

Marta du Vall

**COMPASSIONATE CONSERVATISM.
A NEW VERSION OF THE CONSERVATIVE WELFARE STATE?¹**

The main purpose of this article is to present a new trend in political thinking – compassionate conservatism. This can be understood as a system of closely related political and philosophical views. Such views can be used as a link between the great government era – as a way of dealing with social problems – and a new era, where individuals are thought to be able to decide on their lives and welfare.² It should be remembered that every attempt to describe American conservatism needs to take into consideration the reality of living in the United States. Despite some general problems, most visible in the content of the doctrine is the genetically and functionally basic connection between the concrete historical reality of American society and the interests of various social groups.

Compassionate conservatism, like any other doctrine (if we presume that it is a separate political philosophy), should be explained as a certain social and political phenomenon. In this case it is important to explain the processes of reception (that is acceptance of a large part) of the doctrine by the supporters of this kind of conventional, classic, American conservative doctrine. One should also bear in mind the elements of the critical analysis as well as the need for a historical and

¹ Welfare state – a kind of state with the purpose of protection of citizens against the risks connected to the market economy, primarily job loss, health loss, and also the risks associated with old age; it is also a system of state institutions providing public services and social services. From: www.biznes.pwn.pl/haslo/3953947/panstwo-dobrobytu.html.

² S. Goldsmith, *What Compassionate Conservatism is – and is not*, “Hoover Digest” (adapted from a speech given at the Hoover Institution), 30.04.2000.

contextual approach to the function of the doctrine in a certain place and time. We can also try to account for the genesis of compassionate conservatism by the processes of perception and assessment of the political and legal phenomena made by its creators, which become a motivation for individuals and groups. It is also important to take into consideration analysis of the sociological and political conditions, power structure and political practice (represented in the course of actions and decisions by state authorities, in the tactics and strategy of less or more professionally organized social and political groups).

There is no doubt that, from the 1980s until the first decade of the 21st century, conservatism was the dominant tradition in American political and social life. Despite the popular belief that the 1980s and the period of Ronald Reagan's presidency were the "time of conservatives", conservatism is still supported by wide circles of intellectuals and politicians. It is undergoing a certain revolution and, as time goes by, it can be considered as dominant in American politics.

Three basic axioms should be underlined here: firstly, that in the United States liberalism was and still is not only the prevailing, but simply also the only intellectual tradition.³ Secondly, the result of the first axiom is the idea that American conservatism is not in opposition to liberalism, but is based on liberal ideology.⁴ Thirdly, in America and since 1776 in the United States of America there has always been a place for some kind of conservative thinking.⁵

At the same time it is important to remember that conservatism is not a closed ideology, but rather a way of thinking based on a set of prerequisites (tradition, freedom, ownership, strong state), which can suggest certain solutions according to the circumstances.⁶ Conservatism can be defined in terms of universal values such as: justice, order, equilibrium, moderation.⁷ It is not a homogeneous concept; it is a notion that is as difficult to define as it is multifaceted. It is not a single idea but a whole set of ideas joined with complicated, internal, multi-motivational relations. These relations and dependences show the abundance of conservative thinking.⁸

At this point the ideas of Russell Kirk should be mentioned, as he rightly noticed that the roots of American civilization are conservative in such a way that they created a universal and "proper" moral order, based on the greatest traditions of the West. He linked conservatism to the American heritage, and interpreted the protection of the conservative tradition as protection of the American tradition. Therefore,

³ L. Trilling in *The Liberal Imagination*: "In the United States at this time liberalism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition"; quoted [in:] R. Kirk, *The Conservative Mind. From Burke to Santayana*, Chicago 1953, p. 423.

⁴ G. Carey, *The Popular Roots of Conservatism*, Wilmington 1986.

⁵ *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, ed. R. E. Goodin, F. Pettit, Warsaw 2002, p. 333.

