



*"The mission at home is to help those who hurt, and make the vast potential of America available to every citizen. The mission abroad is to use our good heart and good conscience and not turn our back away when we see suffering."*

President George W Bush, 16th July 2003

# **Whatever happened to compassionate conservatism?**



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## Introduction

Many have rightly observed that George W Bush has made more use of the American presidency in four years than most presidents manage in eight. It is, of course, his leadership of the war on terror that will attract the attention of presidential historians for years to come. Most contemporary assessments of the 43rd presidency – the most important of which will be given tomorrow by the American people – also focus on the campaigns in Afghanistan, Iraq and the pursuit of terrorist networks. This paper, however – *Whatever happened to compassionate conservatism?* – offers a short review of what George W Bush once described as his “governing philosophy”.

The report’s author – Tim Montgomerie – is ideally placed to have written it. Over the last five years he has visited the USA eight times and has talked to more than one hundred people who have influenced, had to implement, or have been on the ‘receiving end’ of compassionate conservatism. Tim’s interviewees have included Tillie Burgin, the project leader who Governor Bush described as the Mother Teresa of Texas; Marvin Olasky, author of ‘Compassionate Conservatism’; Mike Gerson, President Bush’s chief speechwriter; Dr Wade Horn, the administration’s leading family policymaker; Senator Rick Santorum, a leading supporter of welfare reform; and Charles Colson, whose Christian charity manages whole wings of prisons. Over the last couple of months Tim has gone back to thirty of his group of one hundred contacts to inform this review of four years of compassionate conservatism.

Tim has concluded that much has been achieved but not nearly as much as compassionate conservatism’s leading advocates had hoped for. Whilst the war on terror has been an almost inevitable distraction from delivering compassionate conservatism this paper suggests that the initiative has also run into other difficulties. Tim highlights political misunderstandings of the agenda and the lack of a champion for its main themes. My hope is that George W Bush will be given a second term and have the opportunity to progress an agenda that he is clearly committed to and which will further broaden the conservative base.

*Whatever happened to compassionate conservatism?* is particularly helpful in reminding a British readership of the scale of social reform pursued by the Republican party over the last decade. Through zero tolerance policing Rudi Giuliani can stake a legitimate claim to have overseen the most effective and socially-just reform of recent times. Welfare reform, school choice programmes and the encouragement of a more diverse charitable sector are other illustrations of the extent to which Republicans have focused on today’s

social challenges – and not rested on their economic achievements of yesterday.

In their commitment to social reform Republicans have become the party of progress. Liberals are left to defend regressive status quo positions on schooling, criminal justice and social security. Republicans have also been unafraid of proclaiming the vital importance of family, voluntarism and values in the war on poverty. Britain has many differences, of course, with America and some policy ideas will never travel well across the Atlantic. Nonetheless, a recent YouGov poll for the Centre for Social Justice identified an appetite amongst the British public for more conservative approaches to crime, welfare, charity and family structure. The full survey results can be downloaded from our website by social reformers in all parties who recognise the unsustainable nature of Britain's welfare policies.

**Iain Duncan Smith MP**

Chairman of the Centre for Social Justice

1<sup>st</sup> November 2004

# **Whatever happened to compassionate conservatism?**

## **Overview**

### **(1) The idea of compassionate conservatism**

In the close 2000 election compassionate conservatism was probably the decisive factor that put George W Bush in the White House.

Compassionate conservatism has two complementary sides: one seeking to modify conservatism, the other side seeking to modify society's idea of compassion:

- A new idealism, a commitment to a broader range of issues and a more positive view of government characterises the attempt to modify conservatism.
- A belief in superior types of holistic and values-based charities and a willingness to discriminate in favour of 'independence-building behaviours' characterises the attempt to modify compassion.

### **(2) The record of compassionate conservatism**

Before George W Bush's Presidency the Republicans had already introduced a range of policing and welfare reforms of vital importance to America's poorest communities.

Five themes illustrate the uneven record of George W Bush's compassionate conservatism:

- George W Bush's signature issue – the faith-based initiative – has enjoyed mixed fortunes. More government money is being routed to faith-based and other community projects and the 'public square' is becoming more welcoming of religious values. On the downside a continuing reliance on bureaucracy-controlled approaches to funding community organisations will not encourage the most innovative poverty-fighting groups to seek taxpayer funding.
- George W Bush's 'No child left behind' education reforms weren't just a reflection of his compassionate conservatism - they were also part of his promise of bipartisanship. The reforms won cross-party support but, in the process, lost its strong commitment to school choice.

- Government has grown throughout the Bush Presidency but there is little evidence that the growth reflects civil society-building or other authentically conservative programmes.
- Lower taxation enjoys the universal support of the compassionate conservatives interviewed for this paper and there is a particular welcome for the tax cuts focused on the poorest workers and towards the elimination of the marriage penalty.
- Progressive policies on overseas aid, HIV/AIDS and human trafficking have given compassionate conservatism a strong international nature.

### **(3) The future of compassionate conservatism**

The administration's focus on the war on terror does not provide a full explanation for the downgraded status of compassionate conservatism in the 2004 election campaign. Before 9/11 the President's faith-based and education initiatives had already run into trouble.

Misunderstandings of the fundamental nature of compassionate conservatism have contributed to disappointments about the agenda. Some believed that 'CC' meant an abandonment of morally conservative positions on abortion and the family. Some believed that George Bush's faith in charities would lead to them replacing key responsibilities of government. Both of these groups felt let down.

The problem of definition might not have been so serious if, from the very beginning, compassionate conservatism had enjoyed a prominent champion – perhaps within President Bush's cabinet – with responsibility for its communication and implementation.

Senator Santorum and Dr Wade Horn are amongst a small number of people who could drive compassionate conservatism's future.

Britain's conservatives might find an emphasis on social justice a more fruitful form of 'modernisation' than that embraced by those advocating libertarian policies on family, drugs and crime.

## **(I) The idea of compassionate conservatism**

### *Compassionate conservatism put George W Bush in the White House*

The 2000 Presidential election was Al Gore's to lose. That, certainly, was the view of the political scientists. American academia's six most respected political models<sup>1</sup> predicted that Vice-President Al Gore would win with between 53% and 60% of the popular vote. We need an explanation for the defeat of a Vice-President representing an administration closely associated with eight prosperous years. Some posit the fallout from the Monica Lewinsky affair but it would be wrong to see this as a decisive factor. Democrats proved that voters could be persuaded to forgive Bill Clinton's transgressions when they made gains in the 1998 (post-Lewinsky) mid-term elections. Other reasonable explanations for the Republican victory include the contrast between Al Gore's wooden persona and George W Bush's folksy manner. The already weakening economy might also have hurt the Vice-President's candidacy.

All of these negative factors certainly undermined Al Gore's appeal. On the other side of the equation was George W Bush's positive appeal to voters. His social conservatism, the promise of tax relief and strong support of missile defence all energised the Republican base. But it was his heart-on-the-sleeve 'compassionate conservatism' that took his candidacy into new territory.

Compassionate conservatism was an essential part of George Bush's 2000 election prospectus – positioning him as a Republican who promised to “never balance the budget on the backs of the poor”. Given the closeness of the 2000 result it is difficult to believe that George W Bush would have won the Electoral College if he had not offered his different brand of Republicanism.

So what is compassionate conservatism?

### *The two complementary sides of compassionate conservatism*

An examination of George W Bush's writings and speeches – and those of the thought-leaders most associated with him – consistently reveals two complementary sides to compassionate conservatism. George Bush's compassionate conservatism has the ambitious aim of seeking to redefine both compassion *and* conservatism. There is, in reality, not simply compassionate conservatism where compassion is the modifier of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cookpolitical.com/column/2000/060300.php>

conservatism but also 'conservative compassion' where conservative is the modifier to compassion.

This first section of this booklet will overview the defining characteristics of both of these sides of compassionate conservatism. I do not suggest that every supporter of the philosophy signs up to every characteristic I identify but the themes are all present – to different degrees – in George Bush's speeches.

