The Task of Religious Institutions in Strengthening Families

Don Browning
University of Chicago
September 1998

This position paper is jointly issued by The Communitarian Network and the Religion, Culture, and Family Project of the University of Chicago. The research of the Religion, Culture, and Family Project is supported by the Division of Religion of the Lilly Endowment, Inc.
This position paper is one in a series issued by The Communitarian Network. This position paper benefitted from the deliberations and comments of The Communitarian Network's Family Task Force. Members of the Family Task Force are:

Don S. Browning, Divinity School, University of Chicago, Task Force Chair
Enola G. Aird, Motherworld Productions
William J. Doherty, Family Social Science Department, University of Minnesota
Jean Bethke Elshtain, Divinity School, University of Chicago
Kristin Moore, President, Child Trends, Inc.
Michael Perry, Wake Forest University School of Law
Elizabeth S. Scott, University Professor, University of Virginia School of Law (observer)
Linda Waite, Professor of Sociology and Director, Center on Aging, University of Chicago
Amitai Etzioni, Founder and Director, The Communitarian Network

These position papers fall within the purview of ideas expressed in The Responsive Communitarian Platform. Position papers are disseminated and promoted by The Communitarian Network. Other Communitarian Network Task Forces at work include the Education Policy, Community Justice, and American Society Task Forces.

Please refer to the end of this document for information about membership, other position papers, and publications available from The Communitarian Network.
The Task of Religious Institutions in Strengthening Families

Prepared by Don Browning
University of Chicago
Director of the Religion, Culture, and Family Project

A communitarian family policy aspires to balance the good of society with the good of families and their individual members. It holds that the well-being of families, individual family members, and society is best guaranteed when the health of each is promoted equally. This principle is easy to state but difficult to actualize in concrete circumstances. The following proposals are designed to promote this goal.

In this paper, we ask what churches and synagogues as institutions of civil society should do to promote family well-being. What should they do for the families they immediately influence, and how should they work to shape public policy? We pursue these questions in this order because of our conviction that the strength of a society flows outward from its voluntary institutions—religious and civil—to public institutions and their policies. We hold, however, that government programs, religious institutions, and other institutions of civil society should be complementary in what they do for families. The state, market, churches and synagogues, and other voluntary organizations play different roles in relation to families, but these roles should be appropriately coordinated.

Our proposals are guided by three normative ideas. First, although the various spheres of modern societies—government, business, religion, education, law, and the therapies—have unique responsibilities and privileges, they do not and cannot function independently from deeper ethical guidelines and constraints.

---

*For those interested in an explicitly theological elaboration of the three following ideas, see endnotes 1 and 2 for references.
Second, family and local community should be allowed to exercise initiatives and natural capabilities in their spheres of immediate influence without undue interference from either government or market, even though both of these have their rightful role in supporting families and local communities. This concept is close to what the Roman Catholic tradition calls the "principle of subsidiarity"—an idea that can be given religious meaning even though it also has ancient philosophical roots.²

Third, an ethic of "equal regard" should guide both the inner lives of families and family public policy. We realize that the idea of a family ethic of equal regard needs a definition.³ We offer the following: this ethic means that a husband or wife should 1) treat the other with unconditioned respect (as an end and never as a means only) and 2) within this mutual respect work to enhance the well-being of the other. Concretely, the ethic of equal regard means that husband and wife should each in principle have equal access to the privileges and responsibilities of both public and private worlds, although this may be realized differently in specific households depending on individual interests and talents.

A familism guided by an ethic of equal regard is a "critical" familism—another term that requires definition. Critical familism is different from naive "familism," which generally is interpreted as placing family togetherness above other values such as equality between husband and wife, the well-being of children, and the flourishing of individual family members. Critical familism balances family cohesion with the ethics of equal regard. It does this by uncovering and critiquing distortions in power in families which block the realization of equal regard among members.

The equal regard family does not relinquish parental authority; instead, it uses this authority to promote equal regard, dialogue, and the raising of children to gradually grow toward adult relations
of mutual respect with their parents and others. In the case of relations between families, the ethic of equal regard holds that each family has the moral obligation to respect and work for the good of all other families. In turn, each family has the right to be respected and have its good promoted by others.

