Institute for American Values

A Letter of Ideas and Findings
Number 9, Summer 2000

Propositions

Dear Reader,

At a June 23 conference on "Work and Family Issues" sponsored by the Industrial Relations Research Association, Susan Green, a U.S. Labor Department official, announced that the Clinton Administration supports the Family and Medical Leave Act largely because the law can help "to increase the labor force attachment of parents." Well, now we know.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, I wrote articles and testified before Congress in support of what became in 1993 the Family and Medical Leave Act, which allows certain employees (primarily those in firms of 50 or more workers) up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to care for newly born or newly adopted children, or to care for seriously ill family members. I believed then, and still believe, that employed parents deserve the legal right to time off to be with newborn children. My main complaint was that the bill did not go far enough. Twelve weeks is almost nothing. Six months struck me as a more realistic starting point. And for parents who want to take more time off — say, from six months to five years — I wanted policy makers to promote options such as part-time work, job sharing, graduated re-entry following parental leave, and job training credits and job preferences (not guarantees) for parents returning from longer-term leaves. Finally, I favored a one-time doubling or tripling of the child's dependent exemption in the federal tax code during the year of birth or adoption, so that new parents would enjoy a modest "baby bonus" that would make it financially possible for more parents to stay home for longer periods of the baby's early life.

But none of these changes or supplements to the 1993 law have been adopted or even seriously considered, for two reasons, one obvious and the other less so. Each of them would cost money and most of them would require greater government regulation of the private sector. That's the obvious reason. The less obvious — until now — reason is that the Clinton Administration wants to go in exactly the opposite direction. Instead of empowering new parents seeking to reduce their commitment to the paid labor force, the Administration explicitly seeks a policy that will "increase the labor force attachment of parents."

In her presentation, Susan Green spells it out quite plainly. Take your 12-weeks-or-less to do things like "figure out what to do with respect to child care," then go back to work. That's the whole point. That's why the Clinton Administration, looking at the growing revenues in state unemployment insurance funds, recently proposed that states use some of this money to provide partially *paid* leaves of up to 12 weeks. What about using this or other money to permit longer leaves, or to encourage other workplace reforms that would enhance family time? Don't hold your breath. As Ms. Green makes clear, the Administration's core goal is not family policy at all, in the sense of policy aimed at supporting family life. Their primary goal is workplace policy — specifically, a back-to-work-quickly policy for new parents.

In this letter

Lawmakers in 15 states have filed bills to amend their unemployment compensation systems so residents who have just had children, by birth or adoption, could receive up to 12 weeks of paid time off from their jobs.

Boston Globe
July 5, 2000

Here's my new rule of thumb. Whenever I hear someone proposing a "work-family" policy, I'm going to find out which comes first, work or family. Is the underlying vision to free up workers to be better parents, or to free up parents to be better workers? Is full-time parental care of young children viewed essentially as a good thing, worthy of recognition and even support, or as a bad thing, slightly embarrassing, and therefore to be reduced to a bare minimum through social stigma and financial disincentives? Most work-family spokespeople today — with the exception of Susan Green, who is at least consistent — rhetorically embrace family while substantively embracing work.

In most of Europe, I am told by scholars who follow these matters, the "work first" approach, aiming explicitly to "increase the labor force attachment of parents" and thereby institutionalize through law the two-earner family, is so dominant that any alternative is not even part of the discussion. Meanwhile in the U.S., if Democrats have so clearly adopted a pro-corporate, every-parent-at-work strategy, what about a pro-child, give-parents-a-choice alternative from the Republicans? Don't hold your breath. As I've tried to show in previous letters, Republican leaders are increasingly devoted to that version of supply-side economic theory in which any adult not in the labor force, including a mother at home with her baby, is viewed as a drag on the economy, something very close to a social problem. There is virtually no difference today between Democrats and Republican on this issue. First, work.

