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Mapping the Landscape of Compassionate Conservatism: Analyzing the Moral Vocabulary of a Religious and Political Discourse

Brian M. Lowe*

Abstract: Since its emergence in 1998, the term "compassionate conservatism" has drawn media attention as to how it synthesized religious conceptions of charity and service with American conservatism. This paper utilizes the moral vocabularies strategy (Lowe, 2002; 2006) to examine the "compassionate conservatism" discourse as articulated in the documents in the Compassionate Conservatism Archive at the White House web site. This analysis focuses on examining what specific moral claims and policies were promoted by the Bush Administration as "compassionate conservatism" in order to construct an ideal type of what constitutes this emerging form of political and religious discourse.

Key Terms: Moral vocabularies, compassionate conservatism, political discourse, religious discourse, moral claims.

Introduction

Since it appeared on the national scene in 1998 in the speeches of Republican presidential candidate and Texas Governor George W. Bush, “compassionate conservatism” has evoked skepticism, curiosity, measured praise and enthusiastic support. Proponents of “compassionate conservatism” perceive this phrase as encompassing such conservative virtues as volunteerism and local governments acting without constraint, with the “compassionate” goals of alleviating poverty and improving schools; critics of “compassionate conservatism” characterize this form of discourse as an attempt to make potentially controversial conservative policy initiatives, such as reducing welfare payments, more palatable by making them appear “kinder and gentler” . An ambivalent reaction comes from traditional allies, who dislike the term “compassionate” because it connotes that conservatives are not kind or sympathetic. The “compassionate conservative” discourse was an integral part of Bush’s campaign rhetoric and his effort to typify (Best, editor, 1995) himself as a “uniter, not a divider.”

The question remains, what is “compassionate conservatism”, and how it is understood? “Compassionate conservatism” originated domestically as an alternative means of alleviating poverty and drug abuse through religiously-grounded institutions that could not only ameliorate the immediate conditions of poverty and drug abuse, but the root causes as well, which were often religious in nature (see Olasky, 2000; Jacobs, 2000). Besides being able to minister to spiritual needs, what characterized “compassionate conservatism” was an emphasis on accountability that promoters claimed was lacking in traditional welfare-state programs. Sympathetic pundits, like David Brooks, are unclear as to what “compassionate conservatism” constituted. In his 20

March 2004 *New York Times* op-ed article “Too Quiet on the Home Front”, Brooks states that “compassionate conservatism” began vigorously, but has withered during the war on terror: “Compassionate conservatism turned out to be a thin issue, obliterated in the heat generated by global conflict.” Michael Kinsley argued in “The State of Compassion” on 22 January 2004 in *Slate* that while there was considerable confusion over what “compassionate conservatism” constituted, it was clearly distinct from the conservative discourse of the 1990s. Kinsley argued that statements in President Bush’s 2004 State of the Union, such as support for mentorship programs for prisoners re-entering society, would not have been imaginable coming from Republicans only a few years ago. However, Kinsley contends that the mix of “the antigovernment rhetoric”, tax cuts and “the bully pulpit” did not merge into a coherent governing philosophy. Neither writer, however, comprehensively defines what compassionate conservatism

This paper sociologically examines “compassionate conservatism” as a form of ideological discourse utilizing the “moral vocabularies” strategy (Lowe, 2002; 2006). This strategy is used to emphasize the constituent elements from other ideologies and cultural formations (such as religion) that are recombined to create a new form of ideological discourse. In doing so, the moral vocabulary strategy clarifies what understandings and concepts are dominant within a particular form of discourse which may be constantly deployed in order to typify and to support claims. This strategy is also used here to explore how a form of ideological discourse can be drastically transformed when it is used to typify and comprehend circumstances radically different than the social and political forces under which it evolved. In the case of “compassionate conservatism”, part of the purpose of this inquiry is to examine how a civil religious form of discourse

that evolved within religious and politically conservative circles in the United States can be deployed to typify and comprehend stateless international Islamic terrorists. This transformation occurred beginning in 2002 when Bush attempted to interweave communications central to compassionate conservatism – such as the importance of supporting “faith-based initiatives” with federal financial support – with the international war on terror. This raises the question; can a form of ideological discourse be stretched to accommodate vastly new demands than what it was previously intended?

Olasky (2000) states that the first public use of the term “compassionate conservatism” was as a pejorative by Vernon Jordan in 1981, who “attacked the Reagan administration for purportedly not showing it (Olasky, 2000: 9).” Olasky claims that it was subsequently used very infrequently – “...the phrase appeared an average of twice a year during the 1980s, but six times a year from 1991 through 1994 and thirty-seven times a year from 1995 through October 1998” – and became associated with Texas Governor George W. Bush in August 1997 through a CNN broadcast (Olasky, 2000: 11). After Bush’s 1998 reelection, the “number of Lexis-Nexis stories containing that word zoomed to an annualized rate of 2,040 for the last two months of 1998, 3, 164 for the first half of 1999, and 4,455 between July and October 1999” (Olasky, 2000: 12). Olasky is a useful source for examining the origins of compassionate conservatism because he “has been the dominant influence on Bush in this area” (Singer, 2004: 28), and is generally noted as the primary progenitor of compassionate conservatism as a sustained ideology (in 2000 Olasky published a book of the same name with the foreword by George W. Bush). (The only other significant claim to this title is Joseph J. Jacobs, author of *The Compassionate Conservative: Assuming Responsibility and Respecting Human Dignity*

(2000). Neither text refers to the other author; nor does Jacobs (2000) make any reference to George W. Bush). Olasky's *Compassionate Conservatism* (2000) is his account of his travels with his son Daniel to 46 charitable organizations in Texas, Indianapolis, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and Minneapolis, many of which are presented as exemplary organizations whose effectiveness could be bolstered by federal support of their efforts -- in sum, who would benefit from a federal government that practiced compassionate conservatism.

Utilizing the speeches placed in the "Compassionate Conservatism Archive" at the White House's web site, this paper constructs a variety of "ideal type" of "compassionate conservatism" based on these documents. Weber created the methodology of utilizing ideal types in order to facilitate comparative analyses between similar types of phenomena, such as "bureaucracies". Gerth and Mills (in Weber, 1958) noted that Weber's use of ideal types was intended to facilitate more "logically controlled and unambiguous conceptions, which are thus more removed from historical reality" (Gerth and Mills, editors, in Weber 1958: 59), which was in keeping with Weber's concept of sociology seeking "to formulate type concepts and generalized uniformities of empirical process" (Weber, 1978: 19). In sum, the intention of an "ideal type" in this case is to construct an ideology or form of discourse for the purposes of analysis as a form of claimsmaking, as opposed to a more grounded approach intended to analyze to what degree the claims made by a person or group were or were not actually carried out.

In order to create this pure "ideal type" of "compassionate conservatism", I analyzed all of the documents that were archived in the "Compassionate Conservatism Archive" at the White House web site (which has been removed sometimes between 2005 and this

writing in 2006). My intentions was to avoid biases that may have come from either supporters (such as Olasky, who has promoted this discourse for several years prior to its sustained national exposure) or critics, and instead examine “compassionate conservatism” as a form of civil religious and political discourse promoted at the national level. In addition to all the documents cited directly, I also utilized four documents that were also linked to the site (President George W. Bush’s Inaugural Address, and three speeches given at schools as part of Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” initiative: “President Bush Speaks to Elementary Students in Milwaukee”, “President Visits Rufus King High School in Milwaukee”, and “President Visits Logan High School in Lacrosse”.) In addition to these documents, the sampling universe included all the documents within the “Compassionate Conservatism Archive”:

- “President Promotes Compassionate Conservatism” (April 30, 2002)
- “President Joins “No Child Left Behind Tour Across America”” (May 8, 2002)
- “President Lauds Supreme Court School Choice Decision” (July 1, 2002)
- “President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform” (July 2, 2002)
- “President Hosts Conference on Minority Homeownership” (October 15, 2002)
- “President Visits D.C. Food Bank” (December 19, 2002)
- “President Commends Senate Passage of Faith-Based Legislation” (April 9, 2003)

- “President Speaks with Faith-Based and Community Leaders” (January 15, 2004)
- “President’s Remarks at Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Conference” (March 3, 2004)

This paper is not, therefore, either an attempt to critique the effectiveness of various “compassionate conservative” initiatives, nor is it an attempt to create a genealogy (for example, see Foucault, 1977) of the historical and social forces that created the “compassionate conservative” discourse. It is not intended to be a metaanalysis of those sources that have already critiqued “compassionate conservatism” on a variety of grounds (Conason, 2003; Ivins and Dubose, 2000; Miller, 2001; Alterman and Green, 2004). Rather, it will provide a synopsis of “compassionate conservatism” based upon the documents that the George W. Bush Administration has cited as being most representative of this form of discourse and is intended to put this synopsis in the context of moral-claimsmaking.