I. Civil Society, Religion, and State: Toward a Critical Marriage Culture

We affirm the emerging view that religious institutions are central to the health of civil society. Religious institutions are major wellsprings of philanthropic action and seedbeds of civic, religious, and familial virtues. In light of their importance, we make the following recommendations.

Churches and Synagogues Should Critically Retrieve Their Marriage and Family Traditions

First, churches and synagogues should play a leadership role in stimulating the dialogue that creates a new familism. It is our judgment that, with few exceptions, religious institutions have not exercised this leadership in recent decades. To reclaim this role, they must retrieve their marriage and family traditions, even though they must do so critically. Religious institutions should examine their heritages, enter into dialogue with other denominations, work with secular institutions, survey the human sciences, and articulate a fresh vision of marriage and family--something close to what we have called critical familism.

In addition to the marriage theologies of various denominations, this recommendation also can be illustrated by what Catholics and Protestants variously have called the "first" or "little" church. The continuity between the official church and the church at home has been a constant theme throughout
Christian history. Because the early church met in homes, sacred actions around common meals in the gathered *ecclesia* were imitated in private home life. The importance of domestic rituals is even stronger in Judaism. When home rituals and the liturgies of church or synagogue reinforce each other, family life is made more cohesive and integrated more completely into the wider community. When these rituals or devotions are followed by free discussion between parents and children, they give rise to the reflective or critical assimilation of family traditions.

There is evidence that home-based rituals are extremely important for the creation of family cohesion. Family rituals at the dinner table, before bed, and on trips correlate with the effective communication of family traditions. Rituals are important as well for families with a primarily secular identity. In these families, rituals may consist of carefully planned beginnings and endings to meals, family meetings, and other shared and regularly scheduled family activities.

**Religious Institutions Should Cooperate with Other Institutions in Helping Families**

Second, religious congregations should join with other parts of civil society to foster a critical marriage and family culture. In some instances this cooperation might entail partnerships with the state. In establishing these cooperative ventures, religious institutions must simultaneously seek to maintain their unique identity while striving to respect the separation of church and state. They can do this by searching for the points of analogy between their specific goals and the state's concern with the common good. The state, for instance, should be guided by an ethic of justice for individuals and families analogous to the ethic of equal regard promoted by religious institutions. Government also
should abide by the principle of subsidiarity that respects the initiative and responsibility of families yet supports them when they need help.

Some cooperation between religious and public institutions already exists: witness the cooperation between churches and public health institutions. Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services both receive some state support. Note also the cooperation between churches and other institutions of civil society such as the Red Cross, a model that could be expanded and applied more directly to family issues. For example, a complex cooperative project between church, state, and other voluntary organizations can be found in recent efforts to expand the idea of a Community Marriage Policy. This program was first used to organize common marriage policies among local Protestant churches but has now been expanded in some communities to include judges, justices of the peace, and secular marriage counselors. We say more about this policy below.

Public institutions should not become isolated from the energies and positive cultures of specific religio-cultural traditions. Sociologist James Coleman argued that Catholic high schools provide better education than public schools because they receive more support from parents and church. As societies organized around extended family have disappeared, Coleman believed that market, corporation, and government have expanded their influence on society, including schools. Catholic schools are succeeding, he argued, because they are an exception to this trend; they represent the values of families and their churches. Coleman urged us to abandon the idea that schools are solely agents of the state. Rather they should more nearly reflect the values of the family and local community, including religious institutions.

Our view is sympathetic to Coleman's but is somewhat different. We do not believe that family and church should dominate public schools. We hold that families, religious institutions, market,
government each has its rightful expertise and authority for influencing the values and purposes of schools. Hence each of these spheres should conduct an intense dialogue about the direction of public schools and what they teach about marriage and family. This dialogue should result in developing new educational approaches to marriage and family life—approaches that have continuity with, but may not be identical to, the basic values of particular local families, traditions, and churches.

Some proposals by William Bennett and Senator Dan Coats in their Project for American Renewal illustrate how state and civil society, including religious institutions, can cooperate. Coats and Bennett were mildly critical of programs that gave welfare for families to the states. They also rejected the idea of centering social programs for families mainly in the federal government. They call, instead, for funneling government support directly to the institutions of civil society, including the churches. They argue that these institutions are the conveyors of civic virtue, do most of society's moral education, and need to be revived in order to provide some of the cultural and institutional supports needed by families. They propose allowing individuals to give $500 of their tax liability to worthwhile non-governmental charities that help poor families. They recommend demonstration grants for programs that match welfare families with religious communities that offer moral guidance and help. To encourage savings by poor families, demonstration grants would be provided for family deposits to be matched by churches, foundations, and corporations. Funds would be made available for pre-divorce counseling.

