
Pro Rege

Volume 7 | Number 4

Article 3

June 1979

President Carter's Sermon on Human Rights in Foreign Policy

Charles Veenstra

Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Human Rights Law Commons](#), and the [International Relations Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Veenstra, Charles (1979) "President Carter's Sermon on Human Rights in Foreign Policy," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 7: No. 4, 8 - 18.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol7/iss4/3

This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Dordt Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Dordt Digital Collections. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.

President Carter's Sermon on Human Rights in Foreign Policy

Charles Veenstra
Associate Professor of Communication



Charles Veenstra received his B.A. from Dordt College and his M.A. in speech communication from Northern Illinois University. He is presently working to complete the requirements for the Ph.D. degree at the University of Nebraska. From 1974-76 he was on the faculty of Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa. In 1976 he accepted an appointment to Dordt.

Since President Carter professes to be a born-again Christian and repeatedly stresses the importance of religion in his life, it should come as no surprise that his first major foreign policy address assumed a character more like a sermon than a statement of policy toward the world. Surrounded by important Catholic Church leaders and clothed in academic regalia which took on the appearance of a ministerial robe, Carter mounted the pulpit of the Notre Dame commencement exercises on May 22, 1977, to exhort on his new direction for U.S. foreign policy.¹

Lay preaching, of course, is not new to the President. He conducted Sunday School classes while he was in the Navy, did missionary work briefly in

Puerto Rico, led Sunday School in Georgia, speaks at prayer breakfasts in the nation's capitol, and teaches Sunday School at the First Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. In spite of his protestations that he does not "look on the Presidency as a pastorate,"² his experience is reflected in his speaking. Indeed, the London *Economist*, in its discussion of the Inaugural Address several months earlier, had characterized Carter as the "Preacher in the Presidency."³ Since he prepared this foreign policy speech himself rather than relying on his associates,⁴ his preaching style reasonably reflects this deep religious background.

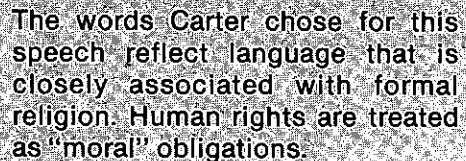
A speech advocating the adoption of his foreign policy, and particularly,

the human rights aspect of it, was not needed at this time. He had previously established the policy in the Inaugural Address. Needed at Notre Dame was a speech of inspiration — to reinforce beliefs in the importance of human rights, to inspire hope, to restore faith “sapped” by the Vietnam war, to encourage those who were beginning to see his vision, and also to warn those who persisted in their refusal to live by these precepts. His audience was much larger than the congregation assembled before him. He was preaching directly to the American people but this sermon was also an ecumenical address to the world.

There are many clues to the notion that the speech functioned as a sermon rather than as argument for the adoption of a proposition. His pastoral-type delivery which was described as showing “obvious intensity and feeling,”⁵ his word choice, the setting, the arrangement which centers on a basic belief in the same way that a sermon centers on a Biblical text, and elements characteristic of worship services, all give evidence of a religious exhortation. Viewing the speech as a sermon may help us understand more clearly why he makes the rhetorical choices he does. In this paper I will examine the operation of these clues in Carter’s sermon as well as commenting on reasons for its success and failure.

The words Carter chose for this speech reflect language that is closely associated with formal religion. Human rights are treated as “moral” obligations. He honored Catholic Church leaders present on the platform with him for their “dedication” and “personal sacrifice.” Dignity and freedom are “fundamental spiritual requirements.” “Fear” and “despair” can be removed by “faith” in democratic values. The United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, etc., are

“testaments to our faith and purpose.” “Fire,” a devil-term, should be fought with “water,” a god-term. “Moral suasion” counterbalances immoral “persecution” of dissidents. The word “moral” appears eight times in the speech. These examples do not exhaust the list. Political ideas and policies were couched in religious language, enabling Carter to preach while explaining his foreign policy.



The words Carter chose for this speech reflect language that is closely associated with formal religion. Human rights are treated as “moral” obligations.