### *(1.1) A different kind of conservatism – compassionate conservatism*

This more compassionate brand of conservatism has three main characteristics:

- A repositioning of the Republicans as the party of progress and idealism;
- A commitment to a broader range of issues; and
- A more positive view of government

#### *- The party of progress and idealism*

"The Wind and the Sun were disputing which was the stronger. Suddenly they saw a traveller coming down the road, and the Sun said: "I see a way to decide our dispute. Whichever of us can cause that traveller to take off his cloak shall be regarded as the stronger. You begin."

So the Sun retired behind a cloud, and the Wind began to blow as hard as it could upon the traveller. But the harder he blew the more closely did the traveller wrap his cloak round him, till at last the Wind had to give up in despair.

Then the Sun came out and shone in all his glory upon the traveller, who soon found it too hot to walk with his cloak on.

Kindness effects more than severity."

Aesop's 'wind and the sun' have competed with each other throughout modern Republican history but Ronald Reagan positively titled the balance of his party's disposition towards that of the sun. His famous 'Morning in America' commercials, his humour and his fearlessness transformed the demeanour of American conservatism.

George W Bush rediscovered this optimism after Republicans had allowed themselves to become the angry men of politics during the Clinton years and, particularly, during the impeachment saga. In a conscious attempt to inherit to Reagan's mantle he ended his 2000 Convention speech with this passage:

"My friend, the artist Tom Lea of El Paso, Texas, captured the way I feel about our great land, a land I love. He and his wife, he said, "Live on the east side of the mountain. It's the sunrise side, not the sunset side. It is the side to see the day that is coming, not to see the day that has gone." Americans live on the sunrise side of the mountain, the night is passing, and we're ready for the day to come."

In his campaign biography George Bush attempted to define compassionate conservatism as a demeanour as much as a philosophy:

"The phrase "compassionate conservative" recognises that a conservative philosophy has sometimes been mistakenly portrayed as mean-spirited. I like to joke that a compassionate conservative is a conservative with a smile, not a conservative with a frown."

The positivity seems to have two principal origins. One cause of American conservatism's optimism is its evangelicalism. George W Bush's conversion story is one that millions of Americans can identify with. Now a teetotaler, George W Bush was a heavy-drinker until his fortieth birthday. "I was a drinker. I quit drinking because I changed my heart. I guess I was a one-man faith-based programme," he told a gathering of religious leaders in New Orleans<sup>2</sup>. In his campaign autobiography he wrote: "Faith changes lives. I know, because faith has changed mine". Many of the people interviewed for this paper suggest that President Bush's deep belief in the possibility of change explains many of his most radical decisions. The other source has been the prominence of a number of liberals-turned-(neo)conservatives in the highest echelons of the Republican Party. They may have abandoned the methods of the left but they have not ditched its idealism.

George W Bush's own willingness to adopt liberal ideals<sup>3</sup> and redeem them with conservative methods was beautifully expressed in this section of a speech to students at Notre Dame University in 2001<sup>4</sup>:

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2 15th January 2004.

3 Mike Gerson, Chief Speechwriter to George W Bush, told The New York Times that he wanted to make social justice a Republican concept.

4 President George W Bush, Notre Dame, Indiana, 20th May 2001

"I leave you with this challenge: Serve a neighbor in need, because a life of service is a life of significance. Because materialism ultimately is boring, and consumerism can build a prison of wants. Because a person who is not responsible for others is a person who is truly alone. Because there are few better ways to express our love for America than to care for other Americans. And because the same God who endows us with individual rights also calls us to social obligations.

So let me return to Lyndon Johnson's charge: You're the generation that must decide. Will you ratify poverty and division with your apathy? Or will you build a common good with your idealism? Will you be a spectator in the renewal of your country, or a citizen? The methods of the past may have been flawed, but the idealism of the past was not an illusion. Your calling is not easy, because you must do the acting and the caring. But there is fulfillment in that sacrifice which creates hope for the rest of us. Every life you help proves that every life might be helped. The actual proves the possible, and hope is always the beginning of change."

Jonathan Rauch has written that George Bush is making an audacious bid to refashion the GOP as the party of progress and himself as the standard-bearer "for the idea that the old ways will not work".

### ***- A broader set of issues***

Compassionate conservatism has been the most powerful force for what the British media might call the 'modernisation' of the Republican Party. It has encouraged the Republican Party to embrace a broader range of issues without sacrificing its traditional positions on enterprise, tax and national security.

This strategy has often bemused mainstream Republicans. At the 2000 nominating Convention in Philadelphia Bush won thunderous applause for his commitments to missile defence, lower taxation and restrictions on abortion. But delegates listened in silence when he talked about "single moms struggling to feed the kids and pay the rent; immigrants starting a hard life in a new world; children without fathers in neighborhoods where gangs seem like friendship or drugs promise peace, and where sex sadly seems the closest thing to belonging".

Since that speech George W Bush has put time and money into causes traditionally associated with the idealistic left. He has talked about literacy as

the new civil right; launched a worldwide campaign against the sex trafficking of women and children; funded the world's biggest HIV/AIDS strategy; invested US\$1.2bn into a research programme that might one day deliver hydrogen-powered cars; and vowed to find a mentor for every child with a father in prison.

### *- A more positive view of government*

A third dimension of George Bush's attempt to reshape conservatism has been his bid to end conservatism's hostility to government. David Brooks of the New York Times believes that George W Bush was determined to "salvage the Republican Party from the wreckage of the Gingrich revolution"<sup>5</sup>.

Candidate Bush certainly made his pro-government credentials clear from an early stage. As the Republican nominee in 2000 he branded "the idea that if government would only get out of the way, all our problems would be solved" as a "destructive mindset". He abandoned the Republicans' long-standing commitment to abolish the Department of Education. At the end of September 1999 he suggested that the Republicans in Congress might be attempting to "balance the budget on the backs of the poor"<sup>6</sup>. In his campaign autobiography he adopted Bill Clinton's triangulation technique to explain his philosophy: "I differ with those who want to dismantle government down to the last paper clip – and with those who want to extend its reach. Government is neither the enemy or the answer"<sup>7</sup>.

By this point, close observers of 'candidate Bush' from within the 'small government camp' were getting nervous. In 1999, the libertarian Cato Institute's Edward Crane<sup>8</sup> had warned that the "Clintonesque" Bush saw "virtually any problem confronting the American people [as] an excuse for action by the Federal Government".

On the White House website compassionate conservatism remains defined in terms of limited roles for 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

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5 Too Quiet On The Home Front, the New York Times, 20th March 2004

6 <http://www.texnews.com/abilene2000/elec/bush1001.html>

7 George W Bush, A Charge To Keep, William Morrow and Co, 1999

8 The Clintonesque George Bush, The New York Times, 4th August 1999

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.”

### *(1.2) A conservative brand of compassion – ‘conservative compassion’*

This conservative kind of compassion had two main characteristics:

- A belief in a superior brand of charity; and
- A willingness to use government to encourage independence-building behaviours.

#### *- A superior brand of charity*

Politicians on both sides of the traditional political divide and on both sides of the Atlantic favour enlarged roles for the non-profit sector. This support for a larger voluntary sector usually reflects a concern at the grey, one-size-fits-all services that public sector monopolies tend to produce. Compassionate conservatives share this confidence in the voluntary sector’s potential but they also have a particular brand of voluntarism in mind.

In *The Tragedy of American Compassion*<sup>9</sup>, Marvin Olasky – who George W Bush described as compassionate conservatism’s “leading thinker” – reviews the USA’s poverty-fighting traditions. He concludes that the most effective charities mend a person’s community and family relationships. The state can be good at providing needy people with material assistance but it lacks the ability of relational institutions to respond on an ongoing basis to other personal needs. George Bush has contrasted the “failed compassion of towering, distant bureaucracies” with “the armies of compassion” that “fight a very different war against poverty and hopelessness, a daily battle waged house to house and heart by heart”.