⁶ J. Matusiewicz, *Conservative Liberalism – Essence and Origins*, www.bezuprzedzen.pl/poglady/konserwatyzm_liberalizm.html (12.2003).

⁷ S. P. Huntington, *Conservatism as Ideology*, "American Political Science Review", July 1956, p. 454–460.

⁸ T. Tołoczek, *Dilemmas of American Conservative Capitalism*, [in:] *Doctrine and Conservative Movement in the Modern World. Conference materials*, ed. H. Łakomy, Kraków 1992.

Kirk's ideas, expressed in his book *The Conservative Mind*,⁹ were crucial for restoring modern American conservatism.

There is no doubt that, during the last 50 to 60 years, we have been able to observe a constant rise and development of America's right wing. The conservative path to respect and power seemed helpless at the beginning due to the dominant left-wing beliefs of wide swathes of the society. Also other circumstances stood in the way: the deaths of leaders, the hostile attitude of the liberal establishment, and common disagreements inside the conservative movement, which was thought to be united.

As mentioned, since the 1980s we have been witnessing a triumph of the conservative doctrine in the United States. It is also worth mentioning that "contrary to the liberalism and socialism, conservatism does not directly realize the special vision of a good society... The purpose of conservatism is to 'shelter, protect and defend' the existing social, economic and political institutions".¹⁰ It seems that the easiest way to perceive the triumph of conservative thought is by the shift it made from the theoretical world of ideas straight to the world of political activities.

I would like to emphasize that American conservatism had and still has typical characteristics of American culture. In almost all its trends there is a belief that the American experiment is unique and its basis should not be affected. If conservatism criticizes America, it is only America's modern, corrupt version, so different from the ideas of the Founding Fathers. That criticism is a kind of nostalgia for wasted heritage, which can still be restored. In its great majority, American conservatism has become since the mid-20th century an enemy to the increasing federal government interference in economic and social life, which was especially visible after the New Deal¹¹ of the 1930s. Conservatism also saw political centralization as a threat to personal freedom; the main ideological enemy for conservatism became progressive liberalism, the equivalent of European social democracy. Conservatism protected private ownership and was against excessive taxation, especially the compensatory welfare state, which in the name of social justice arbitrarily and ideologically defines its contents. It was also against communism as a Manichean ideology – a threat to freedom and the American lifestyle. Conservatism considered religion as a fundamental part of the American experience, and attempts to place re-

⁹ First edition titled: *The Conservative Mind. From Burke to Santayana*, published in 1953, by Henry Regnery Company.

¹⁰ S. P. Huntington, *Robust Nationalism*, "The National Interest" 1999, No. 58.

¹¹ The New Deal was a program of economic and social reforms introduced in the United States by President Roosevelt in the years 1933–1939. The aim of these reforms was to counteract the effects of the Great Depression, which left millions of Americans without employment and in poverty and the economy in a state of disintegration. It was believed then that the collapse was caused by constant instability of the market and that government intervention is necessary to stabilize and improve the economy. To a large extent, the New Deal was about state interventionism. The state introduced unemployment benefits, public works, and federal funds subsidizing many projects. Numerous legal solutions to stabilize the industry, agriculture and banking sector were introduced. In addition, mechanisms to stimulate job creation were also brought in. Roosevelt's New Deal politics gave him considerable popularity among poorer citizens.

ligion in the private sphere were treated only as dangerous in terms of freedom and as a barrier protecting citizens from the state idolatry. What is more, conservatism was against counterculture in its various guises, blaming it for causing axiological chaos and destruction of private and public morality.¹²

Conservatism in the United States is marked with American optimism. According to some opinions it lacks what is so characteristic of its European version, the feeling of fatalism and public helplessness. There is no sign of self-excuse or of adherents making constant objections towards their own views. The difference results not only from the distinct provenance of the American Enlightenment, but also from the authentic social pluralism, its anarchic religiosity, self-organization, financial power, willingness to defend one's 'own' world, and traits of character deeply rooted in the democratic culture. It is also because of cultural rejection of the state as the institution organizing the society.¹³