The setting of the sermon provided the President an excellent opportunity to introduce his theme of human rights. The time was Sunday. The occasion was an ecclesiastical gathering. The speaker wore a robe, not unlike that of a priest. The presence of four Roman Catholic Church leaders who had long worked for the cause of human rights, three of whom were chosen to receive honorary degrees that day for their “fight for human freedoms” in other countries, allowed Carter to identify his cause with that of the Church, the world, and his immediate audience: “I join you in recognizing their dedication and personal sacrifice.” In this context he introduced his purpose of restoration of faith in democracy as the guiding principle for foreign policy.

Carter did not use evidence as proof since sermons frequently do not require evidence in the same way that a speech arguing for the adoption of a proposition does. The audience usually

consists primarily of believers who do not need to be persuaded to change their beliefs. This lack of evidence caused consternation for critics who did not understand that the speech functioned as a sermon. For instance, Wm. F. Buckley called it "the worst speech since he addressed the United Nations" and asked many questions about it, demanding that the President explain.⁶ Instead, in a method similar to that of a minister preaching on a Biblical text, Carter elaborated on his theme of human rights based on his own text: "Our policy must reflect our belief that the world can hope for more than simple survival and our belief that dignity and freedom are man's fundamental spiritual requirements." His sermon was not an exposition or interpretation of the text in neo-orthodox fashion⁷ in the sense that he offered evidence and logic for its validity or reasons why it should be believed, but rather it served as a rallying point for many people in the audience. In a manner closely related to his Sunday School teaching, he explained the implications and ramifications of these beliefs.⁸

Early in the speech Carter reassured the faithful that their reliance on the democratic way was not misplaced. He repeated this several times, each time beginning with "we are confident. . . ." Except for brief, undeveloped examples of "democracy's great recent successes - in India, Portugal, Greece, Spain," he offered little support for his position. Faith consists of hope and does not need evidence for support; the nature of faith obviates logical support. The faithful believe democracy will triumph in the end and need only reinforcement from time to time, which is what this technique of repetition does. However, this technique hardly works for the doubters in the audience. Many news magazines reacted to Carter's statement that "we

are now free from that inordinate fear of Communism," calling it startling. The reason for this type of reaction is that the statement carried no evidence to convince those who were not confident, who did not share the faith. Indeed, Buckley began his rebuttal asserting "we are *not* confident"⁹ But the speaker did not intend to prove. Proof is not essential to sermons. This is not to say that proof never occurs in sermons but it is frequently not necessary and the President determined that it was not necessary here. Apparently he believed that the audience was already convinced that democratic faith would triumph over fear of Communism.

Careful analysis of Carter's choice of his text may illuminate both how he resolves the dilemma of his concern for the separation of religion and politics while letting his religion influence the morality of foreign policy and also his rhetorical reasons for selecting this particular text. While Carter clearly revealed his personal religious beliefs — his commitment to Jesus Christ — during the election campaign, he also sought to dichotomize religion and politics. In response to questions raised during the campaign about the influence his religion would have in government, he replied: "I don't accept any domination of my life by the Baptist Church, none. . . . The reason the Baptist Church was formed in this country was because of our belief in absolute and total separation of church and state."¹⁰ In this statement he mistakenly equated religion and church. Certainly one can separate the institutionalized church and state but not religion and state. By separating church and state, Carter attempted also to separate his religion and politics.

Nevertheless, his effort at dichotomization cannot be completely successful as his concern for morality demonstrated. His way out of his,

dilemma of wanting to separate religion and governmental policy, but hardly being able to do so, is to choose a text that would probably be acceptable to a large number of people. The result is then the statement of the text which served as the core of the speech — “dignity and freedom are man’s fundamental spiritual requirements.” But in making this choice he borrowed from another religion — secular humanism. Notice that man’s “fundamental spiritual requirements” are “freedom and dignity” rather than a statement to the effect that man must respond correctly to God. Thus the moral crisis he described was not a loss of faith in God but a loss of faith in man and in man’s ability to solve the world’s problems democratically. Democracy became the ultimate value that he preached and the Declaration of Independence became his Bible. Similarly, John Patton has demonstrated that the belief in the intrinsic goodness of people dominated Carter’s campaign.¹¹ Although he may not have been aware of it, essentially Carter was inconsistent in espousing beliefs publicly that conflict with the essence of Christianity.