Compassionate Conservatism and Civil Religion

American political discourse, especially presidential discourse, has been infused with religious symbols, ideals, and other references (e.g., “In God We Trust”) collectively known as “civil religion”. While the idea of “civil religion” as a concept that unites a population through a few transcendent principles proscribed as “social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject” (Rousseau, 1988: 135), Bellah first cited the American variant of this phenomena in his 1967 essay, “Civil Religion in America.” In this essay, Bellah (1970) cited the historical tendency in political communications aimed at a national audience (including speeches given by George

Washington, Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy) to utilize transcendent references. Cynthia Toolin (1983) has demonstrated that Bellah's sampling was not haphazard or anecdotal: in 49 inaugural addresses of American Presidents, she found that "only 10.4% (of the 49 addresses) lacked a reference to a deity in some form" (Toolin, 1983: 41-43). Beyond the tendency for American Presidents to utilize "civil religious" language, there has been the American tendency to utilize religious understandings of political figures and/or events. Schwartz (1987) cited Gustav de Beaumont's observation he made regarding the American veneration of George Washington: "...Washington, in America, *is not a man but a God*" (cited in Schwartz, 1987: 195). In a similar fashion, Schwartz (1991) also noted how the assassination of Lincoln was quickly transfigured – apparently spontaneously and without coordination – him into a religious figure whose killing became a martyrdom (a process undoubtedly aided by the fact that the first Sunday after Lincoln's assassination when eulogies and sermons swept the United States was Easter Sunday (Schwartz, 1991: 350)) and further served to reframe (Goffman, 1974) the American Civil War into a conflict with deeply religious overtones. This trend continued well into the twentieth century, as in the famed "I Have a Dream" speech by Martin Luther King Jr, which combines Biblical imagery with references to American ideals of equality.

The synthesis of political communications with religious references, symbols, and so forth has a long tradition in the United States and must be considered in that particular historical trajectory. This reality also raises the question of where within the civil religious tradition does "compassionate conservatism" fall? Is it utilized in the nineteenth century style of combining national goals with a belief in Providence, as was the case in

the writings of figures as diverse as Jefferson, Emerson, and Whitman, or does “compassionate conservatism” attempt a new project of linking religious concerns with traditionally American political objectives, like reducing the role of government in assisting the poor?

Sociological Construction of Moral Vocabularies

A moral vocabulary strategy will identify, examine and analyze the moral claims and understandings made in the context of a subculture, social movement or other ideologically-driven entity. Through creating a comprehensive overview of moral claims and understandings, the motive(s) (Mills, 1940), “interpretative orientations” (Snow et al, 1986), and “world view” (Geertz, 1973; Berger and Luckmann, 1966) may become recognizable and coherent to non-members. The following is a brief synopsis of a more comprehensive analysis of this strategy (Lowe, 2002, 2006).

A moral vocabulary is a collection of moral resources that have been synthesized into some collective structure that provides forms of moral claimsmaking, argumentation, practices, symbols, signs, code words and other meaning signifiers. The moral resources that appear within a moral vocabulary are from a specific cultural and/or historical context, but whose meaning may have been altered or transformed (such as the symbol of the fasces appearing in Italian Fascist propaganda and American currency) and may be shared by numerous widely disparate groups. For example, a historically renowned figure like Thomas Jefferson may simultaneously be cited by supporters of religious liberty, libertarians favoring reducing the size of government and advocates promoting public education. In each case, Jefferson is evoked as a moral resource to bolster the credibility of the moral claims, without necessarily uniting the groups in question over other

concerns. The use of the moral resources that the adherents and/or carriers of a moral vocabulary employ allows for “open coding” that emphasizes the concepts and such employed by respondents in order not to distort analysis by relying on second-order concepts that may not reflect the understandings of the group in question (see Strauss, 1987).

While a moral vocabulary may unite a variety of moral resources in an innovative fashion, these moral resources tend to form into a status hierarchy, with certain moral resources and claims at the core playing dominant roles, and others at the periphery playing less significant roles. This status hierarchy of moral resources is analytically significant for three reasons: it provides a degree of meaningful coherence for adherents, it suggests what moral claims and understandings are most likely to be articulated by a specific group that promotes a given moral vocabulary and it also partially suggests to what degree a moral resource may be accepted or rejected by the host society. In terms of meaningful coherence, moral vocabularies offer a “world view” for adherents that not only allows for interpretation, but also for action. In other words, a moral vocabulary will explain for adherents why some event did or did not occur, but also what course(s) of action are appropriate. For example, in discussing the emergence of the white supremacy ideology articulated by William Pierce of the National Alliance, Griffin (2001) contends that Pierce relied upon racially essentialist views of “white culture” (that artistic and cultural achievements by whites reflected the essential nature of whites) and that Jews played a dominant role in the continued delusions and exploitations of whites. In keeping with these essentialist understandings and concern of Jews as the primary exploiters of whites, it is understandable that Pierce strongly advocated white separatism and

combating Jewish influences upon whites. Moreover, the moral resources that are dominant within the moral vocabulary of the National Alliance suggest why it has apparently failed to find additional adherents: a moral vocabulary that stresses an essentialist view of race and culture is unlikely to find high levels of open support in a larger society that is characterized by a quasi-egalitarian ethos.

Griffin's account is also useful in illustrating another aspect of moral vocabularies, what Bourdieu termed the "economy of logic", when an idea is deployed routinely in a variety of contexts. Gender as a concept can be used to refer to biological differences, personality types (e.g., "tom boys"), occupations (e.g., "men's work" and "women's work") and even varieties of popular culture (e.g., films that are "chick flicks" or television shows that are intended for "the guys"). The relevance of this form of "cultural bricolage" (Balkin, 1998: 32-35) is that it suggests that moral vocabularies will have a tendency to deploy their core moral resources in order to explain numerous types of phenomena. In the case of Griffin's (2001) account of the racial ideology of the National Alliance, "race" is used constantly to explain differences in intelligence between populations, national decline, and even cultural and artistic styles. While such reinforcement may bolster the moral vocabulary by illustrating to adherents how important a particular claim or understanding is, this does not mean that the moral vocabulary is useful in explaining events in broadly recognizable and/or accepted terms. In the case of race, numerous other explanations have been made for the aforementioned differences that completely discount "race". In sum, the constant utilization of certain claims, understandings, and themes may provide a coherent world view, but not necessarily an optimally useful one.

Once a moral vocabulary has emerged and become established to some degree, it generates meaning for adherents in part through rejecting information that is damaging and/or threatening to the core moral resources. In sum, the meaning that is produced by the moral vocabulary is “associated with order – with a patterned cognitive structure that permits anticipation of future developments, so that perceptions and expectations are not surprising” (Edelman, 1971: 31). Therefore, a moral vocabulary will encourage adherents to reject, ignore, or at the very least downplay, information that may weaken either the primary moral claims or understandings of a moral vocabulary and/or its primary units of analysis and explanatory focus. For example, adherents of a free market ideology are likely to ignore, discredit, or discount evidence that suggests that government regulation of the marketplace may be beneficial for some or all involved in the market.

Analysis of Compassionate Conservatism

The moral vocabulary of compassionate conservatism has been promoted as a synthesis of philosophy and policy strategy that unites a conservative political orientation with a compassionate disposition. The following quotation, which begins the “Fact Sheet” about “Compassionate Conservatism”, suggests this union of perspective and pragmatism as stated by President Bush: “I call my philosophy and approach compassionate conservatism. It is compassionate to actively help our fellow citizens in need. It is conservative to insist on responsibility and results. And with this hopeful approach, we will make a real difference in people’s lives”. (Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page one). The same document emphasizes that compassionate conservatism is the “theory and **practice**”(Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page one)(emphasis in original) that will be defined by President Bush in a speech given

on 30 April 2002 and will be the “vision” that “guides his Administration” (Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page one).