Compassionate conservatism is a young trend, created, it is believed, by Republican President George W. Bush and his associates. In his commencement speech (January 20, 2001) President Bush called upon Americans to stop being passive viewers and become real citizens. In spring 2002 he said:

The government cannot solve every problem, but it can encourage individuals and communities to help themselves and each other. Most often the real compassion is about helping citizens to build their own lives. My philosophy and my approach I call compassionate conservatism. Compassion meaning active assistance for citizens when they need it, conservatism meaning emphasis on responsibility and effects. With such an optimistic approach we can really change people's lives.¹⁴

Those words confirmed that the views the president and his associates had were directly rooted in the newly defined version of conservatism.

It is very often the case, however, that questions arise as to whether such conspicuous statements of the new understanding of conservatism are only political slogans, or a new philosophy. What needs to be stated here is that this was a consistent political platform, which explained the Republicans' approach to the domestic politics of the United States. Compassionate conservatism really is a form of political conservatism. It is characterized by the belief that the government should play a restricted role in the lives of citizens as well as towards the market. According to its proponents, compassionate conservatism is the most effective means to build social and economic progress. In consequence, it believes in low taxes, restricted governmental regulations and the great power of the free market. Similarly to traditional conservatism, this trend assumes that the market is the best place for learning and supplying basic values. At the same time conservatives in this current notice that the wealth created in the free market leaves large numbers of American

¹² A. Bryk, *Intellectual Sources of Ronald Reagan's Conservative Revolution*, [in:] *Ronald Reagan and the Challenges of the Epoch*, ed. A. Bryk, A. Kapiszewski, Kraków 2005, p. 152.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

¹⁴ J. M. Jones, *Compassionate Bush*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", www.wyborcza.pl/0,0.html (05.2011).

people behind, and that the government is responsible for those staying on the lowest rung of the economic ladder. According to the principles of compassionate conservatism, government is not responsible for redistribution of the wealth among the citizens, but for providing those in worse conditions with capacities and capabilities to enable them to maximize their shares on the market and build their own wealth. According to compassionate conservatism, welfare has to have a moral background, and its economic results should be available to a wide range of people. Conservatives in this trend do not believe in a paternalistic type of government. They do not believe in “great government” programs either, as this simply means giving money away.¹⁵

There are three main tendencies in compassionate conservatism:

- Optimism and certainty – that individuals are able to take care of themselves;
- Belief – that the best way to help a citizen is through free market mechanisms;
- Conviction – that the welfare has to have a purpose – there is more to the USA being a successful country than just simple functioning of a free market.¹⁶

Undoubtedly, compassionate conservatism was a slogan of George W. Bush’s presidential campaign and became an important vehicle for domestic and international politics during his presidency. To have a closer look at the youngest trend in conservative thinking, one should bear in mind that Bush is only to some extent an author of this idea. The fact is that he used an idea little known at that time and made it his election slogan.

The beginnings of this political philosophy dates back at least to 1992, when Marvin Olasky, a journalist and tutor (University of Texas in Austin, King’s College in New York among others) wrote his book entitled *The Tragedy of American Compassion*¹⁷. In the book he writes about the American struggle against poverty from colonial times to the 1990s. The author argues that individuals as well as organizations and communities, with a particular emphasis on churches and Christian communities, are responsible for taking care of the poor. The conclusion of the book is that individual, personal and spiritual aid and support is at every time more effective and brings far more benefits than any governmental program. Olasky points to the fact that all social engineering programs are inefficient because, being created in politicians’ offices, they are simply detached from reality. On the other hand, he shows in opposition that private charity has the power to change the world and influence people’s lives because it allows donors to have direct contact with the recipients and those who need their help. From this angle, the problem of poverty (in the USA) is not only connected with the poor lacking material support, but far more with the lack of interpersonal relationships. Such a vision could be interpreted as a coming back to the roots which are fundamental for American society to function and which were so perfectly described by Tocqueville in his work *On*

¹⁵ S. Goldsmith, *What Compassionate Conservatism is...*

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ M. Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, published by Regenery in 1992.