Rhetorically, the selection of this text functioned to appeal to a wide range of listeners. The basic beliefs forwarded by the speech are acceptable to many who do not hold the Christian beliefs that Carter claims to hold personally. In addition, many evangelical Christians, comprising a large and growing group estimated at 40 million in the U.S.,¹² who may not recognize this fundamental contradiction of Christianity and secular humanistic beliefs, would respond warmly to any hint of spiritual language. A major concern for many evangelicals is that the President have a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. They then trust that what he says is Christian. A Christian president, for many, is insurance against

immorality. The same may be said for Catholics, and since he was speaking at a Catholic school there were probably a large number of Catholics in the immediate audience.¹³ Carter’s lack of exposition of this text worked in his favor since careful analysis of it by him would have forced him to articulate more clearly its roots and possibly have alienated segments of his audience. His Sunday School style of preaching served his purpose more effectively.

The nature of worship, which is often epitomized in the sermon, involves three basic elements: 1)acknowledgement of guilt in wrongdoing — confession of sins, 2)acceptance of the offer of redemption and thus absolution from sins, and 3)praise and promise of living a better life of obedience in gratitude for salvation received.¹⁴ The presence of these three basic elements in Carter’s speech not only revealed that the speech had characteristics of a sermon but, more importantly, sheds light on the methods he employed to gain greater audience adherence to the democratic faith.

Confession of sins figured prominently in the first part of Carter’s address. Since he was pleading the cause of the democratic faith, democracy could not be made the cause of failure of foreign policy in the past. If it were to blame, then the people might reject it. Instead, he argued that it was the *lack of faith* in democratic values that resulted in national problems. The way to avoid such problems in the future was to forthrightly admit we have erred. Without specifically singling out any one person to blame at this point, he indirectly urged confession: “For too many years we have been willing to adopt the flawed principles and tactics of our adversaries, sometimes abandoning our values for theirs.” Fear “led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in our

fear." Fear, "...with Vietnam the best example of its intellectual and moral poverty," had replaced faith, causing immoral acts. He claimed that this lack of faith was serious since it affected the world: "The Vietnamese war produced a profound moral crisis, sapping worldwide faith in our policy." His very interesting statement, "we fought fire with fire, never thinking that fire is better fought with water," has Biblical connotations. One is reminded of Jesus' injunction not to return evil for evil (Matt. 5:39), but instead to give a cup of water in His name (Mark 9:41). Water is also a purifying agent, both literally and figuratively. With this powerful statement Carter built not only the impact of our failure but also the need for redemption. By getting the people to admit failure (confess sins), Carter took a major step toward leading the audience toward realization of the need for a renewed faith in a democratic foreign policy.

Carter's discussion of the penalty for wrongdoing — Vietnam war and economic strains of the 1970's — is placed in a context of redemption, which is the second basic element of worship: "But through failure we have found our way back to our own principles and values, and we have regained lost confidence." He attributed the cause of punishment directly to the failure to keep adequate faith in democratic values. Instead of trying to find a culprit to blame, the people were asked to understand that their punishment was a direct result of their failure and to realize also that this punishment has been redemptive. Just how this redemption has occurred is not spelled out. Apparently the audience had paid the penalty, earned absolution for wrong thinking, and now was enabled to move forward. Carter, as a priest, appeared to have declared that sins had been forgiven for those who wished to return

to the democratic faith. It seems to me that here he again demonstrated a secular humanistic view consistent with the text mentioned earlier. In essence he said that we went astray from democratic values, we punished ourselves, we earned our own absolution, and now we had found our way back. He did not attribute either punishment or redemption to God, as his personal religion of Christianity would suggest, but everything was man-centered. This concept of redemption helps explain how the President can frequently and strongly affirm our confidence in democracy in spite of our failures in the past. He said, for example, "we are confident that democratic methods are the most effective, and so we are not tempted to employ improper tactics at home or abroad." The redeemed audience could then put the past behind themselves and move forward with Carter.