In addition, Olasky emphasises discernment. Charity without discernment, Olasky wrote, “not only subsidised the unscrupulous and undeserving but became a chief hindrance to spontaneous, free generosity.” Every age, he concludes in a very powerful section, builds its idea of compassion in the image of the god it worships:

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<sup>9</sup> Regnery 1992

"Cultures build systems of charity in the image of the god they worship, whether distant deist, bumbling bon vivant, or 'whatever goes' gopher. In colonial America, emphasis on a theistic God of both justice and mercy led to an understanding of compassion that was hard-headed but warm-hearted... Late nineteenth-century Americans who read the Bible regularly did not see God as a sugardaddy who merely felt sorry for people in distress. They saw God showing compassion while demanding change, and they tried to do the same. Groups such as the Industrial Christian Alliance noted that they used 'religious methods' - reminding the poor that God made them and had high expectations for them - to "restore the fallen and helpless to self-respect and self-support"."

This belief in restoring people to "self-respect and self-support" has led compassionate conservatives to reject the dehumanising 'feed-and-forget' philosophy that has come to characterise the welfare state's attitude to its dependent clients. Compassionate conservatives want to see 'help-to-change' charities becoming an increasing feature of society's response to poverty.

Compassionate conservatives are then faced with something of a dilemma. They want 'help-to-change' charities to receive more resources but they fear that they will lose their salty distinctiveness if they become too close to government. The most dynamic charities have always feared becoming dependent on a funding stream that is controlled by a bureaucracy. Experience teaches that the money may come with few strings in the first year but by years three, four and five, the conditions have begun to reshape the charity's original mission. Catholic Charities USA is held up as an example of a religious charity that has become little more than a 'government programme wearing a clerical collar'<sup>10</sup>. Father Richard John Neuhaus<sup>11</sup> cites 'the Catholic Charities USA phenomenon' as why "seriously religious folk are nervous about their programs becoming, through dependence upon government, indistinguishable from secular enterprises for which "spiritual factors" are, or so it would seem, an afterthought".

This subject was a theme of Iain Duncan Smith's leadership. He said that 'Charitable groups who are filling the gaps left by government failures should not have to beg for grants from bureaucrats who were the architects of those

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<sup>10</sup> A phrase from Michael Tanner's 'Corrupting Charity: Why Government Should Not Fund Faith-Based Charities', Cato Institute, 22nd March 2001

<sup>11</sup> Father Neuhaus – with Peter Berger – edited the hugely influential 'To Empower People: From State To Civil Society' of 1977.

failures”<sup>12</sup>. He continued: “Taxpayers’ money should reach charitable entrepreneurs without a thousand strings attached. That is why we will transform voluntary sector funding mechanisms and examine how we can reform our tax laws in a way that will help charities”.

As leader of the Conservative Party, Iain Duncan Smith launched the Sixty Million Citizens Green Paper<sup>13</sup> on voluntary sector funding. This paper proposed a range of mechanisms that would direct taxpayers’ money to organisations in proportion to the confidence that those organisations enjoyed amongst the communities and clients they served. These mechanisms included vouchers, endowments and much greater use of matched funding.

### *- A willingness to discriminate in favour of independence-building behaviours*

At the core of compassionate conservatism is a high view of the human person and his or her potential. In his inaugural address the President declared that “no insignificant person has ever been born”. This statement is often regarded as shorthand for George Bush’s opposition to abortion<sup>14</sup> but it is a much bigger statement of a Catholic-inspired attitude to all human life<sup>15</sup>. He and other compassionate conservatives don’t just believe in the significance of unborn children but that all people have dignity and potential that is unfulfilled when they are dependent on the state. Inspired by the teachings of the 12th century Jewish scholar Moses Maimonides, compassionate conservatives believe that helping someone to stand on their own feet represents the highest form of charity. Maimonides proposes eight levels of charity<sup>16</sup> - the highest of which is “to strengthen the hand of the

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12 ‘Defeating The Five Giants’ Lecture to Toynbee Hall, 13th September 2002

13 Published in May 2003 and available for download in the ‘policies’ section of [www.conservatives.com](http://www.conservatives.com).

14 George W Bush has also continued to champion conservative positions on abortion, cloning and homosexuality. His choice of judicial nominations, the passage of the ‘Born Alive Infants Act’ ([http://www.nrlc.org/Federal/Born\\_Alive\\_Infants/](http://www.nrlc.org/Federal/Born_Alive_Infants/)), a ban on partial-birth abortion; the restoration of Ronald Reagan’s ‘Mexico City Policy’ ([http://www.religioustolerance.org/abo\\_wrlld.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/abo_wrlld.htm)) opposition to cloning, and support for a constitutional ban on gay marriage have all been illustrations of George W Bush’s moral conservatism.

15 The President has often said that he is indebted to the Pope’s teaching on the culture of life. On 22nd March 2001 at the opening of Washington DC’s Pope John Paul II Cultural Center he said: “The Pope reminds us that while freedom defines our nation, responsibility must define our lives. He challenges us to live up to our aspirations, to be a fair and just society where all are welcomed, all are valued, and all are protected. And he is never more eloquent than when he speaks for a culture of life. The culture of life is a welcoming culture, never excluding, never dividing, never despairing and always affirming the goodness of life in all its seasons.”

16 The eight steps of charity are: (1) One who gives unwillingly. (2) One who gives cheerfully, but not enough. (3) One who gives enough, but not till he is asked. (4) One who gives before being asked, but directly to the poor person. (5) The poor one knows from whom he or she takes, but the giver does not know who is receiving. (6) The giver knows to whom he or she gives, but the receiver does

poor by giving a loan, or joining in partnership, or training out of the individual's poverty, to help become independent." The same belief is summed up more traditionally by the idea that if you give someone a fish they can eat for a day – but if you teach them to fish they can eat for the rest of their days.

This belief in building an independent-minded citizenry leads to compassionate conservatism's most controversial set of beliefs. Compassionate conservatism believes that an economically liberal, small government society depends upon abstinence, strong family structures and zero tolerance of drugs<sup>17</sup>.

Compassionate conservatism's traditional moral beliefs provoke the ire of right and left-of-centre liberals in equal measure. But only the liberal left has the moral and intellectual right to oppose social conservatism. The liberal left's belief in a big welfare state at least means that they are prepared to provide some sort of care – however inadequate - for children in fractured families or for people whose lives have been devastated by drugs. The libertarian right seem prepared to tolerate ultimately self-destructive behaviours without providing a safety-net for the victims of those behaviours.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, compassionate conservatives do not believe that government has been an innocent bystander in the growth of socially-destructive behaviours. Permissive policies on drugs and alcohol have not only fuelled crime - they have also produced unhealthy citizens who underperform at work and in the home. Taxpayer-funded safe-sex policies have appeared to condone – even encourage - sexual experimentation. This has produced a devastating and expensive explosion of sexually-transmitted infections and the huge number of welfare-dependent young mums.

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not know the giver. (7) The giver does not know to whom he or she gives, nor does the poor person know from whom he or she receives. (8) The highest form of charity is to strengthen the hand of the poor by giving a loan, or joining in partnership, or training out of the individual's poverty, to help become independent" –

[[http://www.myjewishlearning.com/daily\\_life/Tzedakah/TO\\_Tzedakah\\_H\\_and\\_D/Tzedakah\\_J\\_Trad/Maimonides\\_Eight\\_Degrees.htm](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/daily_life/Tzedakah/TO_Tzedakah_H_and_D/Tzedakah_J_Trad/Maimonides_Eight_Degrees.htm)].

17 Myron Magnet's *The Dream And The Nightmare: The Sixties' Legacy To The Underclass*, William Morrow & Co, 1993 set out the dangers to poorer communities of 'sixties values'.

18 The idea that the fathers of liberal economic thinking were also social libertarians is highly dubious. Adam Smith, author of *The Wealth of Nations*, was also author of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and originator of the concept of 'sympathy'. 'Sympathy' was an idea that helped the free market to produce just outcomes. He wrote that: "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature which interest him in the fortune of others and render their happiness necessary to him though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it." Burkean or social conservatives believe that close and enduring social structures provide an essential underpinning to feelings of sympathy.

Before President Bush both Republican and Democrat politicians followed the 'harm reduction' philosophy and administered programmes that sought to accommodate 'Woodstock'-era behaviours. Children were told to use drugs safely or to be careful when having intercourse with another fourteen year-old. Tolerance of these forms of behaviours is only likely to increase long-term demands on government, however, and undermine the character traits that the free enterprise system thrives upon<sup>19</sup>.