Democracy in America. Joint action causes people to be closer to each other, somehow even forces them to help one another. It leads to the egoism of individuals being overcome. Intensive interactions and extensive social communication in civil society cause a tightening of interpersonal relations among people and diminish the risk of social isolation and fear. The more individuals contact each other, the more joint actions they undertake and the more they trust themselves.¹⁸

It is easy to notice that Olasky's book was a sharp criticism against the welfare state as an unfair, or even harmful monopoly of the state to help the poor. It advocated restoring the 19th-century system of private and church charity, within which individuals and communities meet the needs of the poor, expecting them to be responsible in return.¹⁹ Olasky continued the topic in his many articles and following books: *Renewing American Compassion* from 1996 and *Compassionate Conservatism: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Can Transform America*²⁰ in 2000.

This way of thinking, i.e. emphasizing the situation of the poor, put compassionate conservatives outside the camp of traditional conservatives, who were more interested in matters of business, taxes, military power, etc. Therefore, it should not seem surprising that participants and commentators at the National Republican Convention in the year 2000 often called the then Governor Bush a "different kind of Republican".²¹ Obviously, the traditional fields of interest of American conservatism mentioned earlier were not against the principle of compassion as such, but did not allow a clear and precise statement to be announced on the matter of poverty.²² At the same time, the fact is that the Republicans won the 2000 elections mainly because finally there were some serious engagements concerning social matters (largely social services and education) in their program. On the political platform level, compassionate conservatism deprived Democrats of their most important point – the unjustified conviction of having the monopoly on care for the unprivileged.²³

Compassionate conservatism was a kind of breach in the Republicans' platform, but many conservative commentators and publicists argue that it was a well-constructed and consistent agenda on domestic politics. The platform was a specific connection between trust in conservative values and seeking new possibilities of implementing those values in modern reality. The basis for new policies became care for the poor, which until that moment had been beyond the scope of interest of Republican politicians, and, at the same time, the belief that the government is responsible for the poor Americans. Republican policies towards the poor since

¹⁸ See: T. Tokarz, *Freedom, an Ally or a Brake on Development*, www.mises.pl/site/subpage.php?id=27&content_id=124&view=full (07.2006).

¹⁹ J. M. Jones, *Compassionate Bush...*

²⁰ The introduction to the book *Compassionate Conservatism* was written by George W. Bush.

²¹ J. Tapper, *Defining Compassionate Conservatism*, www.salon.com/news/politics/feature/2000/08/03/goldsmith (05.2011).

²² J. M. Jones, *Compassionate Bush...*

²³ *Ibidem*.

the presidency of Richard Nixon can be described using the words of the late Democratic senator, Patrick Moynihan, who called it benevolent omission. Nixon, along with his successors, Ronald Reagan and George Bush, treated the idea of the welfare state and all social programs as useless, and did not pay much (not to say no) attention to it. In the other half of the 1990s a new approach could however be seen. It was based on the observation of many Republican politicians, governors and mayors that actions concerning the problems of the urban underclass should be a priority²⁴. At that time, numerous American cities were facing similar problems: poverty, delinquency, high unemployment rate, lots of people using social services, children brought up in broken families, neglected municipal infrastructure. Compassionate conservatism was thought to be a remedy to those problems.