24/7

A new study by Harriet B. Presser of the University of Maryland examines the relationship of nonstandard work schedules — evening and night work, rotating shifts, and weekend work — to the likelihood of marital separation and divorce. In 1991, among couples with children in which at least one spouse was employed, nearly one of every four families included at least one spouse who worked nonstandard hours. The phenomenon is growing. Most people, especially men, who work nonstandard hours do so out of necessity, not choice.

In the case of married couples with children, Pressler's main finding is that nonstandard work schedules, particularly night work and (in the case of the mothers) rotating shifts, substantially increase the likelihood of separation and divorce. This finding holds true even after Presser controls for a wide range of variables, including the number of hours worked and the spouses' gender ideologies. Is it possible that people in troubled marriages are more likely to accept or choose nonstandard hours? Presser investigates but rejects this interpretation of her findings. For married parents, a nonstandard work schedule in and of itself appears to increase the risk of divorce.

One of the trendiest phrases in our society is "24/7." Partly description and partly a form of advertising, the term generally gives off good vibrations: modern, hip, New Economy, macho, lots of achievement. The idea is that we as consumers and as a workforce are tossing out the "Closed" sign. We are always in work mode, always ready to purchase, always open for business. The emergence of this phrase is but one of many signs that we are currently in the midst of a profound

societal lurch: the technology-enhanced speed-up of everything, combined with a new embrace of the ideal of omnipotentiality, or the openness to doing anything at any time, fluidly, with few if any boundaries, time outs, or fixed commitments. The historian David McCullough calls the result "tempo shock": the sense that the pace of everything is constantly accelerating.

I'm sure that all of this is very good for the economy. But Presser's findings clearly suggest that all of this is *not* very good for marriage and family life. Are we as a society actually prepared to let the idea of "24/7" tell us how we should live? Is it time for a family-based backlash against this way of thinking?

Harriet B. Presser, "Nonstandard Work Schedules and Marital Instability," Journal of Marriage and the Family 62 (February 2000): 93-110.

We see a trend for relationships to move in the same direction deep, meaningful, b relatively short. Longterm commitme are less in vogue in our employment and in our personal lives.

A recent "Trend Alert from the Herman Group, a consulting firm.

In Trouble?

Is marriage in trouble in the United States? In a recent episode of "Rugrats," a cartoon show for children airing on Nickelodeon, one scruffy toddler informs several others that when you "grow up," you "move into a house, have some babies, and maybe even get married."

Haysun Hahn, who directs Future Mode, a firm that predicts fashion trends, is asked whether Gucci, the clothing maker, can maintain its trendy public image while also launching a new line of baby products. The answer is yes: "It makes sense, considering the celebrity moms out there. Plus, it's not really surprising, considering marriage is no longer required to make babies. So what's more modern than a baby in Gucci?" The implication, of course, being that marriage poses an image problem for customers who care about modern, trendy clothes for themselves and for their babies.

And the idea of need- ing a husband to ma a baby? Forget it.

State Farm Insurance has a new magazine ad evoking two of the stages of a woman's life. We learn that State Farm was there for you, young woman, when "you got your independence," back when you "dressed like a rock star" and got "your first apartment" and "the keys to that little green coupe." But now, grown-up woman, you've "got your first dependents." Today "you're a superstar (in one little life at least)." And State Farm is still there for you: "There's no one who better understands a single mother's need for affordable life insurance than the State Farm agent you've always trusted . . ." Yes, marriage does seems to be in trouble in the United States.

Cindy Adams, *New Y Post*, June 18, 2000 (Fathers Day)

Allyson Lieberman, "Gucci delivers baby-sized mink coat," New York Post, *April 20, 2000.*

Is This Really Good for Kids?

A cartoon dog named "Blue" will soon be appearing as the "spokespuppy" in Ford ads on Nickelodeon, the children's cable network. Yes, that's right: Ford Motor Company, the car maker, is about to begin pitching its products to viewers under age 12. Says George Murphy, a Ford marketing manager: "Everybody is trying to figure out how to develop impressions in kids. Nickelodeon programs kids two to 11, which is when brand preference is developed. We'd like those kids to

come out of this thinking Ford means safety, family and security." John Popkowski, president of advertising sales for MTV Networks, which includes Nickelodeon, senses that some parents might be troubled by this news. Not to worry. Mr. Popkowski promises that the new Ford ads will go through a filter of "is this really good for kids."