Misunderstanding the forces at play The Economist magazine<sup>20</sup> has attacked George W Bush's social conservatism for being part of his 'big government conservatism'. In reality a belief in social conservatism is essential if demand for government services is to be brought under control. In a democracy a politician is asking for trouble if they attempt to cut the supply of government services before either alternative suppliers have been built up (perhaps in the form of 'help-to-change' charities) or the demand for those services has been reduced.

Dr Wade Horn, who has had responsibility for family policy within the administration, has been a leading advocate of 'growing-government-to-shrink-it'. He has written:

"All good conservatives want smaller government. To achieve that end, we need a plan... The fact is that children (and adults) living in healthy and stable marriages are less in need of government services. By offering marriage-education services — on a purely voluntary basis — to interested couples whereby they can develop the knowledge and skills necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages, we will help reduce the need for more intrusive government interventions later on... Unless we can reverse the decline of marriage, demand for an ever-expanding welfare state will continue."<sup>21</sup>

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19 In refusing to tolerate self-destructive behaviours the Bush administration has not abandoned people to the consequences of those behaviours. Unwed mothers or those seeking an abortion are not abandoned. The administration has increased funding for maternity group homes and civil society programmes that attempt to support lone parents or reconcile lone mother families with the absent father.

20 28th August 2004

21 This argument was discussed by Jonah Goldberg on National Review Online – in No Angels – on 23rd July 2004.

## **(2) The record of compassionate conservatism**

### *Compassionate conservatism before Bush*

'Compassionate conservatism' was a slogan popularised by George W Bush. But long before he arrived in the White House other Republicans had – by accident or design and without using the same compassionate language – already delivered change for some of America's poorest people. Four areas of progress stand out:

- Rudi Giuliani's zero tolerance policing transformed the problem of crime in New York. Zero tolerance of everything from graffiti to 'broken windows' helped to restore a community's sense of peace and order. Mayor Giuliani concentrated police resources on the poorest, most crime-ridden estates and thus resisted the usual temptation facing Republican politicians to station police officers in the wealthier communities that tend to vote for them. A July 2002 opinion poll for New York's Citizens Crime Commission showed that the city's poorest communities were most supportive of the tough enforcement of "quality of life laws" countering graffiti and aggressive begging<sup>22</sup>.
- The 1996 welfare reforms aimed to reduce dependency rates, cut child poverty and strengthen the family. Eight years later the welfare caseload in the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families programme has been cut by 50%. In addition the employment rate amongst the poorest single mums has risen by 50%<sup>23</sup>.
- The Republican-controlled Congress had already passed the 1996 charitable choice<sup>24</sup> provisions for faith-based organisations. These provisions pioneered by John Ashcroft (then Senator for Missouri who became President Bush's Attorney General) were part of the federal welfare reform bill referred to immediately above. That bill included so many massive changes for state bureaucracies that the charitable choice requirements to give community and faith-based organisations more opportunity to deliver welfare services were slow to be pursued. This has begun to change as think tanks such as the Center for Public Justice are increasingly promoting the opportunities the provisions give to smaller, values-inspired poverty-fighters.

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22 Quoted by George L Kelling, 'A Policing Strategy New Yorkers Like', The New York Times, 3rd January 2002.

23 Quoted by Robert E Rector in a Heritage Foundation Memo of 10th February 2004.

24 <http://www.cpjustice.org/charitablechoice/guide/>

- There have also been important Supreme Court decisions that have favoured a conservative approach to compassion. The *Zelman versus Harris* ruling - concerning the funding of religious schools in Columbus, Ohio - was particularly significant. Many liberals wanting a strict separation between church and state had long objected to pupil voucher programmes that could benefit religious schools. *Zelman versus Harris* ruled in favour of the constitutionality of voucher programmes that offered a “genuine choice among options, public and private, secular and religious.”

### *George W Bush's record*

Five policy areas illustrate the uneven progress of George W Bush's compassionate conservative agenda –

- The faith-based initiative;
- The 'No Child Left Behind' education reforms;
- The Bush administration's overall attitude to government;
- Tax policy; and
- International development and justice issues.

Most of the interviewees for this paper agreed that President Bush has not introduced a reform that could compare – in scale and conservative character - with those introduced by Rudi Giuliani, Newt Gingrich or other Republicans. Some thought that I was framing an unfair question, however. Suggesting that crime was so bad in New York and the welfare system so abused, they argued that nothing needed as much radical surgery. Nothing, perhaps, needed such urgent surgery but, perhaps, other chronically failing systems still needed a significant overhaul.

Examination of the first three of the five following policy areas suggest - George W Bush has not:

- pursued radically 'democratic' reform of funding mechanisms for the voluntary sector;
- nor promoted school choice;
- nor stemmed the overall demand for government services.

#### *(2.1) The faith-based initiative*

Many of the key promises of George W Bush's 2000 campaign – abolition of the marriage penalty, missile defence and opposition to partial-birth abortion – were themes already associated with the Republican Party. The faith-based

initiative, however, was widely regarded as Bush's 'signature issue' and one to which he had been committed since his earliest days as Governor of Texas<sup>25</sup>. Some critics of the initiative fear the President's support for faith-based and other community organisations is an attempt to replace government. President Bush has directly rejected this suggestion: "Government cannot be replaced by charities, but we must welcome them as partners, not resent them as rivals."

Although George Bush has a particular respect for religiously-inspired ministries there has never been an attempt to give them favourable treatment. The aim has always been to eliminate the unfairnesses that they face and to give needy people an alternative to state and secular-based services. Under 'charitable choice' a potential 'service-user' who objects to receiving services from a faith-based provider has the legal right to help from a non-religious organisation.

One of America's leading (and non-partisan) think tanks on religion and politics – the Center for Public Justice - believes that George W Bush's faith-based initiative has created enormous opportunities for faith-based organisations:

"Communities across America are now beginning to witness the impact of the Bush Administration's effort to end discrimination against faith-based organizations. Local programs once routinely dismissed as "too religious" or "pervasively sectarian" are today being welcomed to a seat at the table when government seeks partners to help provide publicly funded social services such as job training or after-school programs in communities of need. Christian and other faith-based programs are no longer asked to first abandon their religious character or mission as a condition for receiving public funds.

Policy reforms such as Charitable Choice, enacted first in 1996, are changing the culture both inside and outside of government. Families receiving welfare benefits now have greater choice in services, including faith-based options, when seeking help. Government officials are now guided by new regulations that affirm the important

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<sup>25</sup> As early as December 1996 Governor Bush had published a ground-breaking report entitled 'Faith In Action: A New Vision For Church-State Co-operation In Texas'. This report recommended a wide range of measures to help faith-based and other community organisations.

principle of equal treatment for all faith communities and for those who make no claim of faith in public life.”<sup>26</sup>

Key successes of President Bush’s faith-based initiative include:

- Publication of the ‘Unlevel Playing Field’ report<sup>27</sup>. This report documented the unfairnesses facing faith-based organisations in their dealings with the federal government.
- The establishment of units within the five federal departments of ‘Health and Human Services’, ‘Housing and Urban Development’, education, justice and labour to ensure faith-based organisations receive fair treatment in funding decisions.
- The allocation of US\$1.2bn of discretionary grants to faith-based organisations in 2003 – 8.1% of the total number of grants.
- The appointment of a special counsel for religious discrimination<sup>28</sup> to remove the legal barriers to religious communities playing a fair role in the public square.

#### *- President Bush’s effective use of his ‘bully pulpit’*

Joe Loconte of the Heritage Foundation, noting that US\$74bn is already donated each year to religious bodies, argues that “making federal grants available to religious charities is the least important part of the president’s initiative”<sup>29</sup>. “What’s at stake,” he insists, “is something much larger: the false assumption that religious belief carries no advantage over unbelief in tackling social problems”. He then documents a huge range of faith-friendly initiatives throughout America’s states that prove that “a faith-friendly White House is changing the way many people think about the importance of religion in public life”. Loconte says that the President’s use of his ‘bully pulpit’ is his most important contribution to the idea that faith-based solutions can solve some of society’s most persistent ills.