The third basic element of a worship service is that of challenging the audience to a new life of obedience. The people Carter addressed had been renewed through confession and redemption but could not rest at that point. They had to go forth demonstrating their obedience to the democratic faith. The bulk of the speech was a development of this element. President Carter, in his ministerial role, showed the way. He developed this third element by first noting that some of our past policies, which built "solid testaments to our faith and purpose — the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization . . ." must now be replaced. These policies worked well for twenty-five years but they had to be changed because the world had changed. He described a "new world" which called for a new vision and policy "based on constant decency in its values and on optimism in its historical vision." New nations have

developed, he said, which are free from traditional constraints and are aspiring to achieve social justice. By describing this new world Carter attempted to separate himself from previous administrations and was thus able to call the people to a new obedience which could be implemented only by following his policies — old policies no longer fit.

The call to obedience to democracy is the best policy; it was a direct follow-up of the confession and redemption elements discussed earlier, thus giving the plea for Carter's policies added force.

Therefore, if the people refused to see foreign policy his way, then they were not only out of tune with the new world, but also were being disobedient to the democratic faith. Americans were expected to be an example to the world and demonstrate that their faith could withstand the threats of evil caused by "ideological disputes," "regional conflicts," and "differences in race and wealth." In addition to being an example to the world, "we must continue confidently — our efforts to inspire and to persuade and to lead." Obedience to democracy meant that issues of war and peace must not be separated from the "new global questions of justice, equity, and human rights." The call to obedience to democracy is the best policy; it was a direct follow-up of the confession and redemption elements discussed earlier, thus giving the plea

for Carter's policies added force.

To provide further help for the people in following the new life of obedience, Carter outlined five "cardinal" principles for foreign policy. The term "cardinal" gave the principles a religious aura which served to highlight their importance. Also, instead of calling them *his* principles, he cast them in a religious — almost sacred — mold to identify them with the democratic faith. They appear just two sentences after the central text in the President's message — "dignity and freedom are man's fundamental spiritual requirements." Consequently, if the people wished to be loyal to this faith, belief in these principles was essential.

Belief in principles, of course, by itself is not enough. Carter recognized that if the people were to demonstrate the new life of obedience to democratic values he had to show them the way. By noting that "we have reaffirmed America's basic commitment to human rights as a fundamental tenet of our foreign policy," he showed that the administration was leading the way of faith. But he did not stop there. "What draws us together, perhaps more than anything else, is a belief in human freedom." A sermon needs to bind the congregation together so that the people can move forward as a unit. Indeed, Carter did not ask for the people's support for his policy so that *he* could move forward but instead used plural pronouns of "we" and "our" to join the people with him.

"Moral suasion" constituted the primary means of implementing faith in human rights. Although it had limits and our foreign policy could not be conducted by "rigid moral maxims," nevertheless "it is a mistake to undervalue the power of words and of the ideas that words embody." Thomas Paine and Martin Luther King, Jr., were offered as inspiring examples of people who had

demonstrated the power of words. But lest the congregation be led to think that words replace action and thus "faith without works is dead" (James 2:17), Carter reminded them that "in the life of the human spirit, words are action." He offered as proof the fact that dissidents were "persecuted" by totalitarian leaders because of their words. He did not dwell on the negative, however, but said that "dramatic worldwide advances" had been made "in the protection of the individual from the arbitrary power of the state." Instead of giving evidence of the advances, he exhorted the people to not ignore the trend because doing that

to do was stress the notion that words are action and that failure to believe this would diminish our influence in the world. This technique may not work, however, to convert the doubters.

In his discussion of the means of implementing the faith in a democratic foreign policy, Carter further established that this faith was a faith for the world. Just as a minister who preaches a faith that does not serve the people beyond the walls of the church cannot be of much help in guiding the people in their life, neither could a faith in democracy be limited to the boundaries of our own country. A religious faith must contain a world-and-life view.