Is it even hypothetically possible for a commercial pitch aimed at young children to be "really good for kids"? In 1978, the staff of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) believed that the answer was no. Ads targeting pre-schoolers, the FTC staff stated in a rule-making, are inherently unfair. For this reason, these officials proposed banning the practice outright. But soon thereafter the U.S. Congress, in the Federal Trade Commission Improvements Act of 1980, effectively decided otherwise. That Act explicitly prohibits the FTC from issuing any rule regarding children's advertising based on the notion of inherent unfairness.

Today, a zillion children's ads and many Jerry Springers and Howard Sterns later, Enola Aird, who directs the Motherhood Project at this institute and is researching the commercialization of childhood, wants Congress to revisit this issue. She believes that the 1980 law curtailing the FTC's authority should be repealed, and that Congress should affirmatively direct the FTC to undertake a broad-based rule-making to protect children from violative advertising.

Re-empowering the FTC to address this issue directly is the best mid-sized reform idea that I've come across in a long time. Especially if repealing the 1980 law helped to kindle a public debate on the topic, the repeal might eventually lead to a ban on commercial advertising aimed at pre-schoolers — a modest but valuable step in cleaning up the cultural environment for children. If you can help, or want to find out more, contact Enola Aird at this address or visit the institute's website at *www.americanvalues.org*.

Joe Flint, "Ford to Sell Safety to Kids on Nickelodeon," Wall Street Journal*, April 18, 2000.*

Knowing Full Well

A recent article in the *New York Times* on prenuptial agreements (the article calls them "marriage insurance") stresses that young people today know "full well" the risks of getting married. They know, for example, that: "Of the nearly 230,000 marriages that begin [this] June, more than half will end in divorce . . ." As a result, it may be time, according to the divorce lawyer Raoul Feldman, to "rethink" the entire institution of marriage, since it obviously isn't working: ". . . people are getting married knowing there's a failure rate of 50 percent. It's truly amazing."

That "more than half" of all current marriages end in divorce is probably today's most-repeated statistic about the American family. Haven't you heard it a thousand times? I've said and written it myself many times. The only problem is — or more accurately, the little-known good news is — it probably ain't true.

U.S. divorce rates peaked in 1979, when the crude divorce rate (divorces per 1,000 persons) reached 5.7 and the refined rate (divorces per 1,000 married women age 15 or older) reached 22. Using these rates as their baseline, demographers throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s frequently projected that "more than half" of all recent marriages are destined to end in divorce.

Meanwhile, however, divorce rates have declined. From 1979 to 1997, the crude divorce rate fell by about 25 percent; the refined rate declined by about 10 percent. Today, it's probably accurate to say that more than 40 percent, but *less than half*, of all recent marriages are likely to end in divorce.

But even that estimate is potentially misleading, since it includes all marriages, not just first marriages. And since second and third marriages are more divorce-prone than first marriages, the 40-something estimate exaggerates the likelihood that a first-time marriage will end in divorce. If you are a young person getting married today, what is the statistical likelihood that your marriage will last for life? Let's call it 60 percent, maybe higher. Put differently, your and your friends' first marriages in 2000 are *significantly more likely* — perhaps as much as 20 percent more likely — to last for life than was the case when your parents and their friends got married in the 1970s. This is good news!

More than half of the couples getting marri today will get divorce

Building Relationshi a high school textboo by David Olson, John De Frain, and Amy Olson, 1999.

Why does the "more than half" estimate continue to prosper? Partly because all widely embraced statistics develop their own independent momentum. Partly because bad news usually gets more media attention than good news. Partly because there is still a great deal of divorce in our society. (The U.S. still has the world's highest divorce rate.) But mostly, I suspect, because today's aging baby boomers, who divorce so frequently themselves, find it hard to accept the fact that younger people are behaving differently, and better.

