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(Unedited Transcript)

Well thank you a great deal, Chairman Fred Harris, president Alan Curtis, and to all the distinguished panelists who have joined me for this part of the conversation.

I want to just comment on my colleague from Atlanta, Georgia, Tim McDonald. I'm the president of the regional Council of churches in Atlanta, and Tim and I work together, and I did want to take slight issue with what I thought was an important strategic political analysis that he provided. But I will challenge Tim when I get home, and remind him that when he suggests that African-American clergy are the pivotal figures in the future of everything that ails 50 percent of America, we should be real cautious about setting yourself up as targets in that way, and I would submit a bit of humility is in order. Although, as I think about this notion of humility and this wonderful virtue, I think of Israeli prime minister, Golda Meir's wonderful words to her defense minister, Moshe Dine one day, who said, "Don't be so humble, you're not that great."

(Laughter.)

Let me just focus in my remaining 14 minutes and 30 seconds on four M's: the messengers, the message, the medium, and the myths, as we focus on the agenda of building a public broad coalition, to build a movement for general consensus about public morality, and our nation.

First, messengers. This is a question of leadership, and Father Baroni -- and I'm sure many of you have cited the fact that Rosa Parks took leave from time, to eternity, on the birthday of Father Baroni. And these extraordinary leaders remind us of the importance of leadership. Every time I'm tempted to cynicism about leadership in this nation and in the world, I recall people like Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King Jr., and Rabbi Abraham Heschel, and the leaders who stood with him like Father Baroni, to lead this nation toward authentic and inclusive democracy. So there is leadership in the nation and many of them -- many of you are here today.

John Carter of Harvard Business School has observed in an important book titled, "Leading Change," that most organizations are overmanaged and under-led, overmanaged but under-led. So there is a need for leadership in communities, and not just more efficient, effective management by the numbers.

In a wonderful book by sociologist Alden Morris (phonetic), he really captured the sense of what ingredients were necessary to lead a successful civil rights movement. And he focused on three types of leadership: charismatic leadership, bureaucratic leadership, and grassroots leadership.

And the charismatic leadership represent the University presidents in this nation, who have been largely silent. We have not heard the kind of analysis, the kind of hopeful vision, and the pushing back against the increased polarization between classes, and partisan political parties in this nation, from some of the thought leaders in the nation. So this is something of a challenge to the more than three, 4000 University presidents out

there today, to wake up, to move beyond your offices and fund-raising imperative, to think about your role as public leaders. This doesn't have to be said to faith leaders, I think, largely. Preachers and priests get that point.

But also, the importance of bureaucratic leaders. We need charismatic figures that tell the story, but secondly, bureaucratic leaders, office workers, and people who person the phones, who stand by fax machines, who inform and strategically link organizations. We talk about building a movement to carry forward Father Baroni's principles, and we're going to need to value and celebrate bureaucratic leadership. All of us cannot be the charismatic leaders that stand behind the microphones or in the pulpits. We need folks who are behind the scenes, who don't care about who gets credit. The civil rights movement moved forward on the agenda and out of the briefcase of people like Thurgood Marshall. So, there were the Martin Luther Kings, but there were Thurgood Marshalls more behind the scenes, working in those offices.

And then third were the grassroots leaders. We need to, as we convene, invite charismatic, bureaucratic, and grassroots leaders. Street workers, people in our communities that know the names of all the children in the neighborhood, the barbers and beauty salon workers, the DJs who command radio time every evening, and drive time, and throughout the night. They must be a part of this movement to revive the conversation about public morality in our nation. I think that this rests upon -- and I don't have time to get everything now -- a theory of change that has to do with both court action leading the way, but also moral suasion at the grassroots level. That's the power of the *Brown v. the Board of Education* decision, is that the courts spoke and said, "Desegregation is the wave of the future for America."

But the courts didn't leave it at that. It was grassroots leaders, it was charismatic leaders who stepped up and made the case of why that decision was correct.

And so that's about messengers, and we need to think about those who carry the message going forward.