The Center for Public Justice certainly concurs with this analysis. The CPJ’s Stephen Lazarus pointed me to a diverse number of research projects,

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26 Stanley Carlson-Thies and Stephen Lazarus, ‘Forward or Backward for Equal Treatment: Bush and Kerry on Social Policy Reforms’, Center for Public Justice

27 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/08/unlevelfield.html>. Even those groups unwilling to start a funding relationship with government have benefited from the deregulatory initiatives that this process has yielded.

28 US Department of Justice website: <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/religdisc/religdisc.html>

29 A Heritage Foundation commentary on President Bush’s Faith-Based Initiative, 18th July 2001

websites, conference events and philanthropic organisations that were exploring the social potential of faith communities.

Whilst Joe Loconte and Stephen Lazarus are almost certainly correct it remains disappointing that the Bush White House has not devoted more energy to a 'rewiring' of the way taxpayers' money can fund poverty-fighting groups.

With the exception of the 'Access to Recovery' programme for drug treatment, the Bush administration's faith-based and related initiatives have been built on an increase in government-controlled grant-based mechanisms rather than more democratic mechanisms involving vouchers, matched funding and tax credits.

### *- The precarious nature of President Bush's executive orders*

Grant-based mechanisms are most vulnerable to political manipulation. The other political danger facing the faith-based initiative – should there be 'regime change' in Washington – is the possibility of easy revocation of the Presidential executive orders by which it has been progressed over the last four years. John Dilulio (the first director of the faith-based initiative) has described the executive order mechanism as "ultimately unsustainable"<sup>30</sup>.

John Kerry, although warm about the generality of the initiative<sup>31</sup>, is specifically opposed to charities' freedoms to 'discriminate' in hiring decisions. A constituency of groups that would resist an unwinding of the programmes has grown up, however. This constituency has a large number of black and Hispanic members – two groups that a Democrat President is unlikely to want to offend. The Center for Public Justice has established the multi-faith Coalition to Preserve Religious Freedom<sup>32</sup> to defend charitable choice and related advances.

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30 Remarks at Princeton University, 25th April 2003

31 The Democrat nominee has promised a technical assistance fund for faith-based organisations and has spoken in general terms about the state supporting faith-based organisations: "I know there are some who say the First Amendment means faith-based organizations can't help government. I think they are wrong. I want to offer support for your efforts, including financial support, in a way that supports our Constitution and civil rights laws and values the role of faith in inspiring countless acts of justice and mercy across our land." There are doubts, however, as to whether a Kerry presidency would allow faith-based organisations in receipt of public funds to employ people that shared the organisation's ethos. Senator Kerry has spoken of "civil rights considerations" that may mean, for example, a publicly-funded Christian ministry – with orthodox views on homosexuality - being obliged to employ gay people. Democrats in Congress have certainly objected to any "litmus tests" in hiring practices.

32 Members of the Coalition (<http://www.cpublicjustice.org/cprf>) include the Christian Legal Society, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Synagogues of America and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops.

## *(2.2) The 'No Child Left Behind' education reforms*

In one of the most powerful soundbites of his 2000 campaign George W Bush talked about ending the "soft bigotry of low expectations". In his sights were the teacher unions and other opponents of 'testing and choice' who he felt were defending a status quo that was failing minority pupils, in particular. In August 2000 he contended:

"Too many American children are segregated into schools without standards, shuffled from grade-to-grade because of their age, regardless of their knowledge. This is discrimination, pure and simple.... And our nation should treat it like other forms of discrimination: We should end it".

Within days of entering the White House he was pushing his 'No Child Left Behind' reforms. Not only was it a flagship for his 'compassionate conservatism', it was also used to try and mould the bipartisanship his campaign had promised but which had been hugely damaged by the Florida imbroglio<sup>33</sup>. To this second end President Bush didn't just reach across the aisle but – to adopt a phrase he used against John Kerry in the third of their debates – he reached over the heads of mainstream Democrats and to the far left bank. Senator Ted Kennedy, the liberals' liberal, was enticed to become a sponsor.

Many of the interviewees for this paper agreed that George W Bush probably regards the 'No Child Left Behind' education reforms as compassionate conservatism's principal achievement. Most also agreed, however, that it has been a very disappointing reform.

Within George W Bush's initial education proposals there were tough sanctions for schools that didn't meet basic standards. In addition there were options, for students in underperforming schools, after three years, to become eligible for free tutoring or a move to a private or other state school. Congressional procedures gutted the proposals of the private school option and its other more radical elements. Worse still, a host of special-interest projects were added. Some of these owed more to political correctness than real inequities. Chief among them were initiatives to give extra resources to girls – ignoring the evidence that it is boys who were falling behind.

Despite these setbacks the administration can point to the fact that all states now have "accountability plans" for monitoring progress within schools and

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<sup>33</sup> A YouGov poll suggests that only 7% of American voters believe that President Bush has succeeded in bringing "Washington's Democrats and Republicans together".

all children aged 8-13 are tested on numeracy and literacy. This monitoring regime does, however, risk becoming a distorting target culture that UK Conservatives are wisely abandoning.

Both the libertarian Cato and conservative Heritage think tanks remain concerned about the 'No Child Left Behind' legislation. Cato objects, in particular, to the increased control exerted by federal government over the nation's schools. Heritage objects to the concession of huge increases in federal funding for little reform in return. Krista Kafer of Heritage has warned: "The NCLB requires states, districts, and schools to issue annual report cards on academic achievement, teacher qualifications, and school AYP [Adequately Yearly Progress] status. This information is useless unless parents can act on it.." Ms Kafer's view is that parents are not yet sufficiently empowered.

### *- School choice*

Despite the timid steps towards parental choice in 'NCLB' the administration remains committed to the principle. President Bush has been an active supporter of school choice programmes throughout the USA and in January won Congressional approval for a (limited) voucher programme in the District of Columbia. Rod Paige, Bush's Education Secretary and someone the President worked with in Texas, believes that vouchers are an issue of "social justice". On commencement of the DC vouchers programme, Secretary Paige said:

"I want to see every school system freed of these monopolistic requirements... It prevents innovation, dulls performance. Monopoly is simply the wrong policy for education, just as it is with every other business or endeavour. History has proven time and time again that monopolies don't work. In education, year after year of isolation from any alternative thinking creates an educational funk that frustrates needed change"<sup>34</sup>.

### *(2.3) Growth in the size of government*

This paper has already discussed the President's more positive, post-Gingrich attitude to government. David Brooks has written that President Bush "understands the paradox that if you don't have a positive vision of government, you won't be able to limit the growth of government. If you can't offer people a vision of what government should do, you won't be able to persuade them about the things it shouldn't do"<sup>35</sup>. A more positive view

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34 Quoted by The Journal of Conservative Thought at Tufts University, 13th March 2004

35 David Brooks, The New York Times, How To Reinvent The GOP, 29th August 2004

of government doesn't, however, excuse the bloat and 'pork' that has come to characterise the state under George W Bush.

This growth of the size of government under President Bush has been one of the most controversial aspects of his presidency. Ramesh Ponnuru has said that "big-government conservatism" is a "franker phrase" for George Bush's governing philosophy than compassionate conservatism<sup>36</sup>. By the end of his third year as the resident of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue Bush had increased the size of the state by as much as Bill Clinton had managed in eight years. During the three presidential debates George W Bush proudly talked about the extra spending (equivalent to 1% of national income<sup>37</sup>) that his administration had authorised on education and healthcare. This is in addition to the massive farm bill and increased spending on homeland security and the military. A million extra people are working on government contracts. The new increased total of just over 12 million contrasts with the declining number of contractees during the Clinton years. Dan Mitchell of the Heritage Foundation<sup>38</sup> puts this contrast down to the successful attempts of the Newt Gingrich-led Congress to frustrate the 'big government' plans of Bill Clinton. It is difficult to blame Congress for this largesse – not least because President Bush has never used his power of veto over a spending bill.