As articulated in the compassionate conservatism “Fact Sheet”, this “vision” emphasizes the role of “citizens” who are assisted by government to “build lives of their own “(Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page two) and the need for initiatives that “**effectively tackles some of society’s assignments – educating our children, fighting poverty at home and aiding poor countries around the world** “(Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page two) (emphasis in original). Domestically the compassionate conservative vision combines assistance with effectiveness: “**It is compassionate to actively help our citizens in need. It is conservative to insist on accountability and results**” (Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page two) (emphasis in original). “Accountability” is a significant aspect of this vision, as the domestic initiatives proposed here all contain some mechanism of determining the effectiveness of specific initiatives. The importance of accountability is also noteworthy in the assertion that the “aim of this philosophy is not to spend less money, or to spend more money, but to spend on what works. The measure of compassion is more than good intentions – it is good results. Sympathy is not enough – we need solutions” (Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page two).

The “Fact Sheet” establishes the parameters of the compassionate conservative vision in domestic agendas that evoke the involvement of local citizens, communities, “faith-based” groups and projects, and a financially supporting and cooperative federal government. In the case of “**Educating our Children**”, readers are informed that “Compassionate conservatism places great hope and confidence in public education” and

therefore “The President’s new education reform is compassionate because it requires schools to meet new, high standards of performance in reading and math” (Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page two). What distinguishes the compassionate conservative approach from previous government mandates is that “The new reforms also give local schools and teachers the freedom, resources, and training to meet their needs (Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page two).” In sum, the compassionate conservative vision unites the goal of high standards with the flexibility of localities to meet these standards: “It is conservative to let local communities chart their own path to excellence. It is compassionate to make sure that no child is left behind” (Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page two) (emphasis in original).

The compassionate conservative vision of “Fighting Poverty at Home” was characterized by a larger degree of traditional conservatism that emphasized the previous deleterious government-based approach to poverty. The “Fact Sheet” supports the alterations of federal welfare policies that occurred in 1996, as these reforms weakened welfare that was “once a static and destructive way of life” and have instead contributed to former welfare recipients finding employment: “Millions of Americans once on welfare are finding that a job is more than a source of income – it is also a source of dignity. By encouraging work, we practice compassion” (Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page two) (emphasis in original).

Besides lauding the recent changes to welfare, the original contribution to welfare from the vision of compassionate conservatism is the emphasis on the roles that “charities, community groups and faith-based institutions” may play in combating poverty in partnership with government “(Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page

two). The “Fact Sheet” stresses that government should “promote” the work of these organizations, not regard them as rivals, and appreciate those such religiously-grounded organizations “which often inspire life-changing faith in a way that government never should” (Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page two). ”The “Fact Sheet” does not address whether or not this proposed partnership between government and religiously-grounded organizations could be conceived as governmental promotion of specific religious beliefs.

The “Fact Sheet” establishes that the compassionate conservative vision is not purely domestic and extends internationally to impoverished countries. A “new compact for global development” is proposed which increases foreign aid for “core development assistance” by fifty percent in the “Millennium Challenge Account” (Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page two). The compassionate conservative distinction between the Millennium Challenge Account and previous efforts to support international development is the emphasis on accountability; the funds within the Millennium Challenge Account “can only be spent on nations that root out corruption, open their markets, respect human rights, and adhere to the rule of law” (Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page two). In keeping with the compassionate conservative vision, “When we help them we show our compassion, our values, and our belief in universal human dignity” (Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page two) (emphasis in original). The “Fact Sheet” does not elaborate how this approach will be different than previous efforts at funding international development that failed “often leaving behind more misery, poverty and corruption (Fact Sheet, Compassionate Conservatism, page two).”

The compassionate conservatism “Fact Sheet” is a synopsis of Bush’s “President Promotes Compassionate Conservatism” speech given on 30 April 2002 in San Jose California for the Commonwealth and the Churchill clubs. This speech establishes many of the same points as the “Fact Sheet”, and expands the domestic focus to include affordable health care policies for low income Americans, high environmental standards, a housing program that emphasized home ownership and private savings accounts for Social Security (President Promotes Compassionate Conservatism, page four). The “President Promotes Compassionate Conservatism” speech also connected these domestic initiatives with the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the ongoing war on terror:

In the last seven months, we’ve been tested, and the struggle of our time has revealed the spirit of our people. Since September the 11th, we have been the kind of nation our founders had in mind, a nation of strong and confident and self-governing people. And we’ve been the kind of nation our fathers and mothers defended in World War II; a great and diverse country, united by common dangers and by common resolve.

We in our time will defend our nation, and we will deliver our nation’s promise to all who seek it. In our war on terror, we are showing the world the strength of our country, and by our unity and tolerance and compassion, we will show the world the soul of our country (President Promotes Compassionate Conservatism, page five).

The pattern of intersecting compassionate conservatism domestically with an international war on terror continued throughout the rest of the articles archived in the Compassionate Conservative Archive.

Non-Religious Virtue references

In addition to moral resources that fall within traditional presidential references to God and religious belief as well as references of a pietistic nature (religious references that evoke personal religious experiences and belief in religious phenomena such as miracles) the moral vocabulary of compassionate conservatism contains numerous references to non-religious virtues. These virtues, many of which have been cited previously by conservative William Bennett in *The Book of Virtues* (1993), are described as qualities that are laudable for both personal and public conduct but are not necessarily rooted within a specific religious tradition. These virtue references include general citations to civic virtues “enduring ideals”, the “grandest ideal: unfolding American promise that everyone belongs, that everyone deserves a chance, that no insignificant person was ever born”, “commitment to principle with a concern for civility”, and “civility, the determined choice of trust over cynicism, of community over chaos (President Bush’s Inaugural Address, pages one and two).” In addition to these civic or collective virtues are several references to virtues within individuals including “good will”, “courage, compassion and character”, “duty” and “service” and “personal responsibility” (President Bush’s Inaugural Address, pages two and three).

In general, the association of personal conduct with societal outcomes is emphasized in non-religious virtues: “Public interests depend on private character, on civic duty and family bonds and basic fairness on uncounted, unhonored acts of decency

which give direction to our freedom” (President Bush’s Inaugural Address, page three). In the Inaugural address, Bush implicitly acknowledged that basing claims on “personal responsibility” could support claims that this was simply an effort to ignore broader social factors for explaining social problems through focusing on individuals. Perhaps to avoid such common critiques of neo-conservative social policies, the Inaugural Address introduced a synthesis of moral resources, connecting “personal responsibility” with “personal fulfillment”:

Encouraging personal responsibility is not a search for scapegoats, it is a call to conscience. And though it requires sacrifice, it brings a deeper fulfillment. We find the fullness of life not only in options, but in commitments. And we find that children and community are the commitments that set us free (President Bush’s Inaugural Address, page three).

In sum, this innovation is connecting positive emotions and feelings with virtuous conduct. Moreover, the Inaugural Address introduces another innovation of compassionate conservatism: that the negative emotions created by social problems like addiction must be addressed as well.

Quasi-Therapeutic Moral Resources

A significant aspect of compassionate conservatism is that emotional states are recognized as being concerns in themselves. For example, in “President Speaks with Faith-Based Community Leaders”, President Bush made several references to the negative emotions that many Americans experienced as a consequence of their situations, and how alleviating these negative emotions was a legitimate and laudable enterprise:

I'm at this church to talk about the importance of what we call a faith-based initiative. Really what I'm here to say is that in the land of plenty, we must recognize there are still people who hurt. In the land of plenty, there are people who search for the light, who simply want a chance to succeed and realize their God-given talents. And those of us who have been blessed with the opportunity to help must play to the strength of our country in order to help save lives. The strength of America is found in the hearts and souls of our fellow citizens. This country must not fear the influence of faith in the future of this country. We must welcome faith in order to make America a better place (President Speaks with Faith-Based and Community Leaders, page one).