Raising the issue of government being responsible for poverty and the poor did not mean, as earlier mentioned, agreeing to the liberal vision of the welfare state. American conservatives were convinced that almost every sphere of American daily life was ruthlessly depraved by liberal politics and the liberal ethos. This ethos, according to traditional politicians and authors, on the one hand constantly stimulates striving for political and social collectivism, while on the other hand it is a moral anarchy.²⁵ Compassionate conservatives feel that liberal politics, instead of helping, only made existing problems more serious. Liberal compassion could best be seen in persuading the poorest social classes that they could not change their faith themselves, because they are just the innocent victims of the system (according to either economic inequality or racial discrimination, etc.). This kind of approach was almost destructive – it legitimized the sense of hopelessness and personal uselessness – it creates people unable to act, to engage themselves, to care about their own lives, waiting only for the state (government) to help. The liberal welfare state creates a society of clients of social services. According to conservatives, excessive regulations, control and interfering in economic and social life were the main reason for economic crises and social dissatisfaction. They demanded a significant decrease in state interventionism and an increase in the role of the market.

Again, for conservatives what the poor need above all is significant moral support from the society. A message needs to reach them that they are personally responsible for their lives, but on the other hand that the society is willing to support them and they are not alone. Compassionate conservatism still believes in equality, understood as an “equality of chances” (it favors freedom and economic development); it believes in classless American society, which joins with the opinion that every citizen has an open path to the top jobs; it is also convinced of the egalitarian character of the society, which is linked to strong competition and individualism²⁶ (all of this was connected to a deep faith in the possibility of realizing the aims of particular individuals and groups, in the possibility of the greatest values coming

²⁴ M. Magnet, *What Is Compassionate Conservatism?*, “The Wall Street Journal”, 05.02.1999.

²⁵ I. Kristol, *My Cold War – Irving Kristol, Political Philosopher, Intellectual*, “National Interest”, Spring 1993.

²⁶ W. Osiatyński, *The United States. Society and Power*, Warszawa 1975, p. 25–30.

true, such as freedom of the individual, individual and common prosperity, development, justice²⁷). Compassionate conservatism strives to inspire American society with optimism and bring back faith in the American Dream, according to the rule *if you try – as you must – you will make it*²⁸. Somewhat simplifying the matter – the idea is simple, just like the one in the popular, but still instructive joke:

Every week Moshe goes to the synagogue and asks God for the same: “God, let me win the lottery ...” After twenty years, Moshe enters the synagogue and goes again, his same old request “God,...”. Suddenly, there is thunder and a shrill voice: “Moshe, give me a chance – buy a lottery ticket!”

Following the ideas of modern conservatism, local and state conservatives worked through some efficient ways of helping the poor. The most visible change was implementing *workfare*, that is the system in which a person receiving a social benefit is committed to fulfill certain obligations. Precursors of this experiment were Governors Tommy Thompson in Wisconsin and John Engler in Michigan, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in New York, Mayor Stephen Goldsmith in Indianapolis and Governor George W. Bush himself in Texas. *Workfare* was an alternative to the well-known welfare state. People receiving benefits had to meet different requirements, which most often were a combination of a variety of different activities – improving qualifications and the value of the individual on the job market (training, apprenticeships) with voluntary work. In a wider sense, it was not only voluntary work but also a low-paid job performed for the benefit of the local community (making some impact on the life of the community). This was in concordance with the conservative view that work is what makes individuals responsible for their own faith and the faith of their families; work increases respect and allows social balance to be kept²⁹. Among the purposes of this was among others to revive and revitalize the neglected areas of towns and its dwellers. The main purpose was to mobilize local authorities to take the challenge and focus not on the problems, but on the resources and good sides of the thus far neglected communities. In multiple cities governed by Republicans there were extensive programs undertaken, designed to inspire and stimulate professional and social engagement (including civil consultations).