Some of the growth in government would be excusable if it had been used to 'lubricate' reforms but most do not believe that George W Bush has planted enough mustard seeds of change within his education or healthcare bills.

Jonathan Rauch thinks differently, however, and argues that Bush's reforms have done much to weaken Democrat-supporting special interests:

"Tax cuts dry up future Democratic spending initiatives, competitive sourcing [until recently unique to the Pentagon but now dramatically extended], education reform weakens teacher unions; litigation reform weakens the trial lawyers; trade liberalisation, another Bush priority, weakens private sector unions."<sup>39</sup>

The hugely influential Grover Norquist, of Americans for Tax Reform, is also impressed with the possibilities of GWB's reforms:

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36 'No More Nice Guy: The Death Of George W Bush's Compassionate Conservatism', National Review, 5th April 2004

37 <http://www.brook.edu/gs/cps/light20030905.htm>

38 <http://www.heritage.org/About/Staff/DanielMitchell.cfm>

39 Jonathan Rauch, The Accidental Radical, National Journal, 25th July 2003

“The Democratic Party – trial lawyers, labor union leaders, the two wings of the dependency movement (people on welfare, people who manage it), the coercive utopians (people who tell us our cars should be teeny), government employees – all parts of that coalition shrink and our coalition grows, every time you make one of these reforms.”

If George Bush has limited grounds for arguing that the growth in government reflects reform he has much less ground for saying that it reflects an investment in civil society. Outside of the faith-based initiative there is scant evidence that GWB has used government in this way. Unfortunately Congress has not granted Dr Horn the relatively modest US\$300m the White House requested for the Healthy Marriage Initiative. Some progress is being made at the state level, however. Ten states, for example, are using money under TANF legislation<sup>40</sup> to invest in pro-marriage education for school-age students and adults. Under Jeb Bush, Florida has mandated marriage education in all schools and eight other states, including Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, have developed or are proposing school-based courses.

US\$80m is also being invested into a ten-year research programme into how best to support marriage and healthy relationships. Dr Horn is a particular believer in ‘Community Marriage Policies’. Operating in nearly 200 cities in 40 states, CMPs bring together a community’s religious leaders in the provision of marriage preparation, enrichment education and special services to help troubled marriages or couples under great strain. The Institute for Research and Evaluation<sup>41</sup> has found that divorce rates in counties with CMPs were falling twice as fast as the national average.

Overall, however, since 1996, only 0.02% of the US\$100bn distributed under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families programme has been used to promote marriage. Similarly discouraging is evidence that points to expenditure of US\$4.50 on encouragement of teenagers to use contraception for every US\$1.00 invested in abstinence education. This mismatch of spending persists despite a Zogby International opinion survey which found that 79% of parents with children of 17 years or younger wanted them taught to delay sex until marriage or ‘near-marriage’<sup>42</sup>.

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40 The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) was part of the 1996 welfare reform legislation and provides assistance and work opportunities to needy families by granting states with federal funds to flexibly develop and implement their own welfare programs.

41 [www.smartmarriages.com/cmp.weed.pdf](http://www.smartmarriages.com/cmp.weed.pdf)

42 All data in this paragraph are taken from Robert E Rector’s Web Memo from The Heritage Foundation – Welfare Reform: Progress, Pitfalls and Potential – of 10th February 2004.

## *(2.4) Lower taxation*

Given the hesitancy about tax-cutting within British circles it is striking that not one of the 34 people interviewed for this paper questioned the appropriateness of President Bush's commitment to lower taxation. What the President has described as "the largest tax relief in a generation" was generally agreed to be essential to boost the flagging economy that he inherited and which got hit again after 9/11. I was struck by the confidence that all of my interlocutors have in the morality of cutting the tax burden. It was seen as essential for job creation and ethically right that people retained a bigger share of their earnings. During 2004 taxpayers will receive an average tax cut of more than US\$1,500.

When asked about the budgetary consequences of lower taxation there is an almost universal sense that tax competitiveness is *essential* to grow America's economy and the deterioration in the public finances is a function of undisciplined spending. Job creation is itself seen as compassionate but two other dimensions of Bush's tax cut strategy are highlighted for advancing social justice. One is the fact that five million families have been taken out of the tax system altogether and the other was the abolition of the 'marriage penalty'. Tax cuts of US\$2,602 for 49 million married couples have eliminated the costs that the tax system imposed on the decision to marry.

A significant minority of those interviewed for this paper did worry that the Republican Party's proximity to big business may have skewed the administration's tax-cut strategy towards corporate interests<sup>43</sup>. If 'big business' had been less powerful in the funding of the GOP some thought that a more progressive – and more socially-just - tax system might have emerged.

## *(2.5) Overseas aid, HIV/AIDS and human trafficking*

George W Bush's presidency has been extraordinarily consequential. Whether it ends after one term or continues for another four years it will be remembered for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and for the doctrine of pre-emption. It is probably no accident, therefore, that the international stage has also provided compassionate conservatism with some of its most significant achievements. So significant that they have been welcomed by rock stars Bob Geldof and U2's Bono. The link between the war on terror and global injustice was made in the White House's National Security Strategy<sup>44</sup>:

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43 The extent to which the Republican Party (and the Democrats) remains proximate to special interests because of the huge fundraising needs of American politics has not been examined in this paper. Other vital issues - hardly touched on here - include housing and the environment.

44 The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002

“The events of September 11, 2001, taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states. Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers. Yet poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders. The United States will stand beside any nation determined to build a better future by seeking the rewards of liberty for its people. Free trade and free markets have proven their ability to lift whole societies out of poverty—so the United States will work with individual nations, entire regions, and the entire global trading community to build a world that trades in freedom and therefore grows in prosperity. The United States will deliver greater development assistance through the New Millennium Challenge Account to nations that govern justly, invest in their people, and encourage economic freedom. We will also continue to lead the world in efforts to reduce the terrible toll of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases”.

Three ‘international justice initiatives’ stand out:

The Millennium Challenge Accounts – announced in March 2002 – set out a new approach to development. Underpinned by a US\$5bn (or 50%) increase in ‘core development assistance’ over three years the MCA initiative would “‘reward nations that root out corruption, respect human rights, and adhere to the rule of law... invest in better health care, better schools and broader immunization... [and] have more open markets and sustainable budget policies, nations where people can start and operate a small business without running the gauntlets of bureaucracy and bribery.’”<sup>45</sup> The announcement of the MCA’s first US\$1bn disbursement came in May with resources for Armenia, Benin, Bolivia, Cape Verde, Georgia, Ghana, Honduras, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Mongolia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Senegal, Sri Lanka and Vanuatu.

Last year the President announced a five-year US\$15bn initiative to address the global spread of HIV/AIDS. This additional investment made the American government a bigger financial contributor to the fight against AIDS than all other world governments put together. A values-based approach is meant to underpin this initiative. Randall Tobias, the man picked to head up the initiative, said that an ‘ABC’ (‘abstinence’ before marriage, ‘being faithful’ in marriage, and ‘condoms’ for high-risk groups like sex-workers) approach

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45 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/developingnations/print/millennium.html>

works – as pioneered by Uganda. “I’ve come to believe,” he states, “not just intuitively or by guessing about it, but based on a lot of data that we’ve been able to collect, that abstinence is the best approach”. The early funding decisions taken under GWB’s HIV/AIDS initiative again warn about the difficulties of a bureaucracy-controlled funding system, however. Few ‘ABC’ groups have received money. Groups supporting the conventional safer-sex policies are receiving more money under George W Bush than they received during the Clinton years<sup>46</sup>. Matt Kavgian of the abstinence-education ministry CrossRoads, noting the small number of grants to faith-based ‘ABC’ charities, suggests: “Much of the public-health establishment appears to be waiting for the end of the election season, and if Bush is not re-elected I am sure they will simply return to the status quo of excluding faith-based organizations like us from the federal grant process.”

A third international initiative is the President’s opposition to human trafficking. The United Nations has estimated that the international trafficking of 600,000 to 800,000 people every year has become organised crime’s third largest source of revenue (after arms and drugs). 80% of those trafficked are women and 70% are forced into various forms of sexual prostitution. George W Bush has provided US\$300m to more than one hundred countries to combat this twenty-first century form of slavery. The President has also launched ‘Operation Predator’ to prosecute American citizens who have sexual intercourse with minors abroad. OP has already led to more than 3,000 arrests.