Note how "people who hurt" is depicted as a concern in itself, and not simply as a consequence of more traditional social problems such as poverty. In the same speech, Bush establishes that not only do religious groups have traditional resources, such as volunteers, that may be utilized in addressing social problems, but they also have the essential religious element of faith:

Many of the problems that are facing our society are problems of the heart. Addiction is the problem of the heart – of the heart. I know – I told this story before. I was a drinker. I quit drinking because I changed my heart. I guess I was a one-man faith-based program. (Laughter.)

Problems that face our society are oftentimes problems that require something greater than a government program or a government counselor to solve.

Intractable problems, problems that seem impossible to solve can be solved.

There is the miracle of salvation in our – that is real, that is tangible, that is available for all to see. Miracles are possible in our society, one person at a time. But it requires a willingness to understand the origins of miracle. Miracles happen as a result of the love of the Almighty, professed, by the way, taught, by the way, by religions of all walks of life, whether it be Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu – people who have heard that universal call to love a neighbor just like you’d like to be loved yourself, and then surround someone who hurts with love. Love is powerful. Love is soul-changing. Love doesn’t happen because of government; love happens because of the inspiration of something greater than government. That’s what we’re here to talk about – programs based upon faith (President Bush Speaks with Faith-Based and Community Leaders, page two).

What is significant about the above is that it elevates emotional suffering (“someone who hurts”) to a standing social problem that must also be confronted with emotional solutions, such as surrounding “someone who hurts with love.” Moreover, addiction – a social problem that has been targeted consistently by Republican administrations since the Nixon administration (see Baum, 1997) – here is depicted as a “problem of the heart” that should be met with love. As noted, this is significant because it elevates emotions and feeling to primary concerns, but the above also suggests that orthodox government-based social programs will inevitably be ineffective because they do not address the primary emotional causes of social problems like addiction.

Compassionate conservative references to what I have termed “quasi-therapeutic moral resources” – basing claims on the importance of preserving emotional well-being and alleviating negative emotions that have historically been associated with secular

forms of counseling, psychotherapy and mental health – were not limited to an audience comprised of “faith-based” leaders. For example, President Bush began his speech “President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform” by stating that he was pleased “to be here in the midst of so many social entrepreneurs. (Laughter.) People who are willing to think differently in order to provide hope for people who need hope” (President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform, page one). In this case providing “hope” is equated to the more tangible goal of reducing welfare roles. Similarly, in “President Hosts Conference on Minority Homeownership”, President Bush stated that one of the reasons that the stated goal of increasing the rate of minority homeownership was an “incredibly important initiative for this country” was that “...we can put light where there’s darkness, and hope where there’s despondency in this country. And part of it is working together as a nation to encourage folks to own their own homes” (President Hosts Conference on Minority Homeownership, page six). In this case, overcoming despondency with hope was as significant as aiding minorities in achieving a portion of the “American Dream.” Providing “hope” was also promoted as a means by which children could avoid incarceration: “If you’re worried about children going to prison, let’s make sure that a child can read. That’s the first step to making sure somebody can have a hopeful future” (President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform, page three).

What is noteworthy about these statements is that they illustrate how compassionate conservatism incorporated language from the “therapeutic ethos” and transformed them into goals to be pursued by compassionate conservative initiatives. Not only is this transformation curious in light of the traditional and pietistic religious moral resources within compassionate conservatism that are often characterized at being at odds

with one another (see Hunter, 2001), but this empathetic aspect of compassionate conservatism stands juxtaposed with recent (neo)conservative discourse on social issues. For example, while Bush suggests that assisting a child in achieving literacy will help provide “a hopeful future” that presumes a lower risk of incarceration, and not the establishment of more severe penalties for juvenile delinquents.

Characteristics of Government

Another of the noteworthy transformations of compassionate conservatism from recent forms of (neo) conservative discourse is the characterization of government. Since the first presidential campaign of Ronald Reagan, conservatives have tended to typify the federal government as at best unwieldy and unresponsive, and at worst to being oppressive and dangerous (the American military tended to be exempt from these general characterizations). One common theme was that government had simply overstepped its traditional duties, and needed to return to its original mandate. In this sense, compassionate conservatism follows previous conservative assertions that government should be limited in terms of its duties. The “Fact Sheet: Compassionate Conservatism” states that:

The President rejects the old argument of “big government” vs. “indifferent government.”

Government should be focused, effective, and close to the people – a government that does a few things, and does them well.

Government cannot solve every problem, but it can encourage people and communities to help themselves and one another. The truest kind of compassion is to help citizens build better lives of their own.

We do not believe in a sink-or-swim society. The policies of our government must heed the universal call of all faiths to love our neighbors as we would want to be loved ourselves. We are using an active government to promote self-government (Fact Sheet: Compassionate Conservatism, page one).

However, rather than disparaging the current state of government, the “fact sheet” proposed that “Government cannot solve every problem” and that government needed to facilitate “people and communities to help themselves and one another” (Fact Sheet: Compassionate Conservatism, page one). The form of assistance that was proposed was a partnership between the federal government (largely in a funding capacity) and “faith-based” organizations (that provide services). For example, in “President Speaks with Faith-Based and Community Leaders”, President Bush spoke of a \$60,000 grant received by a battered women shelter in Baton Rouge, Louisiana after the founder of the shelter, Donna Blackburn, was able to secure the grant despite its religious orientation:

Somebody said, well, thank you for the federal government. Now, see, you’ve got it wrong. You don’t need to be thanking the federal government. We’re talking about the people’s money, anyway. It’s the federal government’s job – the federal government’s job is to thank the Donnas of the world, the social people – the social entrepreneurs, the people who are literally changing America one heart at a time. That’s who we’re here to thank, and that’s where our society must recognize and welcome. (Applause). (President Speaks with Faith-Based and Community Leaders, page four).

In sum, government is characterized not as being malevolent, but as simply limited in terms of its capabilities. This is not to say that government is embraced or lauded. For example, in “President Promotes Compassionate Conservatism”, Bush continued a longstanding conservative tradition of typifying government regulation as being largely unnecessary and even counterproductive to economic vitality:

Our economy grows when the tax burden goes down, and stays down. (Applause.)

Much of the growth we have seen this quarter is the result of consumer spending, fueled by well-timed tax deductions. (Laughter.) To encourage growth in job creation, we must protect the lower tax rates we’ve enacted, and we must make them permanent. (Applause.) And to make sure there is economic vitality around our country, our government must control its appetite for excessive spending. (Applause.)

Our economy grows entrepreneurs are rewarded for their success, not hounded by regulations and needless litigation. (Applause.) We must enact reforms that free entrepreneurs from pointless regulation and endless litigation, and to restore trust in our economy (President Promotes Compassionate Conservatism, page one).

The innovation within compassionate conservatism is that government is viewed as having great financial resources, but being limited in its capacity to meet the needs of citizens. Therefore, the ideal role of government for compassionate conservatism is to provide resources to those entities, such as “faith-based charities”, without encumbering these entities with undue regulation:

Government can hand out money. We do a pretty good job of it. But what government cannot do is put hope in people’s hearts or a sense of purpose in their

lives. That's been the fallacy of the federal-government-only approach to helping people help themselves. When we find programs that work, when we find a place that is actually effective at helping people, this government will welcome such programs. That's why I'm here. We welcome this program. (Applause.)

Sometimes reality is that sometimes faith-based groups are prohibited or discouraged from even applying for federal grants. Last week, my director of the faith-based initiatives met with the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty out of New York. It's a group of people who want to help; they feed the hungry for their community. They feed the hungry regardless of somebody's religion. They don't ask, what is your religion; they ask, are you hungry. But because of their name and their identity, federal officials have repeatedly discouraged them from applying for federal funds.

That's not right. The federal government should not ask, does your organization believe in God. That's not the question they ought to ask. They ought to ask, does your program work? Are you saving lives? Are you making a difference in people's lives? (Applause.)(President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform, page five).

There are several core points in the above statement regarding the compassionate conservative understanding of government. Firstly, government is understood as having significant resources and an inherent limitation in terms of how it can provide for the domestic needs of citizens: "...what government cannot do is put hope in people's hearts or a sense of purpose in people's lives." Secondly, many of these "faith-based groups" have the capacity to help citizens in ways that the government is incapable, but are denied

economic resources from the federal government (such as grants) because of federal regulations and bias against religious groups, and is more concerned with enforcing these hampering regulations rather than actively fostering programs that “work” and make “a difference in people’s lives?”. Therefore, the federal government should offer assistance to effective “faith-based groups” without withholding any funding if the organization is religiously-grounded.