But they are. A continually escalating divorce rate, it turns out, is *not* a permanent and inevitable fact of modern life, immune from social learning and human agency. Change for the better is not only possible; it has already begun to happen. Here's the proposition, made up of one part evidence and one part hope: In a few years, we will understand a divorce rate of "more than half" not as a description of current reality, but as something that happened in the old days, when the sexual revolution was young and when today's pot-bellied commentators, editors, and divorce lawyers were wearing bellbottoms and going to discos.

Joshua R. Goldstein, "The Leveling of Divorce in the United States," Demography *36, no. 3 (August 1999): 409-414. Tim B. Heaton, "Factors Contributing to Increasing Marital Stability in the United States," unpublished paper (Provo, UT: Center for Studies of the Family, Brigham Young University, December 1999). Sally Cunningham Clarke and Barbara Foley Wilson, "The Relative Stability of Marriages,"* Family Relations *43 (July 1994): 305-310. Arthur J. Norton and Louisa F. Miller, "Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the 1990s," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, P 23-180 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 1992). David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead,* The State of Our Unions: 2000 *(New Brunswick, NJ: National Marriage Project, Rutgers University, June 2000), 27.*

Amazing Fathers

In letter 6 (Fall 1999), I suggested that recent Harlequin romance novels focusing on fatherhood offer interesting glimpses into the current state of courtship, marriage, and romantic fantasy in our society. Exhibit A was *Do You Take This Child?* in which Slade Garrett, heretofore a love'em-and-leave'em type, turns into a wonderful guy at the very last moment, proposing marriage to Dr.

Shelia Pollack while she is literally in the hospital maternity ward, about to deliver the baby that had been conceived nine months earlier on their "one night of passion." For Exhibit B, let's look at *Are You My Daddy?*

Cody, a "little cowpoke" who is five years old, "didn't know why Daddy didn't want to live with them no more." Joe Rawlins, the nice man at the rodeo: "Where's your dad?" Cody: "I dunno." Yet at that very moment, when Joe first meets the boy, Joe "made a decision. Against his will. Against his better judgment. No matter the consequences. He'd watch out for Cody . . ." Moments later, Cody takes a spill and is hurt. His mother, Marty, rushes to him. The doctor at the rodeo fears that Cody might have suffered a concussion. Marty needs to get him quickly to the hospital for X rays.

Joe suddenly appears: "I'll give you a lift." His "deep, resonating voice, full of authority, made her turn. A cowboy stood a few feet away on the other side of the medical trailer, leaning against a dark counter, his arms crossed over his wide, sturdy chest. Was this her knight in shining armor, ready to slash through her problems as easily as an army storming a castle? No, he was just a cowboy. A good-looking cowboy to boot! And that meant trouble." But just then, "before she could speak," Cody reaches up to Joe, crying "Daddy!" Yes, it turns out that Cody's "mild concussion" has produced "a mild form of amnesia." Cody now believes that Joe, the nice man at the rodeo, is his daddy!

What to do? Should Joe make his explanations and leave? Set the boy straight? No. For "some insane reason," Joe "couldn't turn his back" on Cody and Marty. He decides to stay with them at the hospital. He mentions that he is leaving tomorrow for a rodeo in Oklahoma. Cody: "When will you be home, Daddy?" Joe: "Soon, son, soon." And what does Marty make of this amazing turn of events? "For some reason, one she couldn't fathom, she wanted to believe Joe was different from her ex. She wanted to believe he would come back. That he had good intentions. That he was dependable. That he had a kind, tender heart."

Is Marty right to believe in Joe? It was all happening so quickly. Would this "brooding cowboy" with a painful past "promise to stay around forever?" Not to give away the ending, but the answer is yes.