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46 An article by Priya Abraham – Putting Money Where His Mouth Isn’t – World Magazine, 27th Match 2004

### **(3) The future of compassionate conservatism**

#### *The need to learn from the mistakes*

Most of this paper's interviewees believe that if GWB had remained more focused on his compassionate conservative message his re-election would not be so uncertain. Compassionate conservatism has hardly featured in the Republicans' re-election campaign. In part, of course, it has been eclipsed, like most other issues, by the administration's focus on the war on terror. After 9/11, David Brooks of The New York Times, suggests that GWB stopped defining himself as the "compassionate conservative" and became the "courageous conservative". The feminisation of American politics in the age of the 'soccer mom' was replaced by the post 9/11 need for the "manliness" of soldiers and first-responders<sup>47</sup> to respond the new voting bloc of 'security moms'.

Although all of those interviewed for this paper concede that the agenda has suffered because of the administration's focus on the war on terror, most also wanted to say that compassionate conservatism's flagship issues had already run into serious difficulties before 9/11. The President's signature faith-based initiative had made no legislative progress and had already suffered from its first director resigning. The 'No Child Left Behind' educational reforms had passed but without any of the bold commitments to school choice that were initially promised.

George W Bush was able to communicate a strong, authentic belief in compassionate conservatism because of his own conversion experience. Unfortunately this has not been enough to make an authentic conservative compassion a strong feature of his administration. One disappointed admirer of the President told me: "What we need is a politician who cannot only feel these things, as Bush does, but articulate them." Another said:

"Naturally, I had hoped that compassionate conservatism would be a bold initiative to strategically redesign federal social welfare policy, reposition the GOP on issues of social engagement and justice, and bring about a renaissance in individual, community-based initiative. There are only two possible explanations: one, it was a political tactic to get elected in 2000 and little more; or two, it was sidelined by either 9/11 or controversy, or both. What is personally painful is that I just don't think we should ever be casual about the promises

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47 Peggy Noonan, Welcome Back, Duke: From The Ashes of September 11th Arise The Manly Virtues, 12th October 2001

we make to the poor, especially when the program is rolled out with all of the powerful overtones of personal conscience and conviction.”

### *Public attitudes towards compassionate conservatism*

The lack of attention paid to compassionate conservatism may also reflect an absence of public confidence in it. An opinion survey found that 42% agreed that “George Bush has lived up to his promise to govern as a compassionate conservative” but 52% thought “George Bush promised to govern as a compassionate conservative, but his actions in office have proven otherwise”<sup>48</sup>.

A YouGov survey of American voters<sup>49</sup> did find, however, that George W Bush’s “support for faith-based organisations” was the second most honoured promise of his presidency. 44% of respondents thought GWB had kept his promise on faith-based social action. Only lower taxation (55%) scored more highly. Other themes of compassionate conservatism came in at 33% (“a prescription drug benefit for seniors”), 32% (“a better education for every child”) and 16% (“fighting HIV/AIDS in the third world”).

### *Compassionate conservatism never had a prominent standard-bearer*

Part of compassionate conservatism’s weakness might have been the administration’s failure to ever appoint a high-ranking (and Republican) standard-bearer with responsibility for implementing and promoting what George W Bush called his governing philosophy.

Stephen Goldsmith, the former Mayor of Indianapolis, had been the Bush-Cheney 2000 campaign’s domestic policy advisor. In Indianapolis Goldsmith had pioneered the faith-friendly Front Porch Alliance<sup>50</sup> - an initiative since replicated by Jeb Bush in Florida. Mayor Goldsmith had a firm grasp of the issues at stake. “True urban strength can only be built on values,” he once wrote and concluded that faith-based organisations are the most effective “value-shaping organisations.” Mayor Goldsmith was widely thought to be the President’s first choice to oversee the signature issue of compassionate conservatism – the faith-based initiative. Mayor Goldsmith wasn’t apparently content with such a limited role, however, and sought a cabinet-level position,

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48 A survey by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research in May 2004 for Mother Jones magazine - [http://www.motherjones.com/news/special\\_reports/2004/06/results4.html](http://www.motherjones.com/news/special_reports/2004/06/results4.html)

49 A YouGov survey of 3,171 US citizens, 18-20 October 2004

50 The Front Porch Alliance was created by Mayor Goldsmith to link churches and other neighbourhood groups with government funding and know-how. Mayor Goldsmith, a Jew, wrote: “In many of our most troubled neighborhoods, the most important asset is the church.”

which would have included the faith-based and related initiatives. Not only was this position never offered to Goldsmith a top-level 'czar' for compassionate conservatism – capable of driving the agenda – was never sought either.

The White House turned to John Dilulio, a Democrat-supporting academic, for the narrower role of first director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Professor Dilulio's tenure was not a happy one. It neither began nor ended well. Soon after his appointment, in an address to a major gathering of evangelical Christians – a core constituency of the President – Dilulio implied that they should stop worrying about the detail of his proposals<sup>51</sup> and get on with helping America's poor. Eight months after he took up his post Dilulio resigned citing health reasons. Later – in a rescinded memo<sup>52</sup> - he wrote about the "virtual absence of any policy accomplishments that might, to a fair-minded non-partisan, count as the flesh on the bones of so-called compassionate conservatism". "Truth be told," he said, "[there were] only a couple of people in the West Wing who worried at all about policy substance and analysis". He complained that he "got less staff help" with his "faith bill saga" than any public relations events. Jim Towey, another Democrat, became John Dilulio's successor.

A prominent standard-bearer might have been able to prevent the misinterpretations that have bedevilled the agenda. Liberals hoped that compassionate conservatism might lead to an abandonment of socially conservative positions on abortion, marriage and drugs. Small government conservatives hoped that George W Bush's affection for poverty-fighting charities would soon lead to a reduced role for the state in the delivery of welfare. Believers in a state-led approach to poverty reduction hoped that the President's caring rhetoric would make it difficult for him to cut government programmes. Having people of differing views all like compassionate conservatism may be valuable during a campaign but can be politically dangerous in government.

Similar problems of misinterpretation bedevilled Iain Duncan Smith's 'Helping The Vulnerable' campaign of 2002. Apart from the slightly patronising overtones of the campaign title, some observers interpreted 'HTV' as a fulfilment of libertine views on lifestyle issues. They felt betrayed or confused

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51 Evangelical and other Christian ministries were worried that they would be required to modify the content of their programmes – and their hiring practices – in return for federal dollars.

52 A memo to Esquire journalist Ron Suskind, 24th October 2002, which John Dilulio later withdrew. Dilulio has also written: "President Bush is a highly admirable person of enormous personal decency. He is a godly man and a moral leader. He is much, much smarter than some people -- including some of his own supporters and advisers - seem to suppose. He inspires personal trust, loyalty, and confidence in those around him. In many ways, he is all heart."

when IDS imposed a three-line whip against Labour's plans to allow unmarried couples to adopt. One misreading of compassion – that emphasised the *rights* of adults – was confronting a superior interpretation – the need to maximise the security of children who had been 'damaged' whilst in care and were in need of security.

***The future of compassionate conservatism may rest on the shoulders of a few key individuals and think tanks***

Disappointment at compassionate conservatism's recent limited progress has to be viewed in the light of the significant number of poverty-fighting achievements wrought by conservatives throughout the 1990s. Giuliani's zero tolerance policing, the Gingrich welfare reforms (which Bill Clinton did not veto), Senator John Ashcroft's 'charitable choice' reforms and Supreme Court validation of Republican school choice initiatives have all provided disproportionate benefit to America's poorest people. For the three of those initiatives that fall within the President's ambit, George W Bush has protected and increased their possibilities. Measures to strengthen the family are complementing welfare reform. More faith-based organisations operating in increasingly diverse areas of social need are benefited from a level playing field. 'No Child Left Behind' has slightly increased the opportunities for school choice.