The other important factor within this view of government is that while the government may have “deep pockets”, but is inhibited by regulations that make supporting “faith-based groups” cumbersome and difficult, “faith-based groups” are inherently more pragmatically innovative, effective and are trustworthy. Therefore, “faith-based groups” do not require a significant degree of scrutiny:

We’ll ask for accountability – of course, we’ll ask for accountability. We should ask for accountability whether it be taxpayers’ money or donations in the plate. There ought to be accountability. And obviously, we’re not going to use taxpayers’ money to evangelic – to promote religion. But we should use taxpayers’ money to help people change their lives, so that they can realize the American experience and the American Dream. We’ve got to get our federal agencies to remove regulations that discriminate against faith-based groups (President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform, page five).

The above is noteworthy because it is the only discussion in the documents posted in the “Compassionate Conservative Archive” that mentions “accountability” regarding federal funding of “faith-based groups” and charities. The closely related question of

effectiveness is handled in a parallel fashion through being acknowledged but left unanswered:

But it is essential that when it comes to grant making, we asked a simple question -- can you achieve the objective; what are the results? Too often in government it is, you know, what is the religion you practice, and if you practice, you can't access the money. That's not the right question. The right question is, can you save lives? And if you can, in my judgment, you ought to be able to access federal money through the grant making process (President's Remarks at Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Conference, page four).

The polarizing image of governmental funding agencies weighing faith-based programs against one another in determining which programs are more deserving of financial support is avoided entirely.

Religious, Historical and Prestigious Moral Resources

The moral vocabulary of compassionate conservatism made considerable use of traditional religious references and peripheral references to historical and prestigious figures, events and documents from American history. In the case of prestigious elected historical American figures, three presidents (Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and FDR) were mentioned (as well as statesman John Page), as was the social activist and minister Martin Luther King, Jr. The only historical document referenced was the Declaration of Independence, and the only historical doctrine mentioned was the Four Freedoms established by FDR. The American Civil War was mentioned briefly, in the context of a struggle to exemplify American beliefs.

The moral vocabulary of compassionate conservatism made much more use of traditional religious moral resources than prestigious historical and/or political figures. These references included traditional presidential concluding remarks (such as “God bless America”) and other deist references to God, the Almighty, and being “guided by a power larger than ourselves who creates us in His image” (President Bush’s Inaugural Address, page three). These references were in keeping with other Presidential deployment of religious references, with additional Biblical allusions such as the “Traveler on the road to Jericho” (and stating that the United States “will not pass to the other side”)(President Bush’s Inaugural Address, page three) and the “angel that directs this storm” (President Bush’s Inaugural Address, page four). Beyond traditional presidential deistic references were additional statements concerning religious liberty and religious pluralism that evoked a “universal call” to “love a neighbor just as you’d like to be loved yourself” for “Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu” believers (President Speaks with Faith-Based Community Leaders, page two). References were also made to religious places of worship (“church, synagogue, mosque”) and symbols (“cross, Star of David, crescent”) (President Speaks with Faith-Based Community Leaders, page three).

References to Piety

While the references made within compassionate conservatism to religion were traditionally presidential in that they were generally deist in nature and generally avoided specific religious references of a sectarian nature, there were also a number of moral resources that were of a pietistic quality that emphasized qualities of belief, devotion, and the miraculous possibilities of religious belief (that are not emphasized in all Christian sects and denominations). These references were most common in Bush’s “President

Speaks with Community Leaders”. These moral resources evoked the “miracle of salvation” (President Speaks with Community Leaders, page two), heeding the “call from God, call from a higher being” that was “inculcated with that spirit “(President Speaks with Faith-Based Community Leaders, page six). What is significant about these references is that they served to both transcend the usual boundaries of presidential religious references into religious experience and highlighted the claim that such religious beliefs would allow “faith-based charities” to achieve goals that were beyond the capacity of secular organizations. For example, in “President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform”, Bush stated that the “great power of faith” was necessary to “revitalize neighborhoods” (President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform, page one). Similarly, in “President Speaks with Faith-Based Community Leaders”, Bush spoke of the “miracle of salvation” that was inherent in religious groups dealing with those in need of services” (President Speaks with Faith-Based Community Leaders, page two). “Social entrepreneurs” were cited as agents of faith-based enterprises that both seek to deliver social services as well as transform the lives of people in need (President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform, page one). In sum, pietistic belief was not simply utilitarian in that it could inspire charities to highly effective work, but that these “faith-based charities” were in fact engaged in enterprises that were necessarily religious.

Policies Introduced Within Compassionate Conservatism

The “Fact Sheet: Compassionate Conservatism” stated that “**The President’s vision of compassionate conservatism effectively tackles some of society’s toughest assignments – educating our children, fighting poverty at home and aiding poor countries around the world**” (Fact Sheet: Compassionate Conservatism, page

two)(emphasis in original). Regarding these three stated areas of concern, only education and domestic poverty became the focus of later speeches contained within the “Compassionate Conservative Archive”. Specifically, two documents were archived that focused on education (“President Joins “No Child Left Behind Tour Across America” and “President Lauds Supreme Court School Choice Decision”), and two documents that focused explicitly on poverty (“President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform” and “President Visits D.C. Food Bank”). Three additional documents, not listed in the “Compassionate Conservative Archive” but linked to the “President Joins “No Child Left Behind Tour Across America”” were speeches given by Bush at public schools (“President Bush Speaks to Elementary Students in Milwaukee”, “President Visits Rufus King High School in Milwaukee”, and “President Visits Logan High School in Lacrosse [Wisconsin]”)(“President Joins “No Child Left Behind Tour Across America”). Two other documents (“President Speaks with Faith-Based Community Leaders” and “President Commends Senate Passage of Faith-Based Legislation”) are also noted here because they contain references to “Faith-based” methods of addressing poverty.

The compassionate conservative vision of education reform is a synthesis of moral resources of personal responsibility, federal funding unencumbered by constricting regulation and the paradoxical union of local involvement with federal government oversight. “Personal responsibility” included emphases on “accountability” for teachers, parental involvement and “accountability” for schools in terms of a commitment to high educational standards for student performance. The moral resource of personal responsibility is coupled with an egalitarian perspective on education that all children who are within an educational environment characterized by high standards and

accountability faculty will succeed. Bush made this point in “President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform”:

If you believe every child can learn, you set high standards. And that’s what we’ve done in the new law we passed out of the Congress called the No Child Left Behind law. It says that we expect the best for every single child and, since we do so, we want to know whether or not the children are learning to read and write and add and subtract.

If you have low expectations, you don’t measure. Because you say, well, certain kids can’t learn, why measure? If you care about each child, you do measure. And the measuring system is important, because it helps indicate what’s working and what’s not working. It helps show whether or not a curriculum makes sense or not makes sense, it helps us judge whether or not the very faces of our future can read – for starters. And if they can’t read, we as a society must do something about it. We cannot accept mediocrity. (Applause.)

And so the first time in history, the federal government has said, if you take federal money – and we’re spending a lot of it, particularly for Title I students, and that’s good – that you’ve got to show us whether or not the money is making a difference. You, the people of Wisconsin, measure. And finally, a final part of the bill is it says we trust the local people to chart the path of excellence for their children. In other words, we pass power out of Washington to the local level and we encourage – by doing so, encourage any approach that works (President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform, page three).

As the above implies, the compassionate conservative schema for improving education is that if all children are held to high standards and teachers and parents are both involved in education with the funding and flexibility of methodology in order to enhance student performance, and then there will be an improvement in educational performance.

The compassionate conservative framing of education is simultaneously individualistic, egalitarian, and reliant on external coercion. It is individualistic in the sense that individual teachers and parents (as well as students) are held accountable for educational outcomes and egalitarian in that the “no child left behind” philosophy assumes that all children are capable of high educational achievement. This decidedly non-Burkeian perspective is individualistic in that the mechanisms that are provided for students and parents (such as vouchers) are to permit students to leave “failing” schools” for more successful schools. Efforts to improve “failing” schools as dysfunctional institutions are not discussed. Despite the emphasis on the flexibility of localities to achieve higher educational standards, compassionate conservatism lauds the importance of utilizing examination as a means of measuring success and to enforce accountability, as President Bush stated in “President Lauds Supreme Court Decision”:

But we’ve instituted a new reform, and it’s an important reform. It says, if you do receive the money, if you decide to take federal money, show us whether or not the children are learning, see. Show us whether or not expectations are being met.