It is not our intention to advocate these particular programs but rather to show that such proposals exist and deserve careful evaluation as possible ways for civil society, religious institutions, and the state to cooperate. Furthermore, we use them to illustrate the meaning of subsidiarity—the
way large units of society such as government can support family and local communities without taking over the functions these smaller institutions perform best. Such cooperation also illustrates a dialogical view of authority, i.e., how family, local community, state, and market can work together in creating a critical family culture.

Ecumenicity and Critical Familism

Third, churches must join with other churches and synagogues to create a new critical marriage culture. Seventy-five percent of all marriages, even today, are performed in synagogues and churches. This suggests that churches still have a significant role in marriage and should therefore work together in proclaiming and implementing a marriage and family culture.

But how can this happen? Michael McManus recommends that churches cooperate in adopting something like the Roman Catholic Church's coordinated program of premarital and marital support called the "Common Marriage Policy."9 It has been adopted by the vast majority of Roman Catholic dioceses in the United States. Because of this common policy, Catholic churches have a unified front on marriage issues. Young Catholic couples confront a common set of expectations and a common culture about what it takes to prepare for and thrive in family relations.

This common policy has five components: (1) a six-month minimum preparation period, (2) the administration of the new premarital questionnaires that have been tested for their capacity to predict marriages likely to end in divorce (PREPARE, the Pre-Marital Inventory, or FOCCUS), (3) the use of lay leadership and "mentoring couples" with the engaged and newly married, (4) the use of
marriage instruction classes (weekend workshops, evenings for the engaged in the homes of mentor couples), and (5) engagement ceremonies held before the entire congregation.

McManus proposes bringing together Catholic, evangelical, and mainline Protestant churches (we would add synagogues), to create a "Community Marriage Policy"—an ecumenical and interfaith common marriage policy that would help congregations across denominations to develop a united stance on marriage and family. Such a united front could help churches and synagogues counter the individualism and impatience of couples and parents who expect ministers to perform marriages on demand without careful preparation. The common elements McManus proposes look much like the Catholic model, but he suggests shorter waiting periods to adapt to more liberal customs among some denominations. Although the model needs further refinement, early reports suggest it is an idea moving in the right direction.

Youth and a Critical Marriage Culture

Fourth, churches and synagogues should take the lead in preparing youth for a critical familism. Large portions of society have retreated from guiding and inspiring youth in the areas of marriage and family. Many churches do not do adequate marriage preparation with engaged couples; they do even less with youth and teenagers. Churches have yielded leadership in these areas to public education, at both the college level and below.

As churches have retreated from sex, marriage, and family education, secular courses, often at the college level, have taken their place. A recent authoritative review of college textbooks by Professor Norval Glenn of the University of Texas has revealed that most of these texts are devoid
of historical knowledge of the family, overly optimistic about the successes of alternative family forms, neglectful of children, and uninformed about new research on the benefits of marriage. They tend to ignore evidence showing that married people are mentally and physically healthier, have more wealth, have much more sex, and are generally far more content with life than those who are not married. Churches and synagogues should not only be concerned about this state of affairs but develop better alternative educational resources.

Religious institutions should be aware that there are very few adequate educational resources addressing issues of marriage and family in secondary schools. Sex education courses aim primarily to prevent disease and out-of-wedlock births. Setting aside the question of their effectiveness in realizing these goals, they say little about marriage or family except to promote an attitude of tolerance for different family forms. One of the most competent sex education programs (designed by Marian Howard of Emory University) is not about education for marriage but about the delay of sexual activity until "maturity."

Existing educational programs emphasizing preparation for family life are either deficient in their use of religious resources or fail to present an adequately critical view of marriage, as do most fundamentalist religious programs. We believe that religious institutions should use the powerful new video technologies to teach their religious traditions, the best insights of the new marriage education programs (PREP, PREPARE/ENRICH, etc.), and realistic understandings of the economic, legal, and medical aspects of marriage.
Fifth, churches and synagogues should develop theologies and programs that give priority to promoting the health of intact families while also helping other family forms. The cultural and social forces that are disrupting families are relentless, and high rates of family disruption are likely to continue in the foreseeable future. While we do recognize that family dissolution is often advisable in cases of violence, abuse, and addiction, religious institutions should recognize that many families could function well together if they had better supports.

