“If you’re looking for a label for the new administration in Washington - something other than ‘liberal’ or ‘moderate’ - try ‘communitarian.’” suggest a USA Today article.

President Bill Clinton often speaks in communitarian terms: “If we have no sense of community, the American dream will continue to wither.” Likewise, Vice President Al Gore has echoed a communitarian theme: “While we give supreme value to the rights of the individual, we expect that freedom to be exercised with respect toward others and with decent restraint.” And Hillary Rodham Clinton believes, The Washington Post said, that “People need to serve each other, and serve their communities, distinguish themselves by social activism.” But how good a communitarian is Bill Clinton?

The communitarian movement seeks to raise the commitment to social responsibilities to correct for decades of excessive focus on individual rights. Three years ago a social science finding triggered the movement. Young Americans, the data showed, feel strongly about their right to be tried before a jury of their peers, yet when asked about serving on a jury most seek to avoid this responsibility. Communitarians see this finding as symbolic of the ’80s: A chorus of give-me demand – but little willingness to serve the common good. It is an affliction that runs the political gamut, from welfare cheats to special interests.

Clinton often speaks to the general themes of social responsibility and the need to sacrifice for the common good. His first slew of policy recommendations reflect these communitarian ideas. But he has not yet put into practice some of its other concepts.

For the first time since the deficit escalated, people are told by a president that the deficit will not fix itself, that we have overindulged and that it is time to act responsibly. Clinton’s national service programs are modest due to budget constraints, but they are the most ambitious since Kennedy’s Peace Corps. The welfare reforms that Clinton favors further illustrate the direction in which he is moving: demanding that those on welfare either find work or repay their debt through service to the community.

Clinton’s most interesting communitarian moves are in acts of inclusion. During the campaign, he spoke out against those who sought to pit one group against the others. Although Clinton did not kowtow to minorities - Clinton distanced himself from Jesse Jackson - he has now included in his cabinet and other key posts of his administration a large number of Americans from diverse backgrounds, making his government look “as America does.” So far, this seems to have brought much interracial peace and approval from women’s groups.

The most important program yet to come concerns law enforcement. The Clinton administration has deliberately focused primarily on the economic program and, of course, attended to international events that cannot be deferred. The difficulties in finding an attorney general further delayed the hatching of any definitive Clinton program in this area. Given the high level of crime, this is not an area that can be safely ignored for long.

Communitarians also favor drug tests for those who directly have the lives of others in their hands (e.g., airline pilots and school bus drivers). They see such measures as a legitimate interpretation of the Fourth Amendment (“no unreasonable search and seizure”) rather a diminution of rights. The same holds for sobriety check points and other carefully crafted measures to protect the public.
But what is missing most since Clinton entered the White House is attention to the culture of values. Clinton the policy wonk has largely replaced the leader concerned with the habits of the heart. Clinton the hands-on manager has taken over from the man concerned with the spirit of community.