(Applause.)

I’ve heard it all – we can’t test, we test too much. We test too much. We shouldn’t test children whether they can read. See, all you do is teach to test. Listen, if you

can teach a child to read, they can pass a test. You teach them to read, don't worry about the tests. (Applause.)

We need to know in America whether or not our children can read and write and add and subtract. That's what an accountability system is for. Not only do we need to know, but more importantly, the parents need to know whether or not the children can read and write and add and subtract. (Applause.)

And if we find they can't, something else has to happen. We cannot allow our children to be trapped in schools that won't teach and won't change. (Applause.)

(President Lauds Supreme Court Decision, page one).

Exams for educational competence are typified as being essential for maintaining individual accountability on the part of students and teachers to parents and the nation. Assisting schools as institutions – “schools that won't teach and won't change” – is not considered. While education was frequently lauded in terms of being important for democracy and for the future of economic success, acquisitions of more abstract intellectual traits (such as civic knowledge and involvement) are not discussed.

The compassionate conservative individualistic focus for solving social problems was also evident in discussions of alleviating poverty. Compassionate conservatism continued the trajectory from the 1990s of “welfare to work”, the policy goal of reducing welfare rolls through mandating that welfare recipients seek employment. The innovation in compassionate conservatism is that “faith-based” charities are cited in providing traditional services, such as job training, as well as addressing more of the emotional and spiritual needs that such persons may require. As President Bush stated in “President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform”:

Another initiative that...makes sense in order to make sure America is a better place is welfare reform. Welfare reform to me means liberation from dependency. It means we realize each person matters, and if we can help people find work, it means there's dignity. And this state has been fantastic about encouraging work and providing services to help people work, and recognizing that faith-based institutions can make a huge difference in the training and helping people train to be able to find work....

And one way to make sure that we continue to make progress is insist upon work, and then help people who need help to find a job, either through training and/or job placement. And today we saw what can happen. Today, I met the recipients of the compassion in the building. One lady had been on welfare for a while, now owns her own business. Isn't that right? (Applause.)

There's story after story of people who have been helped, people who have come here not only to receive the word, but also have come here to receive a helping hand. And that's what I appreciate so very much about this program and faith-based programs all across the country. Our government should not fear faith in our society. (Applause.)

Just ask Annette Williams, mother of four, been on and off welfare. She's the owner. She's owned her own business for four years. Or Essie Lee. She's been on welfare. She lost her job. She came here as a single mom. And, by the way, being a single mother in America is the toughest job in America. It's the hardest work. And she came with a 12-year-old child. She got job training. She had counseling,

and she's now gainfully employed in the catering business. In other words, the folks came here to obviously receive comfort from the comforter. But they also came to receive a hand from the people who want to help them. (Applause.)

(President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform, pages four and five.)

Compassionate conservatism acknowledged that those who are seeking the "dignity" of paid employment (or who have no other option) may require assistance in finding work and in acquiring skills in order to obtain employment, as well as may require some sort of 'comfort' from "people who want to help them." However, compassionate conservatism does not acknowledge broader societal or structural factors that may contribute to unemployment, and does not advocate government-based solutions to meet these (such as government job creation).

The position within compassionate conservatism that addresses macro-sociological factors is discussion of the gap in home ownership between minorities and whites. This initiative sought to unite federal monetary support with the encouragement of "faith-based" programs intended to educate potential homebuyers about the financial and legal complexities involved in purchasing a new home. From the vantage of compassionate conservatism, homeownership was not simply a policy to pursue because it was sound public policy, but because home ownership was integral to the compassionate conservative vision:

All of us here in America should believe, and I think we do, that we should be, as I mentioned, a nation of owners. Owning something is freedom, as far as I'm concerned. It's part of a free society. And ownership of a home helps bring stability to neighborhoods. You own your home in a neighborhood, you have

more interest in how your neighborhood feels, looks, whether it's safe or not. It brings pride to people, it's a part of an asset-based to society. It helps people build up their own individual portfolio, provides an opportunity, if need be, for a mom or a dad to leave something to their child. It's a part of – it's a being a – it's a part of – an important part of America....

Low interest rates, low inflation are very important foundations for economic growth. The idea of encouraging new homeownership and the money that will be circulated as a result of people purchasing homes will mean people are more likely to find a job in America. This project not only is good for the soul of the country, it's good for the pocketbook of the country, as well (President Hosts Conference on Minority Homeownership, page two).

Within the moral vocabulary of compassionate conservatism, homeownership becomes the individualistic vehicle that may contribute to larger societal improvements through revitalized neighborhoods and communities. As in the case of unemployment, the federal government will provide financial support, but does not address larger concerns such as building new safe and affordable housing.

Compassionate Conservatism and the War on Terror

The moral vocabulary of compassionate conservatism evolved from a largely domestically-oriented form of civil religious discourse about how practices and orientations (such as charitable donations and in keeping with Post –World War II American conservatism) could be deemed “compassionate” when united with religiously-grounded charities. Considering the individualistic focus of compassionate conservatism (“saving a life at a time”), it is not surprising that any international dimension of

compassionate conservatism would be minimal. Indeed, despite the fact that the “Fact Sheet: Compassionate Conservatism” established as a policy goal of assisting the poor in developing nations, there are no documents within the “Compassionate Conservatism Archive” that address international development aid.

The attacks of September 11, 2001 significantly reoriented the priorities of the Bush administration, including compassionate conservatism. How could a form of discourse that deployed peaceful religious and civic moral resources and promoted volunteerism by individuals and “faith-based” groups absorb and provide a meaningful context for extremely violent terrorist attacks from Middle Eastern organizations? Faced with phenomena that clearly fell outside of the previous parameters of compassionate conservatism, the discourse became sharply binary and Manichean, with those showing compassion in the United States becoming the antithesis of the violent terrorists, as articulated in “President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform”:

When the enemy hit us, they didn't know who they were hitting. Out of evil will come some really important good. Good will come when neighbors love neighbors just like they'd like to be loved themselves. It is the acts of kindness and generosity and decency, which you find right here, is what define the true face of our country. We recognize that there are people who hurt and we want them to be healed. We recognize people are hungry; we want them to be fed. We recognize people can't read and we want them to read. That's our focus.

Out of the evil done to America can come some incredible good, because this is a great nation, full of decent and loving and honorable people. (Applause.) And it is

my honor today to be amongst great leaders – two fine bishops, and a congregation which cares about their fellow man (President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform, page six).

In this case, volunteers are portrayed as the moral antithesis of the impersonal “enemy” who have created “evil”.

In “President Promotes Compassionate Conservatism”, the binary division between “evil” terrorists” and “good” Americans and allies continued, although references to activities associated with “compassionate conservatism” are not predominant:

We have entered the next phase of the war, with a sustained international effort to rout out terrorists in other countries, and deny al Qaeda the chance to regroup in other places. Across the world, governments have heard this message: You’re either with us, or you’re with the terrorists. (Applause.)

And for the long-term security of America and civilization itself, we must confront the great threat of biological and chemical and nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorists or hostile regimes. We will not allow the world’s most dangerous regimes to threaten America or our friends and allies with the world’s most destructive weapons. (Applause.)

History has called us to these responsibilities, and we accept them. America has always had a special mission to defend justice and defend freedom around the world. Whatever the difficulties ahead, we are confident about the outcome of this

struggle. Tyranny and terror and lawless violence will not decide the world's future. As Ronald Reagan said, and as every generation of Americans has believed, the future belongs to the free. (Applause.) (President Promotes Compassionate Conservatism, page two).