There is much that can be done to mitigate strains on disrupted families, be they never-married single parents, the divorced, or stepfamilies. Finally, we must recognize the advent of families with gay and lesbian parents and families consisting of heterosexual parents with gay or lesbian children. Although there is a range of positions in the churches about the nature and moral status of homosexual practice, almost all churches, conservative or liberal, wish to minister to these families.

Religious institutions should imitate those churches and synagogues that simultaneously and aggressively prepare people for stable and fulfilling marriages yet support and assist alternative family forms. For example, there is a burgeoning white Pentecostal church in the western suburbs of Chicago that has, in addition to its strong emphasis on marriage and opposition to divorce, a highly popular twelve-week post-divorce support program. Many African-American churches have such complex ministries. The Shiloh Baptist Church located in the poorer section of Washington, D.C. has a complex approach. It has delicately balanced programs designed to increase the number of intact families while, through its Family Life Center, it also reaches out to disrupted families in the community.
Churches, Synagogues, and the Balance of Work and Family

Sixth, religious institutions should address one of the major sources of strain on families—the tensions between family needs and the demands of paid work. Mothers have joined fathers in the work force, the average workweek has been extended, parents spend less time with children (the "parenting deficit"), and married couples spend less time with each other. Clearly, it takes time and energy to create an equal-regard family with parents guiding children into an ever-deepening dialogue with them, their faith traditions, and the wider society. We propose a model not exceeding a total 60-hour workweek for a mother and father with young children. The compensated working hours could be divided between husband and wife as 30-30, 40-20, or 20-40. There is evidence that the happiest families are those in which both husband and wife have some paid employment, share household chores and child care, and work less than two full-time positions. Churches, in their theologies of work and leisure, should support such arrangements.

If the equal-regard family, however, is to become a reality within the context of modern work demands, it will need to gain the skills of intersubjective communication (the ability to see and feel issues from the partner's point of view) required to define what is just and equitable. Church-sponsored day-care centers, support groups for working parents, church-sponsored baby-sitting networks, church-sponsored nursing support for parents of sick children—dozens of programs are possible. But more fundamental than any of these is a theory that sanctions the balance of work and parenting and the development of the communicative skills required to iron out the practical arrangements of everyday life.
Religious Institutions and Divorce

Seventh, religious institutions should do more to address the reality of divorce. While religious groups differ on the question of divorce, they all have tended to be either cautious, or genuinely restrictive, about this issue. Despite trends in secular society toward the easy acceptance of divorce, churches and synagogues should continue to be conservative in their attitudes on the dissolution of marriage. However, this does not necessarily mean an absolute prohibition of divorce.

We recommend four strategies that local churches can use to address the reality of divorce. First, prevention is the best cure. The best divorce prevention is extensive marital preparation of the kind envisioned by our proposal for a Community Marriage Policy and our suggestions for early church-based and school-based education for marriage and family.

Second, both church-based and secular marriage counseling should begin with a humane bias toward preserving marriages. One of our team has written with reference to both the counseling pastor and the secular psychotherapist: "As therapists, we are moral consultants, not just psycho-social consultants. We should not try to impose our beliefs on undecided clients, but we can advocate in an open manner when appropriate." Counseling that presents theological and moral reasons for the importance of preserving marriage is entirely justifiable as long as it is not coercive, does not override the decision-making integrity of the individuals involved, does not suppress important dynamic and communicative issues that the couple should face, and does not ignore abuse, violence, and addiction. The idea that divorce is generally not good for children and that couples not involved in physical and mental violence may be able to learn to communicate and love one another again must be taken seriously in the counseling of churches. Recent social science research by Paul Amato and
Alan Booth in their acclaimed *A Generation at Risk* (1997) indicates that only one third of all divorces are preceded by high conflict of the kind destructive to children. This raises the question as to whether the less destructive remaining two thirds might have avoided divorce had they found the proper help.21

Third, synagogues and churches should love, minister to, and sustain the divorced and their children. In spite of what worshiping communities do to discourage them, divorces will occur, although we hope with less regularity. Churches and synagogues must also make a special effort to support children of divorced parents, whose experience of the divorce may be quite different from that of their parents and whose journey through childhood may be different from many other children. The religious communities that simultaneously promote a marriage culture, discourage a divorce culture, and promote a culture of care for the divorced, remarried, and their children,22 are the ones that make full use of their theological traditions to hold authentic ideals together with a charitable sense of human weakness. Furthermore, these congregations help disrupted families create the networks—what sociologists call "social capital"—necessary for the support and enrichment of all families, especially those disrupted by transitions. Finally, churches and synagogues, even at the local level, should join the national discussion about whether our divorce laws should be revised.