What should we make of this story? Partly, of course, like *Do You Take This Child?*, it's the old story of the gallant knight who rescues the lady in distress. But the whole plot is so bizarrely unbelievable. Cody falls asleep, as it were, and wakes up to find . . . *a brand new daddy*! A mother who bitterly resents her ex-husband and distrusts men in general — "She didn't want to rely on this man. Or anyone." — suddenly encourages a perfect stranger to start pretending that he is her husband and the father of her child. But most of all, Joe Rawlins, a drifting rodeo cowboy who is about as steadfast and domestic as, say, Slade Garrett, all of a sudden, and for absolutely no reason, becomes the most nurturing guy in the world, eager to play house, be a tender-hearted companion for life, and raise another man's son.

These stories appear to be trying, without success, to combine two worlds. In one, men are unreliable, women are independent and resentful, and children don't have fathers. In the other, men protect women and children. These stories always seem to begin in the first world and, propelled largely by radical and

inexplicable changes in male behavior, end up in the second. If only it worked that way in real life.

Marie Ferrarella, Do You Take This Child? *(New York: Silhouette Books, 1996). Leanna Wilson,* Are You My Daddy? *(New York: Silhouette Books, 1998), 7, 13, 21, 23, 31, 36-39.*

Adult Book Section

A new book for children written by Dr. Sol Gordon, a psychologist, is called *All Families are Different*. The book explains "just what it means to be part of a family." And just what does it mean? It means that some children "live with both parents, while others live with one or with step- or foster-parents. Nowadays, we also find children being reared by aunts, uncles, or grandparents, as well as same-sex couples. The variety of possibilities is rich in its diversity." The main things for young readers to remember are that the members of your family, "whomever they may be," love you, and that "no one's family is perfect."

What if your parents divorce? What if your mother marries someone else? It might make you sad: "It isn't always easy to live with a new parent or parents. It may take time before you feel good being with each other, and you may need to talk many times to explain to each other how you feel about many things." If you are "not happy," you may find it helpful to "try talking about what troubles you by saying how you feel, like 'I feel sad because . . .'" But above all, you must keep a proper perspective: "You know that all families have their problems, even those with children who live with both their parents." You may imagine that "someone else's family is better than yours" because they "seem to get along," but remember, "you just don't know the problems they have." And finally: "So what do you think? Is your family normal? Well, you guessed it. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A NORMAL FAMILY."

All Families are Different is an example of a type of children's book that first emerged in the 1970s. After almost three decades, the genre is well-developed and quite widespread. Chances are, for example, if you walk into any public elementary school library, you will find this type of book. The largest number focus on what happens when parents divorce and when they remarry, including celebrity-authored books such as *Daddy Day, Daughter Day*, by Larry King, the talk show host, and *Martha's New Daddy*, by Danielle Steel, the novelist. Others, like *All Families are Different*, focus more broadly on the prevalence and benefits of frequent family change and of every imaginable family structure. As an earlier book of this type, *All Kinds of Families*, puts it: "There are new husbands, new wives . . . comings together, and goings apart. There are changes, but families go on."

What is wrong with these stories? It is certainly true, as Dr. Gordon suggests, that no family is perfect and that no two families are the same. Nor is it incorrect or even controversial to insist that children are not to blame, and therefore should not blame themselves, when adults do not marry one another, get divorced, or marry someone new. But what about equally fervent insistence that *adults* are not to blame, and therefore should not be blamed by their children or anyone else, when adults do . . . anything they want to do?

Here we get to the heart of the matter. One part happy-talk and another part excuse-making, these books purport to reflect childhood realism, but in fact closely resemble adult propaganda. The pictures are cute and the voices are juvenile, but the point of view is strictly adult and overwhelmingly self-serving. Things may seem rough right now, young reader, but you'll be fine. Forget about "normal"; trust us, that's a myth. Forget about some other situation — for example, living with both parents — being better than yours; that's also a myth. When it come to families, the main point is that whatever the grown-ups do is okay. And that whatever happens, your parents love you.