In his discussion of the means of implementing the faith in a democratic foreign policy, Carter further established that this faith was a faith for the world. Just as a minister who preaches a faith that does not serve the people beyond the walls of the church cannot be of much help in guiding the people in their life, neither could a faith in democracy be limited to the boundaries of our own country. A religious faith must contain a world-and-life view.

would cause them to lose moral authority in the world. Again, he was really talking about faith — the trend was there even if we did not see it. And the people were not allowed to doubt, for in doubting, he said, they would lose their influence. By tying his assertions to obedience, he left little room for the people to disagree. Strong assertion of belief is often all that is needed to strengthen that belief in a congregation that has assembled primarily to profess and reinforce its common faith. For those who did not doubt, all Carter had

So, too, Carter recognized that the democratic faith must not only govern our domestic policy and inform the foreign policy for our country, but it also must promote harmonious relations throughout the world. All nations could benefit by adopting this type of policy. The President developed this point by describing the activities his administration had engaged in, thus demonstrating the leadership role he was providing. The first step was to "reinforce the bonds among our democracies" which involved several

activities, the most important of which was that "all of us reaffirmed our basic optimism in the future of the democratic system." He continued by pointing out that our links with the nations in this hemisphere "are the same links of equality that we forge with the rest of the world." He urged Western democracies, OPEC nations, and the developed Communist countries to cooperate democratically "through existing international institutions in providing more effective aid" to developing countries so that the third world nations could participate in the successes that democracy brings. He was boldly specific in his direction for South Africa: "The time has come for the principle of majority rule to be the basis for political order, recognizing that in a democratic system the rights of the minority must also be protected." These directions were "rooted in moral values." Demonstrating that this faith is adequate for the world greatly enhances its acceptability. And when Carter showed how it could be implemented, he provided grounds for the wisdom of this faith. His discussion of what the world must do came in the form of an admonition — the world as well as Americans must be obedient to the democratic faith.

The President ran into some trouble, however, in seeking to demonstrate the efficacy of the democratic faith for Communist nations. He wanted to cooperate with China, but he said "we hope to find a formula which can bridge some of the difficulties that still separate us" instead of applying the same democratic formula that he applied to other countries. He further declared: "Based on a strong defense capability, our policy must also seek to improve relations with the Soviet Union and China. . . . Even if we cannot heal ideological divisions, we must reach accommodations that reduce the risk of

war." Here he prefaced his statement about policy with an implicit threat that our military is part of our policy-making apparatus. "Accommodations that reduce risk of war" appear to take precedence over human rights. This can be explained by the fact that it is very difficult for Carter to get away from the "power politics" type of foreign policy practiced by previous administrations, which essentially held that we must negotiate from a position of strength. Although he believed that previous foreign policy had had insufficient concern for human rights, yet he realized that it had been effective in achieving a change from the Cold War foreign policy of the post-World War II era. Thus he vacillated between these two types of policy — "power politics" and his own "new world" or "human rights" foreign policy. His statements can also be understood in the context of warning, which is also characteristic of sermons, as will be discussed below. While he did not demonstrate the efficacy of democratic faith in dealing with Communist countries, this does not mean that it cannot be an important element in relations with such countries. That the life of obedience to the democratic faith is difficult, Carter implied, is insufficient reason for rejecting it.

Another way in which the democratic faith could be lived was to reduce both the danger of nuclear proliferation and the worldwide spread of conventional arms. After reviewing our policy on arms sales, Carter said that we would reduce our own arms sales unilaterally first and at the same time seek to get other nations to join us in the effort because "competition in arms sales is inimical to peace and destructive of the economic development of poorer countries." He implied that a prior condition for the implementation of the democratic faith is the reasonable assurance of peace. In

addition, competition in arms sales prevents the poorer countries from developing themselves so that they can engage in "equitable trade" and thereby help themselves restore their own dignity. Again, he gave no details of how much we have reduced our arms sales, but in making this speech as a sermon, he freed himself from the requirement of giving details. He identified evils and separated them from good. Seeing this speech as a sermon enables us to recognize that it was enough for him to state that we have made a beginning and that this is the right direction for us to go. A preacher knows the way and will direct us in the proper path.