Second is indeed the message. We have to revive a conversation about this age-old question of who is the good person, and what is the nature of the just community, or the just society? There's a sense in which the history of world philosophy really hinges on those two basic categories. From the ancient Egyptian theorists to the latest political philosopher in the Beltway. Who's the good person, what does it mean to live a good life, a decent life? And what is a good community? What kind of community, what kind of nation do we want to live in? And I think, to globalize this conversation, we have to talk about world community, now, and global community.

And so there's a sense in which the message is actually fairly simple. It's to provide wisdom about the good life, the good person, and the just society. Aristotle offered something important here as he reminds us that the good person, there are really three components to understanding what it means to live a decent life. The good life has to do with, number one, knowledge, knowing what is the right thing to do. Second, desire, desiring the right thing. And third, habit, practice is habitually practicing the right thing and through trial and error getting it right.

Any of you are or think of yourselves as decent and moral people, there's a sense in which knowledge, desire or will, and habit and practice played a role. And so this ancient political philosophy I think informs what we're trying to do in this nation today. It also has to do with documenting what works. And here, I want to just celebrate, as a former lowly program officer at the Ford Foundation, I came to discover the work of the Eisenhower Foundation, and its wonderful focus on what works, because I think that's an important strategic addition, value added to the thousands and thousands of good works and activities going on in the nation, to ask the question, "What really works?"

And I think organizations like the Children's Defense Fund have some important insight and value to add to the conversation about what it means to create and nurture good children, who become good citizens and good people. We know that Headstart works, that childcare works, that preventative medicine works, that character education works -- I just joined a board, the Character Education Partnership, focused on teaching character in public schools.

And the move in this nation to focus again on how do we instill the knowledge of what is the right thing to do, the desire to do it, and the habit, opportunities to practice that?

We also should recognize that as we have a conversation about "How do we make good communities," that America is exceedingly diverse, religiously pluralistic. So the conversation has to move beyond, as Father Baroni and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Heschel, and others recognize so well: it's not just a Christian conversation. And this is a real caution to our president and many who I think overemphasize the Christian-specific character of much of our moral rhetoric and moral values.

These values really are universal. They reside in other faith traditions. And so we ought to make knowledge and cite the gems that emerge from Islam. For instance, Islam's moral teachings about usury and teaching against exploiting those who are already economically valuable.

Now that's present in a lot of faith traditions, but it's prominent in Islam. Or the practice of Zakat, one of the five pillars of Islam. The obligation, the duty, the opportunity, to give away part of one's wealth. These are treasures that emerged from a tradition with which much of Christian America feels tension, and outright war in some places.

Seems to me, thought leaders, messengers who are leading change in our nation, have to be Catholic intellects, with a small "C": broad, encyclopedic thinkers.

The third point -- so it's a question of messengers and leadership, the message we wish to convey, and acknowledging the many traditions that inform the message about the good person and the good community.

Third is the medium, or the media, and the role of media. And here, let me just thank Father William Byron for capturing some of the wisdom of the Baroni principles with respect to media. I think that many of us who are worried about America, as Dr. King often talked about it, who are anxious about the future of our nation, given what is happening and what we hear over talk radio, the increase in rudeness in this nation, and so on. We've got to become more media-savvy.

And Father Baroni said such things as, "Timing is critical. Seize a crisis, or if necessary create one" or "information is power." Some of those principles ought to inform what the

messengers that we're nurturing are up to as we move forward with the agenda of really rehabilitating American democracy, from its current state of fragility.

We must also use new technologies more effectively. Others in the room are more expert at this than I am, but we have to go beyond simple print modes of communication. So I think it would be a real danger if the Baroni principles simply end up in print form. I want to submit to you that the Baroni principles have to sing. They have to have multimedia, multisensory, engaging packaging. So that radio, as television, and film, and art, and poetry, and rap, and hip-hop, and other modes of expression convey these important principles and values.

So if we're just going to print a book, I would submit to you we've already failed the patron saint of this meeting. We've got to be smarter than that. He would. He'd be talking about iPods and e-mail were he here, and we've got to be on that leading edge. Let's not underestimate the power of media and arts.