Sol Gordon, All Families are Different *(Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000). Brochure for* All Families are Different*, Prometheus Books, 2000. Larry King and Chaia King,* Daddy Day, Daughter Day *(Los Angeles: Dove Kids Book, 1997). Danielle Steel,* Martha's New Daddy *(New York: Delacourte Press, 1989). Norma Simon,* All Kinds of Families *(Niles, IL: Albert Whitman & Company, 1976).*

All and All

All Kinds of Families. All Families are Different. And now comes *All Our Families,* with the same basic message, but for readers with doctorates and from a university press. Maybe it's because I read them at the same time, but *All Families are Different*, the children's book, and *All Our Families*, the academic book, sound remarkably alike, starting with their shared mistrust of the word "family." Here is *All Families are Different*, chapter one: "Not long ago the word 'family' meant children living with their own parents in the same place . . . But things have changed. Now there are all kinds of families. Did you know that most boys and girls in America do not live with both of their parents? There are other changes as well." And here are the three editors of *All Our Families,* also in chapter one: "Indeed, to speak of 'the family' often obscures more than it reveals. Families today do come in many varieties — two-parent, single-parent, stepfamilies, gay and lesbian families, foster families, and so on."

Like the author of *All Families are Different*, the editors of *All Our Families* repeatedly suggest that only the simple-minded or the politically misguided believe that two-parent families are typically better for children than one-parent families, or that children need fathers, or that family structure (who lives in the home) decisively influences family process (how family members relate to one another). Here, for example, is Stephen D. Sugarman, one of the editors, explaining why society should support, not criticize, single mothers by choice: "As for deciding to raise her child on her own, this by itself no longer arouses great public outcry. After all, it is not as though widowed mothers who make that decision are castigated for choosing not to marry."

That formulation deserves a prize. When a father dies, the decision of his widow not to remarry is the social and moral equivalent of an unmarried women deciding to have a child on her own. Wow! Why is that so? First, because neither decision currently arouses "great public outcry." And second, because there are apparently, as Sugarman sees it, few if any distinctions to make between a father's death and a father's desertion, or between a parent and a stepparent, or between marriage and its absence, or between marriage and remarriage. The intellectual

quality of that thesis gives you a good sense of the editors' overall accomplishment and the quality of most (though not all) of the essays in this book.

There may be, as these authors insist, "NO SUCH THING AS A NORMAL FAMILY," but there *is* something approaching a norm, a well-established vocabulary and ethical framework, governing the way that many of today's family experts and family professionals talk to children and each other about "what it means to be part of a family."

Families can also have babies. It take two people – a man and a woman – to have a baby. Sometim the man and woma are married, and sometimes they are n

My Kind of Family, children's book, 1990

Gordon, All Families are Different. *Mary Ann Mason, Arlene Skolnick, and Stephen D. Sugarman (editors),* All Our Families: New Policies for a New Century *(New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1, 14.*

Uncertain

In 1971, as a high school sophomore in Jackson, Mississippi, I wrote columns for the school newspaper taking the "liberal" side of current issues, such as school busing and the war in Vietnam. My "conservative" counterpart was David Bufkin, who idolized William F. Buckley, the founder of the magazine *National Review*, and occasionally wrote Buckley letters. One day David came to class proudly bearing not only a touching, respectful letter that Buckley had written him in response, and not only a copy of Buckley's latest book, which Buckley had enclosed, but also large button which had been included in the package from New York. The button read: "Don't immanentize the eschaton." I had no idea what it meant, and I don't think Bufkin did, either.

Cut to almost 30 years later. I see the phrase again, for the first time since Callaway High School, this time in the *New York Times,* complete with a reference to its source: Eric Voegelin's 1952 book, T*he New Science of Politics*. Still ignorant, but curious about what the phrase actually means, I buy the book and read it. It turns out that the phrase is a distillation of the book's main theme.