The above was largely characteristic of the separation between the previous typification of "compassionate conservatism" and the emerging threat to the security of the United States. One notable exception to this trend was in a document entitled "President Visits Rufus King High School in Milwaukee", in which domestic compassion was promoted as a solution to the "evil" threat facing America:

No, we're fighting evil around the world. And one way to fight it here at home is to make sure every child gets a good education. And another way to fight it – and I want you all to listen carefully, for those of you who are wondering about America and what – our worth and what this country is all about. If you want to fight evil, do some good. You see, if you want to fight evil, love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself. The great strength of America lies in the hearts and souls of our citizens. (Applause.)

We have this kind of materialistic world – it must have seemed that way to the enemy. When they hit us, they must have said, this country is so self-absorbed, so selfish, so materialistic, so self-centered that it would never respond – maybe file a lawsuit or two, but never respond. And they were mistaken, because that's not

what we're made out of. On the one hand, we're tough. On the other hand, we're compassionate. On the one hand, we will do what it takes to defend liberty, as I mentioned. But on the other hand, we can show the world what we're made out of by loving a neighbor.

If you're interested in serving your country, go to your church or synagogue or mosque, start a program that loves a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself. Why don't you go to the Boys and Girls Club and help mentor a child after school? Why don't you walk across the street and tell a neighbor who may be a shut-in that you love them, and ask them what you can do to help them. It's these acts of kindness that help define the soul of America. (Applause.)

I met a young lady today at the airport named Tammy Krohn... Tammy Krohn is an AmeriCorps volunteer. Tammy Krohn has said, what can I do to help my country. What can I possibly do to make a difference in the lives of my fellow citizens. She is a resident elementary school teacher for children with special needs. She's trained a golden retriever that will serve someone with physical disabilities. Some say, well, you know, that's not that big a deal. It's a big deal to the person she's helping.

You see, America changes, America becomes a better place one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time. And what Tammy knows is that one person can't do

everything, but one person can make an enormous difference in the lives of somebody who needs help.

And that's my call today. To those of you who live – are going to college – got a great education here, are going to go to college, I just want you to remember that if you're interested in fighting evil, if you're interested in making this nation as strong as it possibly can be, help someone in need. Take time out of your day, take time out of your life, to be a part of the vast army of compassion which exists all across this great land (President Visits Rufus King High School in Milwaukee, pages four and five).

Here the individualistic methodology of “compassionate conservatism” -- changing “one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time” -- is juxtaposed against “evil around the world”. One volunteer is upheld as a moral exemplar for her work with a therapy dog and the disabled. While the “vast army of compassion” is mentioned as something beyond the individual, no other descriptions of it are provided. In sum, individually volunteering is provided as one way to domestically combat terrorism.

Conclusion

“Compassionate conservatism” as a form of political and civil religious discourse demonstrated both an extensive continuation of forms found in past presidential political communications, as well as having demonstrated some innovations. In general, compassionate conservatism was quite consistent with previous presidential uses of

(largely deist) civil religious discourse (see Toolin, 1983); the use of pietistic language was a deviation from these broader presidential trends.

In her analysis of the “mental maps” related to moral perspectives of American and French men from what she termed “the “lower middle class”” (Lamont, 2000: 2), Lamont (2000) contends that her respondents exhibited a morality that was primarily characterized by:”(1) being hardworking and responsible as a means of ensuring a predictable environment for oneself and others; (2) providing for and protecting the family; (3) being straightforward and having personal integrity; and (4) respecting religion and other traditional forms of morality (Lamont, 2000: 20).”This moral orientation also exhibits a degree of racial differentiation, with black respondents placing “a premium on collective solidarity” (Lamont, 2000: 21). Moreover, Lamont contends that workers from the lower middle class workers “...stress moral criteria more than professionals and managers do” (Lamont, 2000: 22). In addition to a tendency to emphasize morality, Lamont’s findings support previous research that lower-middle class workers are more likely to “put family above work and find greater satisfaction in family than do upper middle class men” (Lamont, 2000: 30). Such a moral orientation meshes smoothly with compassionate conservatism in that both emphasize individuals, families, and traditional religious bodies as their primary units of analysis. As previously noted, the discourse of compassionate conservatism makes few references to larger institutions or structural forces that might be partially responsible for undesirable social conditions. According to Lamont (2000) lower middle class men are also likely to emphasize individual traits and qualities in accounting for creating and perpetuating societal circumstances. This alignment between lower middle class moral inclinations and

compassionate conservatism suggests an effort to attract and maintain lower middle class voters who discover an affinity between their own moral perceptions and the moral vocabulary of compassionate conservatism (see Frank, 2004).

The use of quasi-therapeutic language – concern for the emotional well-being of persons – was also somewhat innovative when it was coupled with conventional religious discourse. In this respect, “compassionate conservatism” resembles the “politics of meaning” that was coined and promoted by Michael Lerner (1996) in *Tikkun* magazine (and a subsequent book of the same name) and was employed by both President and Hillary Rodham Clinton in claiming that the emotional and spiritual injuries caused by social conditions were legitimate concerns. The “politics of meaning”, like “compassionate conservatism”, was also coupled with religion in an ecumenical manner. The “politics of meaning” declined from prominence when its most public supporters left the executive branch. Similarly, the importance of the promotion of compassionate conservatism from the executive branch was expressed by Olasky: “We need to hear from a trustworthy source that faith-based organizations are part of the solution for America, not part of the problem. The one person fitting the bill is a president of the United States...”(Olasky, 2000: 191-192). It remains to be determined if compassionate conservatism will also fade from prominence when the current administration leaves the executive branch.

The moral vocabulary of compassionate conservatism exhibits a high degree of what Balkin (1998) termed “economy of logic” in which core moral resources are constantly deployed to both make claims and to provide meaning for the adherents of a moral vocabulary. In the case of “compassionate conservatism” moral resources related

to “faith-based” initiatives and individualistic approaches to alleviating local problems were predominant to the degree that other potential moral resources were excluded. There was no attempt to infuse it with a more civic republican (Bellah and Hammond, 1980) trajectory in proposing more abstract public service to strengthen the nation, instead of focusing exclusively on one’s immediate locality. There was no effort to infuse more support for federal government programs, such as the Peace Corps, which could have become a vehicle for compassionate conservative actions and virtues to be taken abroad to demonstrate the generosity of the United States in an effort to potentially win “hearts and minds” by emphasizing the differences between Americans and the “enemy”. Instead, the documents containing discussions about the war on terror describe “the enemy” in stark and unforgiving terms and leaves domestic security firmly in the hands of federal and state authorities. There is no sustained effort to create some symbolic bridge between individualistic efforts and a broader and specified national purpose, other than several references to the “army of compassion”. This metaphorical possibility – an organized effort to achieve specific common goals – is simply left as an attractive code word but inert concept. This failure is noteworthy because there have been other periods in American history, such as World War II, when individualistic efforts (such as “victory gardens” and campaigns to ration materials for the war effort) were clearly linked with concrete programs and policies. Compassionate conservatism makes no such effort to unite the individual with national and/or international projects.

In all of the domestic initiatives directly associated with compassionate conservatism, all relied on individualistic or small-group intervention with the unfettered financial support of the federal government – a significant deviation from traditional

conceptions of volunteers being independent of government. In none of these cases was any sort of larger scale entity proposed to assist, facilitate, and/or monitor these federally-funded private initiatives (except in the case of “high-standards testing” to maintain educational standards). While international efforts to alleviate poverty in the developing world were mentioned in the “Fact Sheet: Compassionate Conservatism”, no additional discussions of these initiatives were archived in the “Compassionate Conservatism Archive”.

In discussions of the war on terror in the context of compassionate conservatism there is an exclusive reliance on military language and terminology to discuss the conflict between the United States and its allies and “the enemy”. This is significant not only because it effectively excludes other possibilities of challenging terrorism that exclude individual American citizens (such as a renewed Peace Corps to win ‘hearts and minds’), but because it derides non-military efforts to challenge terrorism. For example, in “President Visits Rufus King High School in Milwaukee” President Bush stated that “When they hit us, they must have said, this country is so self-absorbed, so selfish, so materialistic, so self-centered that it would never respond – maybe file a lawsuit or two, but never respond” (President Visits Rufus King High School, page four). In sum, only military force was couched as an appropriate “response”. This is noteworthy because there is evidence of a trend by tort lawyers to seek financial compensation for terrorist victims from financial supporters of terrorism not only to financially punish these individuals and groups but to deprive these parties of the ability to finance further terrorism. Attorney Ronald L. Motley has filed one of the larger lawsuits against parties accused of supporting Islamic terrorists, and in the process claims to have uncovered

valuable information that the CIA and FBI had not obtained (Senior, 2004). The point here is simply that there may be numerous effective strategies and tactics beyond military force to weaken and/or destroy terrorists that have apparently been discounted. In this sense, “compassionate conservatism” comes to resemble what Lakoff (2002) called the metaphor of “strict father morality” in which strength is exhibited primarily through military force.