Workfare was legally recognized in 1996 through the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act*³⁰ (PRAWORA). The document is a real milestone as far as methods and ways of reaching goals in social politics in the USA are concerned. The Act, presented by Congressman E. Clay Shaw Jr., con-

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

²⁸ M. Magnet, *What Is Compassionate Conservatism...*

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Content of the document: www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Legislation/pdfs/PL_104-193.pdf (05.2011), for more information see: www.naswdc.org/advocacy/welfare/legislation/summary.pdf (05.2011).

stituted the basis of the Republican *Contract with America*³¹ (1994), chief architect of which was Newt Gingrich.³² In the Republicans' political program one can read among others about the necessity of reducing special program expenses, but also a commitment to make efforts to promote individual responsibility. PRAWORA constituted *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families*³³ (TANF), a program which entered into legal force on 1st July 1997 and replaced *Aid to Families with Dependent Children* (AFDC), which functioned in the American system of social politics starting in 1935. It also replaced *Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training* (JOBS), which commenced in 1988.

TANF ended the era of the federal authorities' monopoly in the field of supporting needy families. It was replaced with dividing the federal funds and a subsidy for the state and local authorities, transferred to their budgets every year. These funds were to finance family benefits, administrative costs connected with those social programs and a range of other services for those in need of support. Among TANF's main aims are: support for poor families, which was to ensure the possibility of raising children in their own homes (and families); reducing parents' dependency on social benefits through promotion of training, raising qualifications, taking up employment and promotion of the institution of marriage; counteracting extramarital pregnancies; encouraging the establishment and maintenance of two-parent families. PRAWORA accounted for precursory politics, aiming at strengthening the faith in the ethos (and ethics) of work.

In this campaign in 2000 George W. Bush put emphasis on the basic assumptions emerging from the philosophy of compassionate conservatism. First of all, he pointed to a nation that was a lot more than simply an accumulation of independent individuals; he called for promoting moral values in the States and American values abroad. As far as compassionate foreign politics is concerned, the words of the president from 2001 will be the best illustration:

We have to help developing countries in fighting illiteracy, diseases and debts that are impossible to repay. This is exactly the compassionate conservatism on the international grounds³⁴.

According to his philosophy, President Bush proposed e.g. that half of the poorest countries' debts incurred in the World Bank and international development banks would be granted in the form of non-refundable loans.

³¹ Content of the document: www.house.gov/house/Contract/CONTRACT.html (05.2011).

³² Newt Gingrich, born in 1943, a prominent American politician, in the years 1979–1999 was a member of the House of Representatives. From 1989 to 1995 he was a disciplinary spokesman for the minority (the Whip). Regarded as one of the main framers of the Republican victory in congressional elections in 1994. For the next four years he was Speaker of the House. Currently, one of the main candidates to compete for the presidential nomination in the Republican Party.

³³ For more information see: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/tanf/about.html (05.2011).

³⁴ For Bush's Compassionate Conservatism, see: www.wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1339,title,Wspoluczajacy-konserwatyzm-Busha,wid,186364,wiadomosc.html?icaid=1c504 (05.2011).

He also called for an increase in grants on education development in the poorest countries in the world by 20 percent.³⁵

In domestic politics George W. Bush saw federal government as an executive arm of the nation, which in certain circumstances could be used to support those members of the society who were in need. The primary role in this area, however, was to be fulfilled by private organizations, especially churches, local and state authorities and the market forces along with tax reliefs. Those organizations and authorities should replace Washington bureaucracy.³⁶ In one of his speeches during the election campaign, Bush said:

I am convinced that the conservative philosophy is a philosophy of compassion which inspires individuals to realize the maximum of their potential. Conservatism tells us to reduce taxes, and compassion, more money for people to spend. Conservatism gives schools to the local communities, emphasizing high standards and effects, compassion on the other hand emphasizes the concern whether every child can read and nobody would be excluded. Conservatism reorganizes social service, underlining the importance of work, while compassion frees from government dependency.³⁷

The presidency of George W. Bush made compassionate conservatism a truly nationwide philosophy. It was rooted in the deep faith that Americans are able to support themselves at an individual level without the assistance of the government. At this point, we may once more recall Tocqueville and his idea that:

Next to the freedom of individual action, the most natural human need is the freedom to join one's own actions with other people's actions, and act together with them.³⁸

Stephen Goldsmith, Bush's advisor on domestic politics at the time he was governor and one of the precursors of compassionate conservatism, argued that in today's conservative thinking federal government has specific roles to play, e.g. providing medication funding for seniors on low income, providing funds for the medical care for the uninsured; in terms of pension policy the government has to enable citizens to transfer part of their social security fund into their individual retirement accounts. However, Goldsmith strongly emphasized that in compassionate conservatism the government's actions respect free market mechanisms and the rule of self-government.³⁹ Goldsmith wrote that:

According to the rules of compassionate conservatism, government is not responsible for redistributing citizens' wealth, but for assuring those socially disadvantaged with possibilities and capabilities allowing them to create their own wealth.⁴⁰

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ M. Kinsley, *The State of Compassion*, www.slate.com/id/2094248 (05.2011).

³⁷ J. M. Jones, *Compassionate Bush...*

³⁸ A. de Tocqueville, *On Democracy in America*, Warszawa 1976, p. 153.

³⁹ J. Tapper, *Defining Compassionate Conservatism...*

⁴⁰ J. M. Jones, *Compassionate Bush...*

The newly elected President Bush without hesitation started to realize his compassionate program. One of his first moves was the announcement of a presidential decree (dated 29.01.2001) appointing the *White House Office of Faith-Based Neighborhood Partnerships*,⁴¹ previously known as the *White House Office Of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives* (OFBCI). Bush's government presented a new way of management, the essence of which was providing federal funds to the religious organizations and treating them fairly, which in the end was to motivate the best private resources for improving the quality of living. The White House Office Of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives was supposed to provide compassionate conservatism with a central position in all of the political strategies proposed by the Bush administration.⁴² One should bear in mind that the initiative was widely criticized, mostly by liberal and secular groups.

Many of the programs signed by the president, especially *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB),⁴³ an act from 2001 which put emphasis on education of handicapped children as well as a responsibility and knowledge test, were significant examples of how Bush wanted to integrate compassion with public policies.⁴⁴ The main aim was to align the level of education with the rule – great (providing good education) schools for everybody. It is important to stress that NCLB was in fact a reincarnation of Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson's politics and his *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) of 1965. The aim of the act was to improve the level of education and eradicate the differences of the teaching process in public education institutions.⁴⁵

Multiple programs also operated in a sphere called by Bush active government, which promoted local government, e.g. the *Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act*⁴⁶ (MMA) of 2003, which, among others, was to provide elder people, especially poor ones, with more support and sources to pay for their basic medical care. Some of the tax reductions made by the president were aimed at millions of poor Americans and were to reduce federal taxation, allowing people to better control their expenses.⁴⁷ Bush said: "American citizens can use their own money far better than the government"⁴⁸.

The philosophy of compassionate conservatism started to be noticeable in hundreds of social programs administrated by the Housing and Urban Develop-

⁴¹ www.hhs.gov/partnerships/ (05.2011).

⁴² J. M. Jones, *Compassionate Bush...*

⁴³ For more information see: www2.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml (05.2011).

⁴⁴ J. M. Jones, *Compassionate Bush...*

⁴⁵ See: www.nea.org/home/NoChildLeftBehindAct.html (05.2011).

⁴⁶ Full version of the document: www.medicare.gov/medicarerereform/108s1013.htm (05.2011), analysis and criticism of the legislation: M. Ganz, *The Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003: Are we Playing the Lottery with Healthcare Reform?*, www.law.duke.edu/journals/dltr/articles/2004dltr0011.html (05.2011).