"All of this is just a beginning," the President declared after discussing the steps that his administration had taken, "but it is a beginning aimed toward a clear goal: to create a wider framework of international cooperation suited to the new historical reality." A sermon cannot be only a description of what has already been done in terms of living a renewed life; it must also contain a vision of things to come. The people needed a vision and Carter provided it. His faith is a faith for the nations. He drew an analogy from that great hero of the democratic faith, Abraham Lincoln, to provide strength for his claim that we must minister to the needs of the hungry two-thirds of the world. The reference to Lincoln in the speech functioned to inspire. How the hungry two-thirds of the world could be fed by our renewed faith in democratic foreign policy was not discussed. But a sermon need not contain exact plans for the future. The details are not important. It is the vision that must lead people on.

The necessary counterpart to a call for new obedience by believers must be a warning to the wayward, i.e., those who do not accept the faith. Sermons function to show the way to those who obey, but also to warn those who

disobey. Carter warned the wayward at several points in the speech that their evil would be overcome by democratic good. The sinful were "those rulers who deny human rights to their own people." Those who refused to conduct foreign policy democratically would risk the threat of our military as Carter made evident in his comments about the Soviet Union and China, mentioned above. His warning clearly conveyed his desire for dealing with the Communists democratically, although it might be difficult. Progress toward peace "must be both comprehensive and reciprocal. We cannot have accommodation in one part of the world and aggravation of conflicts in another." He further singled out the sin of the Soviets' effort to impose their social system on another country "through the use of a client state's military force — as with the Cuban intervention in Angola." In addition he singled out the sins of "persecution" of dissidents, the "morally deplorable" arms race, racial hatred, etc. The London *Economist* reacted that he was firm with the Russians.¹⁵ It is sufficient for a preacher to condemn evil and especially to label such actions, as Carter did. Exact punishment need not be spelled out; it only need be clear that punishment for sins exists.

Another characteristic of many sermons — although it is neither characteristic of all sermons nor essential to the nature of a sermon — is the demonstration of what I will call "triumphalism." Throughout his speech President Carter provided evidence of this. Triumphalism is the notion that since we have such a good and true idea, it will triumph in the end. Not only that, but already we can see evidence of its success and we are well on our way to ultimate victory. We have overcome. It appears as a premature celebration of victory before victory has been achieved. It is the sense of "we have

arrived!" Rhetorically it operates to get people to join the ever-increasing throng in the march to the true reality. But it is more than the bandwagon propaganda technique. It amounts to carrying the declaration of an idea too far — to the point of not respecting all of the members of the audience. It manifests an arrogant attitude by saying to those who are not convinced: why can you not see what the rest of us see? The implication is that anyone who does not accept the idea is either blind or foolish. The value and success of whatever idea is promoted is supposedly so self-evident that the speaker need not demonstrate its validity.

In a manner characteristic of a sermon, he was preaching the significance of a value system that he assumed his audience already believed. Reinforcement and inspiration, characteristic of sermons, was all that he considered to be necessary.

Since triumphalism is the declaration of victory, it works successfully to reinforce those who already believe in the idea. Carter used it to reinforce the believers in democracy. His triumphalism was manifested in the repetition of "We are confident. . . ." In particular, he attempted to sweep the nation along with him when he said "we are confident of the good sense of our own people, and so we let them share the process of making foreign policy decisions. We can thus speak with the voice of 215 million, not just a handful."

Using this emotional technique allowed Carter to make these assertions without showing how the 215 million participate. Triumphalism was also apparent in his statements about the success of democracy: "Democracy's great recent successes. . . show that our confidence is not misplaced" and "all of us reaffirmed our basic optimism in the future of the democratic system. Our spirit of confidence is spreading." Similarly, "we can already see dramatic worldwide advances" in protection of human rights. Illustrations of "dramatic" advances were not given, but neither was the audience permitted to ask questions about it since "for us to ignore this trend would be to lose influence and moral authority in the world." Doubting would have been wrong. Instead, we must lead this trend in order to "regain the moral stature we once had." This technique of very strong declaration is seen by its users to be sufficient by itself to convince, and in this way Carter used it. In a manner characteristic of a sermon, he was preaching the significance of a value system that he assumed his audience already believed. Reinforcement and inspiration, characteristic of sermons, was all that he considered to be necessary.