To immanentize something is to draw it in closely, to make it a part of one's immediate, subjective consciousness and experience. The eschaton is our ultimate destination, the final end toward which our lives are ordinated. Affirming an insight that lies at the core of classical Greek philosophy as well as Judaism and Christianity (the three streams of what Voegelin terms "the Mediterranean tradition"), Voegelin views the yearning for transcendence, the restlessness for a world better and higher than this world, as a universal and empirically self-evident component of human personhood, nothing less than a fundamental part of who we are.

Consequently, to immanentize the eschaton is to commit a basic error in self-understanding. It is to assume wrongly that human aspiration and destiny are coterminous with the natural world. It is to assume wrongly that metaphysical questions, which are life's core questions, either do not exist at all, or can be rationally investigated only through the methods of physics, which in practice tends to be another way of defining such questions as unanswerable and therefore irrelevant. In sum, to immanentize the eschaton is to assume wrongly that ultimate reality, of which God is the final measure, is instead some form of this-world reality, of which man is presumed to be the final measure.

In the case of Christian symbolism, when the gospel song says "This world is not my home," it affirms the Christian eschaton. Conversely, when the singer-songwriter Tracy Chapman recently produced a hit song called "Heaven's Here on Earth," and when, some years earlier, John Lennon, in perhaps his most famous song, invited us to "imagine there's no heaven, it's easy if you try," these poets were quite consciously seeking to immanentize the eschaton.

Why does any of this matter? Don't jump too quickly to the question of whether or not you believe in God. That is obviously a momentous question, but Voegelin's challenge to us cannot, at least initially, be reduced to a contest between theism and its alternatives. Indeed, Voegelin takes great pains to show historically that *religious* leaders, speaking in the name of their faith, are quite capable of immanentizing the eschaton, with frequently tragic results.

For Voegelin, as least in his role as political scientist, the great dividing line is between certainty and uncertainty. The good thing is uncertainty. Why? Because people who are certain about humanity's ends often seek to divinize society, to reunite heaven and earth, by establishing within this world the true and final purposes of man. For Voegelin, this form of certainty is the great threat to humanity. For the man who is certain in this way "will not leave the transfiguration of the world to the grace of God beyond history but will do the work of God himself, right here and now, in history." Cromwell was certain in this way. Lenin and Hitler were, if anything, even more certain. Indeed, leaders and social movements possessed of this type of certainty shaped much of the 20th century, including almost all of its bloodiest and ugliest parts.

Voegelin argues that belief in God makes us, or at least should make us, less certain. If, as Paul puts it, "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," then faith is much closer to hope than it is to certainty. It does, or at least should, temper our all-too-human tendency toward pride and lessen the chances that we will transform any of the ideas limited to this world (History, Progress, Patriotism, there are many others) into final answers. At a minimum, belief in God suggests a difference between salvation and self-salvation.

Yes, many terrible things have been done and justified in the name of religion. But I think — okay, I also hope — that Voegelin is right to suggest that, in the modern world, sincere faith reduces rather than increases the risk of excessive existential certitude. Dr. R. Maurice Boyd, the pastor of the City Church, New York, says that Jesus' ministry can be summed up in two questions. When speaking about the kingdom of God to the powerful and the self-righteous, he always asked: Are you so sure you're in? And to the weak and the castigated, he always asked: Are you so sure you're out? Don't be so certain. To me, that is perfect.

Critics of religion often make a similar point about certainty and uncertainty, but in the service of a different interpretation. Religion, they argue, asks us to invest our largest hopes in another world, thereby slowing us down in this one, making us less insistent — less uninhibited — about changes in the here and now. The old gospel song describes the essence of Christian hope: "We will meet, by and by. We will meet on that beautiful shore." A few decades ago, U.S. labor organizers, who did much to improve the lives of working people, cruelly mocked that hymn for their own purposes, parodying the original stanzas with lines such as: "You'll get pie in the sky when you die!" I reject their implication that religion

is an enemy of social progress — think of religion's role in the U.S. anti-slavery, character education, temperance, and civil rights movements — but they, and Voegelin, are surely right to suggest that belief in God implies the relativization of all political and social goals, however worthy.