**Churches, Synagogues, and Fathers**

Eight, churches and synagogues should do more to address the growing absence of fathers from their children. If the movement toward father absence is to be abated, nearly every aspect of civil society must address it and religious institutions should take the lead. There is much to learn from
black churches about restoring responsible fatherhood. The 10,000 member Apostolic Church of God on Chicago's south side routinely and vigorously addresses father absence and discusses the positive contributions to children that fathers make. Another nearby church does all these things but with more consciousness of African themes. This church has rites-of-passage ceremonies for both teenage boys and girls that combine African themes and Christian meanings in defining adult male-female relations. It has an "adopt-a-school" program in which adult males relate to a neighborhood school, give courses on "responsible living," and help guide male students away from gangs and sexual involvement and toward their studies.

II. Critical Familism, Religion, and Public Policy: Beyond Value Neutrality

Churches and synagogues should become involved in public policy beyond the natural confines of their memberships and immediate communities. We hold that public policy should not and cannot maintain "value neutrality" on family matters. Furthermore, family issues cannot be solved strictly through technical and economic interventions by state and market. A critical familism is first a result of cultural visions--indeed religio-cultural visions--that come from the institutions of civil society, especially churches and synagogues. Nonetheless, economic measures from both state and market are also important for families.
The Economic Support of Families

Religious institutions should explicitly support several economic strategies that can help families. First, the tax structure should be far more family-friendly than it is. If the child exemption on federal income tax returns had kept pace with its value when first enacted in 1948, it now would be equivalent to $8,200 rather than its current $2,500. Second, we applaud the recent adoption by Congress of a $500 per child tax credit. But it may need to be more. The 1991 report to the President of the National Commission on Children recommended a refundable tax credit of $1,000, and William Mattox of the Family Research Council has called for a $1,500 credit. Third, we support the earned income tax credit for poor families that is generally believed to have contributed to the stability of low-income working parents. Fourth, the so-called marriage tax penalty—the fact that married couples often pay considerably more in taxes than they would if single—is both a real and symbolic assault on the social value of marriage and should be removed.

Then there is the issue of welfare. We agree with those who argue that government's first obligation, at this moment in history, is to strengthen the institutions of civil society—churches, clubs, community organizations, voluntary service organizations—to carry more of our welfare system for families. But, at the same time, government must be involved in welfare to assure consistency, sufficient funding, and universality of some very fundamental programs.

In this statement, we will not debate whether such goals should have been realized in a revised national welfare plan or through one administered by each of the 50 states, as established by the 1996 welfare reform. Instead, we are concerned about an issue in workfare, whether administered by states or by the national government. In keeping with our proposals that married couples with young
children should not work in wage employment more than a total of 60 hours a week between them, we propose that single welfare parents with young children not be required to work over 25-30 hours per week, roughly five to six hours a day.28 Even this time should be undergirded with state-supported child and medical care. The idea of thirty-hour working weeks for single parents and 60-hour working weeks for married parents has been tried with success. For two decades, from 1930 to 1950, W. K. Kellogg ran his Corn Flakes plant in Battle Creek, Michigan on a six-hour day. Recent research based on interviews with older employees reveals a high level of employee satisfaction with the arrangement.29

New welfare reform efforts should raise this model to public consciousness. A critical familism rewards family formation, gives social supports to those seeking gender equality, encourages paternal responsibility, discourages family welfare dependency, equips people for work, supports them with child care and medical care, and makes these policies as consistent as possible throughout the various states.