The fourth point and finally, myths, the fourth "M," myth. I love this notion of myth. I'm a theologian, I teach in a seminary, and I think a lot about the power of story. Some have said myth means it's an untrue story, it's a falsehood. And I rather preferred to talk about myth as a story that is true to those who believe it to be true. In that sense: myth is truth language, it carries a certain power for those who believe it.

There is a wonderful book you want to put on your reading list: Richard Hughes, a sociologist, Pepperdine University. Hughes' book is titled *Myths America Lives By*, and in it he documents five or six prominent myths that have been important in American life: the myth of a Christian America, the myth of a chosen nation, the myth of a millennial nation, and he goes on to describe the way in which those myths have in a sense complicated public discourse today. And I think we, as we move forward with elevating a new understanding about public morality, and what is decent in the world, and building a movement around that, we need to sort of take on the myths that are already out there.

Bob Reich, Robert Reich, writing in the "New Republic" a few months ago, some of you saw a terrific piece titled "Storytime," I think it was the title of the piece. A word to Democrats in that instance about how to be more effective in telling their story. And he talked about the four prominent myths that have helped underwrite the American culture and consciousness: The myth of the heroic or triumphant individual; Horatio Alger, Teddy Roosevelt. Second, the myth of the good community; the role of barnraising in local communities around the nation, and there's still that deep sense of, that can still happen in a good neighborhood. Third is the myth of the "rot at the top;" that those who are at the top, those who have concentrated power are corrupt, or certainly corruptible, and ought to be regarded with real suspicion.

And the fourth myth of the threat at the gates, or the enemy at the gates. We see how that myth is played out in the history of American foreign policy, especially during times of war, and our current kind of anxiety about homeland security.

Just a word about being attentive to the myths. Martin Marty (phonetic), University of Chicago, church historian talks about myths being those "deep stories." There are so deep you don't believe them; rather, you are those beliefs. He uses the Spanish word,

"creyencias," the notion that these aren't things that I believe, these are the things that I am.

But the big myth in this nation, underwriting so much of what is wrong in our nation is something I'm writing about in a book that will be published later this year -- well, in a couple of months. A collection of essays by an organization in New York, called Demoss (phonetic). And that book, Bill Moyers, Barbara Ironreich, a number of us contributing essays, Jim Wallace. But I'm writing about the myth of normative inequality, the myth of normative inequality. The way in which selective hermeneutics and interpretation have looked at the New Testament, picked up Jesus' words, "the poor you have with you always," and I think it made some very bad moves, and in other words, justified current arrangements of inequity, of wealth and power in this nation.

And it is a selective hermeneutics; hermeneutics, that branch of philosophy concerned with interpretation, because Jesus also says in his first sermon, according to Luke, chapter four, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because I've been anointed and sent to preach good news to the poor." And so that messages right alongside these rather obscure and ambiguous saying, "The poor you will have with you always," which I think authorizes many people to accept poverty as in some sense normative.

The final word from a German social critic, Jurgen Habermas. In his book, Legitimation Crisis, he reminds us on this point of myth that every social system requires a legitimating myth. In order for there to be the sort of Sam Walton's and Walton family's in the same society where there are people begging for meals outside this building in the nation's capital, in order to have that kind of inequity in the same society, there has got to be a set of stories and myths that help people sleep well at night, and sleep with a sense that it's okay; "God ordains this," rather than "God is offended by this reality."

But Habermas observes that now and then, the myth begins to erode. The reality behind the myth becomes transparent. People are not persuaded by the myths, and he calls this a legitimation crisis, the title of his book.

I think that's the time and the period in which we are now living. We are living amidst a legitimation crisis, that represents an opportunity for us to -- as Martin Luther King talked about it -- read and interpret the spirit of the times -- he used the German term, the "zeitgeist," the spirit of the times. What are these times saying to us? And I close with my friend and teacher, Martin Luther King Jr., who said, "This hour in history need a dedicated circle of transformed nonconformists" -- isn't that a great phrase? He says, "This moment, our world will be saved from impending doom not for the actions of a conforming majority, but from the transformed malcontent of a transformed minority."

And so I think that we are a part of that cadre of transformed nonconformists that are being gathered to study again the Baroni principles, and to think about how we can lead change in our nation. Thank you.