the product of a voluntary choice.⁶³ Although Quiverfull believers and American fundamentalists do not differ significantly in their gender ideals, a dimension is added in the Quiverfull movement: women's submission has to be a personal choice (or even calling), in accordance with modern ideas about life.

Conclusion: A Biblical Modernity

Locating the Quiverfull movement within Christianity, it becomes clear that although the movement is mostly fundamentalist in its view of the Bible as absolute truth and its condemnation of the changes modernity has brought on in religious beliefs, it is also very much present in the modern world. Quiverfull Christians do not reject or selectively adopt modernity, but are fully present and engaging with it, aiming to rearticulate and transform modernity to be in line with God's commandments.

Zooming in on gender roles, the ideals of Quiverfull movement seem part and parcel American fundamentalist gender politics. Quiverfull gender practices align with those of mainstream American fundamentalism: women are to be confined to the domestic sphere, their highest calling being motherhood and their ultimate goal to serve their husbands completely in all aspects. However, fundamentalists relate modernity to these relations by referring to a time long past when these 'biblical' gender relations were generally accepted and not under siege by modern developments (e.g second wave feminism). Quiverfull believers on the other hand legitimize them as timeless, by referring to the Bible as a recipe for a Christian future. The focus on a biblical future, rather than a return to a past that was biblical, necessitates reformulating modernity, effectively changing in to suit Quiverfull lifestyles.

This focus on a Christian future *within* modernity becomes apparent in the emphasis on biblical womanhood as a modern choice, rather than an enforced convention. Raising as many children as physically possible to be 'arrows' for God is a conscious decision and strategy to carve out a Christian space in contemporary society. Similarly, Quiverfull women engage with modernity by writing online, aiming at propagating Quiverfull ideals and empowering fellow Quiverfull believers. They actively participate in the public domain, despite

62 Harrison and Rowley, 61.

63 Harrison and Rowley, 62.

their biblical choice to be 'keepers at home'. Here, too, modernity (women in the public domain) is rearticulated in order to ensure a Christian future: the internet as a public space becomes part of Gods plan, because it enables these women to spread the word about their choice and thus motivate other women to follow suit and start having babies for God, 'keeping the home' a biblical place.

The Quiverfull movement might be understood as a relatively small and loosely organized subgroup of American fundamentalists who reject birth control as part of a plan for a Christian future. Zooming in on its gender politics, however, illustrates the differences this focus on the future entails. Though the Quiverfull movement is small now, its tactics and strategies provide Christian fundamentalists with new perspectives on growth and the preservation of Christian morals. Rearticulating their biblical convictions online in thoroughly modern ways, Quiverfull women are moving towards a modernity that is transformed to be completely Christian, one baby at a time.

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