A Family-Friendly Workplace

Second, churches and synagogues should urge policymakers to promote a family-friendly workplace. Some people advocate minimizing work strains with tax reductions that lower the need for families to have two incomes, thereby giving parents more time with their families. Many commentators argue that these proposals simply support the nineteenth-century model of an industrial family with its wage-earning father and domestic mother. President Clinton has tried to solve family-work strains with proposals such as better job conditions for parents, more flex time, an extension
of the Family and Medical Leave Act, twenty-four hours a year for parents to keep school appointments and take children to doctors, portable family insurance, health insurance for poor families, compensatory time off in lieu of overtime pay, and new federal child care programs. These proposals acknowledge women's desire to work and the realities of the postmodern family. We support both strategies—tax breaks and supports for family-friendly work conditions.

But these strategies do not go far enough. To implement the 60-hour workweek, state and market must cooperate in creating the new 20- and 30-hour a week positions necessary for families to arrange the right combinations. These jobs should provide retirement and medical benefits. This raises the need for a basic universal health plan. We do not presume to settle here the best way to provide universal, cheap, and equitable health coverage for all workers, whether employed twenty, thirty, or forty hours a week. But to create flexible work arrangements that give parents sufficient time with their children, some such system of health care is required.

Child Care

Third, although there is a need for more and better care for the children of employed parents, some of the proposals we advocate should mitigate that need. If parents limit their employment outside of the home to 60 hours each week, fathers and mothers will have more time for child care. If the tax breaks listed above went into effect, couples will work fewer hours, have more time for child care, yet be able to afford better quality care because their overall income will improve.

Nonetheless, government initiatives to stimulate the development of more affordable quality child care are necessary. Government should invest in training and upgrading child-care workers, stimulate
the development of minimum standards of care, encourage child-care provisions in parent's place of employment, and offer more flex time and home-based employment. Government operated child-care facilities eventually may be necessary but should not be the country's first approach to meeting the needs of families.

**State-Supported Marriage Education**

Fourth, public policy should provide for marriage and family education. As we saw above, the state is already participating in marriage education, mainly through university-level courses on the family and elementary and high school sex-education classes. Much of this instruction is deficient on marriage and family and some is directly misleading. Although marriage and family life should not be reduced completely to simple public health issues, at this level alone the state has every right to promote marriage and family education. Other countries, such as Australia, sponsor marriage and family education courses. Sometimes these programs function through existing institutions of civil society. They emphasize communications skills, conflict resolution, and parenting skills. At the level of junior high and high school education, such programs would not be addressed to couples but would emphasize education in intersubjective communication skills that, later in life, would prove important for sustaining marriage and family.
Mothers, Fathers, and Public Policy

Fifth, religious institutions should support public policies that help both mothers and fathers with the new challenges they face. We advocate measures that go beyond finding ways to force deadbeat fathers to support their children. We agree that measures should be used to garnish wages, use federal and state income taxes to collect delinquent payments, and compel responsibility by canceling auto or professional licenses. But such policies, although necessary, are basically punitive.

The state should become a moral and financial partner of the initiatives in civil society to promote better fatherhood. Take, for instance, Charles Ballard's widely recognized National Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Development, which receives some state support. Ballard's program is designed to reunite fathers with their children, help fathers support their children financially, and foster in these men an attitude of respect for former girlfriends or wives. Counselor-educators (called Sages) visit alienated fathers in their homes, help establish paternity, and model responsible fatherhood themselves. Other programs receive moral support from government even though they get no direct financial help. The National Fatherhood Initiative was founded during the autumn of 1994 with bipartisan support from Democrats Al Gore and William Galston as well as Republican William Bennett. It addresses the growing absence of fathers from their children by distributing information on the importance of fathers and the social costs of father absence. Ken Canfield's National Center for Fathering is an older hands-on program with considerable grassroots impact. Both organizations have more general audiences than Promise Keepers, and their messages are less laden with the language of a particular religious tradition. Both programs work intensively with religious organizations.
The situation of mothers in contemporary society has been very different from that of fathers. Fewer mothers have fled families, but may instead feel trapped by them. Even today many women feel that they must choose between paid employment or time with their infants, a choice that often leads mothers to leave the work force and fall behind in job and career advancement. This predicament has led economists Richard and Grandon Gill to propose what they call a Parental Bill of Rights. Just as American men were given the GI Bill to help them make up for lost career time after serving in the armed forces during World War II, so should parents who take time to care for their children receive child-care payments, modest annual child allowances, job training, education, and other protections so that the years spent caring for their infants will not cause long-term financial, job, and career losses. The authors estimate that this Parental Bill of Rights would cost citizens no more than $200 per capita in 1990 dollars.