⁴⁷ J. M. Jones, *Compassionate Bush...*

⁴⁸ M. Kinsley, *The State of Compassion...*

ment Department (HUD), Department of Health and Social Services (HHS) and other federal agendas – among others, in the reform of the social services with new criteria for employment, a healthy marriage initiative, a 10-year local plan for fighting homelessness and changes in the public housing priorities – encouraging house purchases.⁴⁹

For many publicists and political opponents (even in the Republican environment) the philosophy of compassionate conservatism was treated as a dangerous combination of right-wing ideology and left-wing methods of operation. Republicans from the Reagan camp, while listening to the president arguing that *there is a group of American people who need help*, raised objections and stated that President's Bush office was a terrible mixture of the political ideas created by Democrats like Bill Clinton and Ted Kennedy.⁵⁰ Certainly, such a statement was to a great extent true. However, compassionate conservatism was thought to be a way of rescuing the Republican Party from collapsing, and it was to bring a victory like the one from 1994, when after forty years Republicans managed to regain the majority in Congress. It was a positive philosophy with an emphasis on responsible society, local government, the role of the local communities and a much greater role of parents in the process of bringing up their offspring. The philosophy of compassionate conservatism assisted and in fact helped large numbers of American people to understand and accept many aspects of conservative thinking.

On the other hand, the programs mentioned earlier, such as NCLB or MMA, did not entirely satisfy the society.⁵¹ These schemes generated huge costs and enlarged the deficit, which must have caused a reaction. The changes led to the deformation of Bush's office's domestic politics. Conservatism according to George W. Bush also discouraged the lower levels of the party, because these members of the party did not share the delight and optimism of the White House and were tired of wide governmental intervention. What they objected strongly to was abandoning the rule of restricted government and using the administration for conservative purposes.⁵² The undisputable fact is that the administration of the 43rd president of the United States disregarded the basic rule of expenditure control.

However, it seems that the failure of the Republican Party in the 2006 Congress elections and 2008 presidential elections was caused mainly by the negative reception of Bush's foreign policy and America's being weary of the prolonged armed conflicts in distant places. Another cause could be the reform of the Democratic Party political platform, which made Democrats more moderate or even conservative. This could be regarded as a kind of success in promoting conservative ideas.⁵³

⁴⁹ J. M. Jones, *Compassionate Bush...*

⁵⁰ M. Kinsley, *The State of Compassion...*

⁵¹ D. Brookes, *Too Quiet on the Home Front*, "The New York Times", 20.03.2004.

⁵² J. M. Jones, *Compassionate Bush...*

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

The whole situation is somehow connected with an observable tendency of shortening the distance between the platforms of modern political parties. The Republicans, in order to become a party that meets the expectations of modern American society, often adopt Democratic ideas, depriving Democrats of their monopoly on defending excluded and so far undeveloped social groups. Democrats in turn, by making their views more moderate, renounce the mark which came with the sexual revolution of the 1960s and '70s. Actions like this are thought to increase political support and allow the party to win elections, although they cause a kind of chaos and hesitation amongst citizens as the choice between political options is becoming even more difficult.

Nevertheless, as a final conclusion it is important to emphasize that the compassionate conservatism that is the Republicans' motto remains an intellectually reasonable and coherent doctrine, which has a wide spectrum of practical uses for Republican politicians.⁵⁴ It is also an excellent, however moderate, alternative to libertarian economy on one hand and religious conservatism on the other. Compassion seen as solidarity with the afflicted, those with low incomes, impaired members of the society, undoubtedly is a value that build bridges over divisions. When trying to answer the question from the title of this article, one should strongly emphasize the fact that the conservative welfare state matches compassionate conservatives' worldview exactly. Such a welfare state is a state which takes responsibility for creating people's behaviors on the free market and for supporting them. Conservatives believe that citizens want the state to assist them (in an adequate range). However, they are against the views and methods of the liberal welfare state, along with its massive government intervention in the free market sphere, lacking manners and moral values. To conclude, nowadays being a conservative in the United States does not only mean that one protects basic values, moral and political views, but also suggests approval for diverse social programs, which are becoming inseparable parts of America's political fundaments.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.