Uncertainty is the ver
essence of Christianit

Eric Voegelin, *The Ne*
Science of Politics

So it gets pretty complicated. On the one hand, belief in God does not, in and of itself, either weaken our desire for social reform or always protect us from the epistemological error of seeking to immanentize the eschaton. At the same time, the growing drive in modern societies to bring heaven down to earth, to draw God into man, has produced not only great evil, in particular the various totalitarianisms, but also great economic productivity, great advances in science, and great legacies of genuine social reform. As Voegelin chillingly and with only some irony puts it: "The death of the spirit of the price of progress."

Part of Voegelin's gift to us is conveying this complexity. But to me, his two main gifts are his insistence that political science rediscover its original purposes, which would necessitate recognizing man's spiritual dimension, and his provocative reflections on the role of uncertainty and its opposite in human affairs. Vaclav Havel once said (I am paraphrasing) that he would rather have a beer with someone who was looking for the truth than with someone who had found it. From what I can tell, Voegelin was a seriously religious man. Certainly he was no religious or moral relativist. But I think he would have agreed with Havel, and would have invited him out for a beer.

William Safire, "On Language," New York Times*, May 7, 2000. Eric Voegelin,* The New Science of Politics: An Introduction *(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 188, 147, 131. The Bible, Hebrews 11:1.*

Spiritual, Not Religious

Elizabeth Marquardt, a new affiliate scholar at this institute, served last year as an assistant chaplain at Bates College in Main. She reports that a remarkably high proportion of students at Bates describe themselves as "spiritual, not religious." Most students use exactly that phrase. It's a remarkable formulation, deserving of our attention.

When I declare that I am "spiritual, not religious," I am disclosing two facts about myself. First, I am a searcher who is interested in, and yearns for, transcendence — some meaning and destiny that reach beyond the limits of the material world. And second, I avoid organized religion and reject institutionally articulated religious doctrines. In short, I am looking for spiritual nourishment, but not by going to church or synagogue.

What does the growing popularity of this self-description tell us? It tells us that the human person is spiritually thirsty, whether or not there is any water to drink, and whether or not we even recognize what water is. My belief that organized religion cannot tell me what to worship does not change the fact that, because I am human, I must worship. Life's ultimate questions can change form or even put on funny clothes, but they never go away. For example, Christian shrines in New York City today are rarely surrounded by crowds of reverent young people. But all day every day, less than two blocks from where I live in

Manhattan, young people from across the country and tourists from around the world crowd around a small shrine in Central Park. They leave flowers, notes, and pictures of loved ones. They light votive candles. They meditate, read poems, and sing. The shrine says "Imagine" and commemorates the life of John Lennon, the singer-songwriter. Judith Martin, the "Miss Manners" columnist and a member of this institute's Council on Families, says that a growing trend today is people informally and spontaneously creating makeshift shrines, often connected to a public tragedy, such as the death of Princess Diana. The need does not go away.

Many describe themselves as spiritual rather than religious.

Newsweek, special report on U.S. teenagers, May 8, 2000

The popularity of being "spiritual, not religious" also suggests that large and probably growing numbers of Americans now individually customize their religious faith. This trend should give us pause. A new book by Bobbi Parish is called *Creating Your Personal Sacred Text.* The book is "a step-by-step guide to writing your own scripture," using selections from various texts of your choice as well as "your own words." More and more in our society, instead of the thing defining me, I define the thing. When the thing in question is, say, marriage, the trend is troubling enough. But have God and the moral law also become my own private creations?

Bobbi Parish, Create Your Personal Sacred Text *(New York: Broadway Books, 1999).*

Sincerely,

David Blankenhorn

P.S. More than 100 scholars and civic and religious leaders recently issued a public appeal, *The Marriage Movement: A Statement of Principles.* This institute is a co-sponsor of the initiative. Contact us if you want a copy. Or you can read the statement, and if you wish become a signatory to it, by visiting *www.marriagemovement.org*.

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