Divorce and Public Policy

Sixth, religious institutions should back the revision of divorce laws. Since the advent of no-fault divorce in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the marriage contract has become weaker than most business contracts. In many states, it can be broken unilaterally, and the dissenting partner has little recourse. From a both a philosophical and theological perspective, we hold that marriage agreements should be more like covenants, i.e., binding agreements between a husband and wife, between them and the wider society, and, for the religious, between these two individuals and a transcendent power as they conceive it. Such multi-dimensional agreements should not be broken with ease. In reality, marriages should be conceived as both contracts and covenants. The system recently enacted in
Louisiana which gives couples the option of choosing no-fault marriage contracts or more binding covenant marriages is a sound and non-coercive way to reestablish the legal seriousness of marriage.

The members of this Task Force do not agree as to whether the present system of no-fault divorces should be rejected completely by the several states. We do agree, however, that in cases where couples with children want divorce by mutual consent, they should undergo required counseling on parenting after divorce and on the potential impact of the divorce on the children. Furthermore, couples should be required to develop a long-term financial plan to cover the needs of children until they are 18 and in some cases older. This plan would have to be accepted by the court before the divorcing couple could begin dividing property between them.

Some members of the Task Force believe that the assignment of fault may not be necessary if waiting periods, required counseling, and long-term financial plans for child support are part of the proposal. However this is decided, we believe that marriage, even before the law, increasingly should be seen as a public covenant vital for both individuals, children, and the common good.

**The Media, Public Policy, and Civil Society**

Seventh, the institutions of civil society and churches should join with government and the market to launch a critique of media images of marriage and family. The emphasis should be on providing criticism and well-grounded evaluations, not censorship. Nor should criticism be voiced in ways that obscure the good that educational television can do and the positive images that some programs and movies convey. But critiques of the unhealthy aspects of the media should be relentless, should come from many different voices, and must be heard.
From one perspective, the media are an expression of the overflow of cost-benefit, individualistic, and consumption-oriented patterns of the market that increasingly pervade our society. We are not against the market, but we do believe that the rational-choice and ethical-egoist motives of the market can and should be restrained by an ethics of equal regard for persons within and outside of families. This applies as well to a responsible critique of the family images found in movies, television, popular music, and popular journalism.

Rather than portraying the media, however, as single-mindedly seditious,\textsuperscript{37} we follow Kay Hymowitz's analysis of the dialectical relation of the media and social attitudes.\textsuperscript{38} She points out that the values governing marriage and family have changed due to a variety of economic and cultural trends. The media, she explains, do not by themselves create these changes, but they exploit and exacerbate them. Furthermore, in order to sell movies, TV series, and consumer products, the media use shock and excitement to create interest and viewing addiction to the more titillating aspects of these changes. The media give a stamp of normality to behavior and conditions once thought to be immoral and still deserving of analysis and moral criticism.

Censorship is not the answer. A new critical familism is the answer. But this familism and marriage culture should be supported by multiple voices critiquing and sometimes boycotting the media—voices no longer afraid of the charge of moralism. So far, the groups willing to do this are few in number. Such criticism is generally limited to the important reality of violence; addressing family and marriage issues seems to be more difficult.\textsuperscript{39} More needs to be done on both questions. The kind of criticism we have in mind is found in a long document by Roger Cardinal Mahony, archbishop of Los Angeles, in which he publicly urged the entertainment industry to "adopt general guidelines for the depiction of violence, sex, family, and the treatment of women."\textsuperscript{40} Recent steps
taken to adopt an industry-administered rating system that will later be reinforced by the parent-controlled V-chip may help. Watchdog organizations such as the National Institute on Media and the Family should be encouraged.

But until a new artistic sensibility informed by a critical familism emerges, these suggestions will inevitably constitute partial measures. Just as Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala challenged Hollywood to live up to its creative potential by inventing stories not featuring people smoking cigarettes, so too should multiple voices challenge the media to tell more truthful and positive stories about human love, sexuality, marriage, and families.