If re-elected George W Bush will have another opportunity to advance compassionate conservatism. The most important test may be his selection of Supreme Court justices. Two or three judges may retire over the next four years and the men or women appointed to succeed them may determine vital issues of religious freedom (and, therefore, the potential of faith-based groups to operate successfully) and family law.

Looking forward – to both a possible Bush second term and to beyond the 43<sup>rd</sup> Presidency – a few individuals and think tanks may determine the future of compassionate conservatism:

Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania – and currently Chairman of the Senate Republican Committee - is probably Congress' most committed compassionate conservative. He has written that "Compassionate conservatism is definitely the future of the Republican Party and, I hope, Britain's Conservative Party, too." He has expressed a hope to "redefine compassion" – "countering the Left's false claim that they are the only ones who truly care for the poor"<sup>53</sup>. Senator Santorum, a committed Catholic, was

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53 Senator Rick Santorum, a contribution to *There Is Such A Thing As Society*, edited by Gary Streeeter, Politicos 2002

a leading champion of welfare reform and employed eight welfare recipients in his own office as part of that commitment. He has also been a leading supporter of the President's faith-based initiative, family policies and action on international poverty – for which he also won the praise of U2's Bono. Also encouraging is the establishment of a Community Solutions and Initiatives caucus<sup>54</sup> of more than twenty (mainly Republican) members of the House of Representatives. This caucus aims to learn from the best efforts of faith-based and community groups.

Senator Dan Coats – now US Ambassador to Germany – may replace Donald Rumsfeld or Colin Powell in a second Bush administration. Coats was one of the earliest champions of faith-based social action and believes in the importance of voucher-based funding mechanisms – rather than direct grant systems. The new Sagamore Institute (closely associated with Ambassador Coats) and the Manhattan Institute are think tanks most committed to compassionate conservatism<sup>55</sup>. Indianapolis-based Sagamore is a very new enterprise – having broken away from the Hudson Institute. Manhattan is most associated with Rudi Giuliani's reforms and has recently developed a strong interest in social entrepreneurship.

This paper has already referred to Wade Horn. Dr Horn is one of America's most persuasive advocates of a conservative view of the family. As a previous director of the National Fatherhood Initiative he has enormous experience of grassroots approaches to poverty reduction. He has wisely promoted the importance of 'healthy' marriages rather than marriage per se. Desirous of investing more resources in marriage preparation (rather than crisis counselling), Dr Horn believes that it is important to persuade incompatible couples from marrying in the first place. In marriage preparation courses couples discuss their expectations of each other and for children. Having these discussions early can be essential for a healthy marriage to emerge and for the avoidance of mismatched expectations.

### ***The libertarian and compassionate paths to the modernisation of Britain's Conservative Party***

If the overall progress of compassionate conservatism under George W Bush was modest this paper has argued that the last decade has been significant for the overall social reforming record of America's Republicans.

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54 [http://www.house.gov/ryan/press\\_releases/2004pressreleases/62304comm\\_solutions.html](http://www.house.gov/ryan/press_releases/2004pressreleases/62304comm_solutions.html)

55 Although both think tanks focus on compassionate conservatism Sagamore emphasises the importance of building a more diverse and free civil society (the first half of the conservative compassion suggested in section one) whilst Manhattan has tended to develop Myron Magnet's critique of 'sixties libertarianism' and its terrible effect on the poorest Americans (the second dimension of conservative compassion).

The Republican Party's achievements mean that it is many years ahead of British Conservatives in delivering socially inclusive government. Thinking about the different 'modernisation' strategies chosen by the two once close political parties provides much food for thought. Both have lived in the shadow of two charismatic and successful third way politicians. But rather than trying to replicate the rainbow coalition of the Left, American Republicans sought to apply authentically conservative principles to the persistent challenges of crime and welfare. They sought to broaden their identity rather than question it. The Americans' ambitious extension of conservatism was powered by a number of thoughtful liberals-turned-neoconservatives who abandoned the big state beliefs of their old worldview but retained its idealism.

The modernisers within Britain's Conservative Party have been ahead of the curve in their understanding of the need for their party to change. To this end they have invested huge effort in finding 'modern' positions on Section 28, civil partnerships and even drugs. However, while hateful attitudes to minority groups should certainly be abandoned, the modernisers' mistake was to search for a tokenistic Clause IV – the abolition of which would signify change. The last decade of American Republicanism suggests that something less cosmetic and more serious is required. Wouldn't the Tory Party have made more progress if it had focused on the stark gap between haves and have-nots rather than the contentious divide between traditionalists and transgressives?

Iain Duncan Smith's shadow cabinet set the Conservative Party on the road to rediscover its one nation heritage. 2002, in particular, was one of the modern Conservative Party's most innovative years. It was launched with Oliver Letwin's 'conveyor belt to crime' analysis and David Willetts' 'One Nation Hearings' in Britain's poorest neighbourhoods. Tory-controlled Kent County Council was accelerating its dependency to independence strategy. At the party's spring forum IDS committed the party to the 'rescue' of communities like Glasgow's Easterhouse. In September he pledged to slay the five modern giants of failing schools, crime, substandard healthcare, child poverty and insecurity in old age. Since the end of his leadership 'social justice' has been a less prominent theme. Michael Howard has, however, refined the 'pupil passport' policies into a school choice agenda that, if enacted, would be the most radical of its kind in the world. Also of note have been John Hayes' housing policies<sup>56</sup> and John Bercow's curtailed spell as

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56 John Hayes MP has proposed that "the idea of the home can define a Conservative agenda for the twenty-first century". He has said: "Homes are a symbol of social justice - of private ownership - of security - of independence from intrusive

international development spokesman when he fought fiercely for forgotten nations like Burma.

Few Tory MPs object to the idea of a more socially-just conservatism but they might be being more honest if they did. Most of the MPs who tell me that compassionate conservatism is “very worthwhile” don't actually want the party to spend much time on it. For them compassionate conservatism is something you may make brief reference to at the church hustings meeting in the run-up to election time. Few understand the political potency of a more compassionate brand of conservatism that doesn't just reshape a few policies here and there but actually changes the whole way the party presents itself. Some are willing to experiment with a few inner city photo opportunities but expect an immediate fillip in the opinion polls. They miss the fact that the electorate are reserving judgment until they see a genuine commitment to social reform - tested over time. Some protest that the poorest communities will never vote Conservative – overlooking the fact that many prosperous voters will only return to the Conservative Party if they see a party that is good for their neighbour, as well as for themselves.

A recent YouGov poll for the Centre for Social Justice<sup>57</sup> suggested that a caring conservatism made more political sense than a libertarian conservatism. The survey found an overwhelming concern – across all ages and regions – about the vulnerability of pensioners and children. The minorities so courted by the modernisers hardly registered in the survey. YouGov also found strong support for families built around traditional values and schools rooted in strong disciplinary codes.

A belief in a more progressive tax system – underpinned by tax cuts for the poorest families – could be a flagship for compassionate Toryism. This could be accompanied by New York-style policing and anti-drug policies for Britain's hardest-pressed neighbourhoods. These and other policies – pursued vigorously over years rather than in a tick box kind of way - wouldn't require an abandonment of 'core' Conservative beliefs on crime, immigration and Europe. On the contrary, quality of life policies would provide the seasoning to make those core beliefs palatable to a greater number of people. At long last the prosperous voters who abandoned the Tories in 1997 could again find their hearts *and* heads telling them that voting Conservative is the right thing to do.

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government - of local identity - of embryonic community life." From a speech at Toynbee Hall, 24th May 2004.

57 YouGov for The Centre for Social Justice, 21st September 2004

**In this extended essay  
Tim Montgomerie investigates the  
strengths and weaknesses of  
George W Bush's compassionate  
conservative agenda.**



Tim Montgomerie's analysis is based on more than thirty interviews with officials inside the administration, Washington thought leaders and people associated with George W Bush's Governorship of Texas.

Despite some important successes, the author contends that the promise of compassionate conservatism has been unfulfilled and that President Bush's re-election chances have been hurt by the neglect of the agenda.

Whatever happened to compassionate conservatism? also considers the prospects for a renewal of compassionate conservatism if America's 43<sup>rd</sup> President retains the White House.

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