The tendency exhibited within compassionate conservatism to focus on a few, core strategies to meet its stated ends – as in the above case of fighting terrorism – speaks to the broader weakness of this moral vocabulary. In terms of promoting initiatives steeped in compassionate conservatism, two underlying commonalities were the assertions that private citizens and/or unencumbered localities (such as school districts) could deliver services in a superior manner to the government (in keeping with traditional American conservatism) and proposing religious groups that would become at least partially federally subsidized (another perspective in keeping with traditional American conservatism). What was striking about the evocation of localism is that while the federal government was going to provide funding for schools and “faith-based charities”, accountability was only significantly mentioned for the former (and only one paragraph for “faith-based initiatives”). Supervision of “Faith-based charities”, either to assess program effectiveness or local need assessment, was not mentioned. The lack of supervision of “faith-based charities” may become an increasing difficulty for these programs not only because of the increased risk of corruption (as there is no specified oversight), but also because these programs may lack demonstrably effective outcomes. For example, a recent eight-year study of sexual abstinence programs that encouraged

teenagers to wait until marriage before becoming sexually active found that graduates of such programs had rates of sexually transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancies nearly as high as teenagers who were not in these programs (Goldenberg, 2004; Altman, 2004). Such evidence suggests that federal support for “faith-based charities” may be challenged by skeptics who demand effective and accountable programs.

The moral vocabulary of compassionate conservatism suffers from two structural limitations: an individualistic focus and an assumption that those who participate in “faith-based” charities are united in their antipathy towards government participation in providing social services. As previously noted, the individualistic unit of analysis within compassionate conservatism apparently prevented any consideration of how social structures could be compassionately altered in order to benefit the less fortunate. None of the speeches in the Compassionate Conservative Archive contain references addressing underlying social conditions, such as creating new opportunities for employment that could ameliorate the living conditions of those who might otherwise have to turn to “faith-based” charities. The only large-scale institutions discussed in the speeches in the compassionate conservative archive were education and the federal government in providing financial support to faith-based charities and the military aspect of the war on terror.

The assumption of the unity of faith-based charities in their antipathy towards government participation in bestowing charitable services rests on two, unstable premises: that all faith-based charities share this antipathy, and that these faith-based charities and representative communities share cooperative and benevolent opinions of each other. These assumptions are central for the moral vocabulary of compassionate

conservatism because they provide a perception of unity of methods and goals that conceals potential divisions between different faith-based charities and communities. While the abstract discussions of compassionate conservatism stress its ideally ecumenical nature, all of the individuals cited as examples of “social entrepreneurs” whose religious affiliation was stated were either Christians or Jews. Moreover, well-known religious figures who do not share the compassionate conservative methodology were not included either in the speeches in the compassionate conservatism archive or in Olasky’s (2000) book. Figures such as Bernard Tetsugen Glassman (the Zen Roshi who helped found Greyston Bakery), Jim Wallis (the executive director of Sojourners) and Tony Campolo (founder of the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education [EAPE]) are all recognized figures who have united their religious orientations with their charitable and philanthropic endeavors, and therefore would be ideal candidates for promoting the religiously and politically ecumenical quality of compassionate conservatism are not mentioned. This omission is all the more glaring considering that Olasky (2000), in writing *Compassionate Conservatism*, visited Camden, New Jersey (Olasky, 2000: 109) where he visited several faith-based groups, but not Urban Promise, an evangelical charity that is supported by Campolo’s EAPE.

These omissions are significant because they exemplify the importance of the assumption that all faith-based bodies are united in both their antipathy towards government and their respect for each other. These assumptions are critical for the integrity of the moral vocabulary of compassionate conservatism because they allow proponents to avoid the church-state separation question and because they encourage the perception of a unity of purpose against an intrusive secular state. The use of inclusive

terms like “faith-based” charities and communities encourage a perception that divergent “faith” communities are united in their common desire to access the resources of the federal government while avoiding truncating elements of their religious tradition and practices. This attempt to forge the perception of a united “faith-based” front mirrors the polarizing conflicts between Hunter’s (1991) orthodox and progressive cultural conflicts in that the polarization between these two sides suppressed divisions between different units in each respective camp. This illusion of unity becomes potentially highly unstable when it is weighed against President Bush’s stated goal of supporting effective faith-based programs. In supporting effective programs with federal grants, it will be necessary to measure the relative effectiveness of faith-based programs. Such measurements will necessarily place faith-based enterprises in competition with each other over which programs are the most effective (and are thus the most worthy of receiving grants), which therefore places federal grant agencies in the position of evaluating religiously-inspired and/or religiously-based practices. Such evaluations will place faith-based charities in competition with each other, which may encourage inter-religious divisiveness and divisions over which programs will receive both financial support and the status associated with that support. Such competition will likely both encourage hostility between faith-based groups competing over federal support, and will create additional tension through having the federal government evaluate which religious groups are worthy of federal financial support and accolades. In sum, a cultural contradiction of compassionate conservatism is created, whereby either the federal government blindly funds all faith-based organizations, or the federal government favors some faith-based groups over others because of their success in reaching specific goals, thus encouraging

competition between these groups over federal support. The tension within the compassionate conservative dual thrust of no interference with faith-based groups and an emphasis on tangible results will be extremely difficult to overcome. This contradiction is exacerbated by a lack of evidence that faith-based organizations are more effective in ameliorating social problems that previously have been the focus of government intervention (Singer, 2004: 94-95).

As of this writing, only two documents appear to have been placed in the “Compassionate Conservatism Archive” in 2004, suggesting that the Bush Administration may be allowing compassionate conservatism to wither away. Traditional conservative understandings of limited governments and localism did not facilitate compassionate conservatism with a transformation of compassionate conservatism to address a new and wildly divergent threat of stateless Islamic terrorism. While Bush himself has been apparently very comfortable in a variety of contexts using morally and religiously charged language of “good” and “evil”, there has been no sustained effort to graft compassionate conservatism onto a coherent strategy of reacting against terrorism. This may be because of the core moral resources of localism, which may allow for the acceptance of federal funds to support local initiatives, but not to accept any sort of federal coordination to address domestic ills in the name of either compassion or national security and stability. Compassionate conservatism may return during the 2004 presidential election, both as a means to galvanize those attracted to compassionate conservatism, and by those opponents who wish to emphasize weaknesses in Bush’s domestic agenda. Tensions that have emerged in reaction to the “No Child Left Behind” policy and to the potential tensions that skeptics may have for unaccountable “faith-based

charities” suggest that compassionate conservatism as a moral vocabulary will do more to divide than unite the electorate. As Olasky (2000) notes, compassionate conservatism does not have “an ideological home in...traditional liberalism nor much of conservatism...”(Olasky, 2000: 194). Compassionate conservatism does not seem to be an ideology in which greater national aspirations can be nurtured.

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"President Visits Rufus King High School in Milwaukee" (May 8, 2002)

"President Visits Logan High School in Lacrosse" (May 8, 2002)

"President Lauds Supreme Court School Choice Decision" (July 1, 2002)

“President Emphasizes Need for Welfare Reform” (July 2, 2002)

“President Hosts Conference on Minority Homeownership” (October 15, 2002)

“President Visits D.C. Food Bank” (December 19, 2002)

“President Commends Senate Passage of Faith-Based Legislation” (April 9, 2003)

“President Speaks with Faith-Based and Community Leaders” (January 15, 2004)

“President’s Remarks at Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Conference” (March 3, 2004)

***Direct correspondence to:**

By Brian M. Lowe
Department of Sociology
418 Fitzelle Hall
State University of New York College at Oneonta
Oneonta, New York 13820-4015
(607) 436-3046
(607) 436-3512 (Departmental office)
lowebm@oneonta.edu

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