Conclusion

There is no single cure for the family crisis in our society. There is no magic bullet. We have listed over a dozen strategies that religious institutions, voluntary associations, government, and market should take in cooperation with one another. The power of these strategies will become apparent not when viewed in isolation from one another, but when they become orchestrated into a new gestalt--a new critical familistic culture with accompanying social supports.
ENDNOTES

1. This position paper was adapted, with extensive suggestions from the members of the Communitarian Family Task Force, from chapter 11 of From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate, by Don Browning, Bonnie Miller McLemore, Pamela Couture, Bernie Lyon, and Robert Franklin (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997). This is the summary book of the 11-book Religion, Culture, and Family Series produced by a research project located at the University of Chicago and financed by a generous grant from the Division of Religion of the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

2. For a discussion of the Aristotelian roots of the concept of subsidiarity, see From Culture Wars to Common Ground, pp. 238-244, 363. For a more proximate source of subsidiarity in Roman Catholic thinking, see Pope Leo XIII, "Rerum Novarum," Proclaiming Justice and Peace: Papal Documents from Rerum Novarum through Centesimus Annus (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991 (1891)).

3. The philosophical and theological grounds for the ethic of equal regard is extensively developed in the introduction and chapters 4, 5, and 10 of From Culture Wars to Common Ground. Chapter 8 also gives a discussion of the concept of subsidiarity and demonstrates how both American Roman Catholicism, the thought of evangelical Ralph Reed, and the social philosophy of Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan all have been influenced by this idea.


5. As reported by Judge James Sheridan and Michael McManus at the "Smart Marriages: Happy Families" conference on July 10, 1997, Crystal Gateway Marriott Hotel, Washington, D.C.


7. Ibid., p. 18.


10. Ibid., p. 267.


13. One of the best videos for high school education for marriage and family is prepared and distributed by the American Bar Association. It brings legal perspectives on marriage together with insights from the new psycho-education movement. See Partners: An Interactive Televised Course (Chicago, IL: ABA Family Law Section).

14. There are few careful studies of the values clarification approach to sex education that show it to be successful. This is an approach in which teachers take no stand on moral issues. Decisions are left to students about how to use information. See Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "The Failure of Sex Education," Atlantic Monthly (October 1994), pp. 55-80.

15. For information on PREPARE, write PREPARE/ENRICH, P.O. Box 190, Minneapolis, MN 55440-0190, and on PREP, write Professor Howard Markman, PREP, Inc., 1780 South Bellaire Street, Suite 621, Denver, Colorado 80222.


22. The Willow Creek Community Church, a megachurch in the northern suburbs of Chicago, is an example of a church with a strong marriage culture that promotes intact families but also has a wide range of services for the divorced, single parents, stepfamilies, and singles.


32. Brochure provided by The National Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Development, p. 2. To contact, write the National Institute For Responsible Fatherhood and Family Development, 8555 Hough Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44106-1545.

33. Taken from a brochure titled "Creating a Father-Friendly Neighborhood: 10 Things You Can Do," (Lancaster, PA.: National Fatherhood Initiative).

34. For information, write the National Center for Fathering, P.O. Box 413888, Kansas City, MO 64141.


The Communitarian Network, a membership organization, is a coalition of individuals and organizations who have come together to shore up the moral, social, and political environment.

*For more information, visit our website! <http://www.gwu.edu/~ccps> Our site includes other position papers, updates on our activities, a complete publications catalogue, our communitarian bibliography, information on The Responsive Community quarterly, membership information, and more!

*You can sign up to receive our free electronic newsletter, The Communitarian Update! Email the message "subscribe comnet," followed by your name, to listserv@hermes.circ.gwu.edu, or email us at comnet@gwu.edu, and we’ll subscribe you.

*Consider becoming an Associate of The Communitarian Network. For $50, you will receive discounted subscription rates for The Responsive Community quarterly, featuring prominent political leaders and scholars on policy and community initiatives, discounts on books and other Communitarian Network publications listed below and on the following page.

*Recent communitarian books from The Communitarian Network include:
  Repentance: A Comparative Perspective, edited by Amitai Etzioni and David Carney
  Community Justice: An Emerging Field, edited by David Karp
  National Parks: Rights and the Common Good, by Francis N. Lovett

To order or receive more information, please call toll free:

1-800-245-7460

or contact us at:
The Communitarian Network
2130 H St. NW, Suite 714J
Washington, DC 20052
(202) 994-7997  Fax (202) 994-1606