Like a sermon, the President's speech succeeded in achieving its purpose with some and failed with others. One listener in the immediate audience said, "This is either a very important speech or a prayer."¹⁶ "Still others wrote off the Notre Dame speech as an insubstantial sermon — PIETY STRIKES AGAIN, said Britain's conservative *Daily Express*."¹⁷ *America* reported that it was encouragement for Catholics.¹⁸ Wm. F. Buckley's comment about one part of the speech — "now what on earth does that long rhetorical gargle mean?" — is typical of the flavor of his critique.¹⁹ The type of speech it is

suggests that while it would succeed with some, it would not succeed with all. His attempt to be ecumenical — include the entire world and offer something to everybody — was a monumental ambition. It is safe to say that even Carter did not suppose that he would convince everyone. This was not the first speech he gave on human rights but, rather, another step in a human rights campaign that began with his run for the Presidency and continues to the present day. The speech was important in that it filled out what the President had advocated earlier in his Inaugural Address and it established the direction that foreign policy would take under his administration. In making clear this direction he succeeded in demonstrating that his foreign policy marked an important change from previous administrations and from the way that other nations conducted foreign policy in the past.²⁰

However, Carter's text would not be acceptable to Christians who believe that man's fundamental spiritual requirements are more than simply dignity and freedom. With this particular text as his basis, Carter's sermon was not distinctively Christian. On the other hand, for those who worship at the feet of man, the sermon became a focal point around which they could rally and go forth to meet the challenges facing democracy. Those who seek evidence as the foundation for their belief in the reasonableness of a democratic foreign policy are looking in the wrong place. Never mind the fact that the speech was given at an academic institution; the commencement exercise was not an academic activity. The occasion called for a sermon to send the immediate audience — the college graduates — into the world with renewed faith and a new vision as well as to strengthen the convictions of others in the larger audience.

Notes

¹All references to President Carter's speech are taken from *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 43 (15 June 1977), pp. 514-517.

²Robert Shogan, *Promises to Keep: Carter's First Hundred Days* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977), p. 135.

³"Preacher in the Presidency," *Economist*, 22 Jan. 1977, p. 17.

⁴"Carter's New World," *New Republic*, 4 June 1977, p. 8.

⁵"Plain Talk about America's Global Role," *Time*, 6 June 1977, p. 10.

⁶Wm. F. Buckley, Jr., "Carter at Notre Dame," *The National Review*, 24 June 1977, p. 740.

⁷For a discussion of neo-orthodoxy's effect on preaching see Harold Brack, "Neo-Orthodoxy and the American Pulpit," in *Preaching in American History*, ed. DeWitte Holland (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), pp. 278-291.

⁸An example of Carter's Sunday School teaching, along with an outsider's views on it, is provided in Shogan, pp. 137-141.

⁹Buckley, p. 740.

¹⁰Martin Schram, *Running for President 1976: The Carter Campaign* (New York: Stein and Day, 1977), p. 302.

¹¹John H. Patton, "A Government as Good as Its People: Jimmy Carter and the Restoration of Transcendence to Politics," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 63 (October 1977), pp. 249-257.

¹²David Kucharsky, *The Man From Plains: The Mind and Spirit of Jimmy Carter* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 49.

¹³Catholics also try to separate religion from certain areas of life as demonstrated by the separation of religion courses and secular courses in the Catholic schools, often with clergy teaching the religion courses and lay people teaching the secular courses. More recently, however, the Catholic Church seems to be moving toward greater integration of faith and learning.

¹⁴See, for example, the *Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publishing House), which is distinctly divided into three parts, each part representing one of these elements.

¹⁵"Are Carter's Foreign Policy Words Action?" *Economist*, 28 May 1977, pp. 33-34.

¹⁶"Plain Talk About America's Global Role," *Time*, 6 June 1977, p. 9.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁸"President at Notre Dame," *America*, 4 June 1977, p. 494.

¹⁹Buckley, p. 740.

²⁰"Carter's New World Order," *U.S. News & World Report*, 6 June 1977, p. 17.