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Political Scripture Paper

On March 8, 1983, then-President Ronald Reagan gave a speech to the annual convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida, which has since been dubbed his "Evil Empire Speech." The focus of this speech centers on two main political topics: abortions and infanticide and relations with the Soviet Union. Throughout, Reagan pays great attention to his faith and religious values. He uses the themes of sin and evil to describe his views on heavily debated topics and references the Bible multiple times to support his points. Reagan's use of scripture in his Evil Empire Speech is effective because he accurately represents the verses, and its use is relevant to the stances he takes.

Before diving into my analysis of the scripture used in Reagan's speech, it is vital to examine the audience he is speaking to and how he sets up his two main points. He gives this speech to the National Association of Evangelicals; in other words, his audience is a crowd of Christians. This detail influences his approach to discussing the topics he covers. Reagan claims that America's "commitment to freedom and personal liberty" is rooted in the acceptance of the blessings of God, and he quotes multiple founding fathers regarding the importance of religion to this nation (8). He makes it clear that America needs to stay grounded in morality to remain the great nation it is known to be and overcome the trials that it faces. Once he gets into the meat of his speech, he uses multiple direct quotes from scripture to support his points and even references a C.S. Lewis book, "The Screwtape Letters." Reagan's speech is saturated with

Christian beliefs—he doesn't simply drop a singular Bible verse to fulfill some rudimentary requirement for speaking to a group of religious individuals.

The first direct quote from scripture that Reagan provides in his Evil Empire Speech comes about halfway in, following his discussion of abortion and infanticide. After expressing his desire for an end to abortion, explaining the actions he has taken to save the lives of disabled and handicapped infants, and asserting his belief that "America is in the midst of a spiritual awakening and a moral renewal," he quotes Amos 5:24 (Reagan 31). This verse states, "Rather let justice surge like waters, and righteousness like an unfailing stream" (*New American Bible Revised Edition*, Amos 5:24). For context, in the verses preceding 5:24, Amos denounces the people of Israel for offering feasts, solemnities, songs, and sacrifices to God, despite continuing to mistreat their fellow Israelites. He tells them that God is pleased instead by justice and righteousness. Reagan's use of the verse fits in very well with the ideas he is conveying. Reagan condemns those who have turned to secularism and states that "their value system is radically different from that of most Americans" (13). But he also claims that those people are in the minority, with an overwhelming majority of Americans being religious and believing in God. That, coupled with Congress's debating of the issues at hand, supports Reagan's belief that the people of America are choosing justice and righteousness like Amos is telling the Israelites to do. As such, Reagan's use of Amos 5:24 accurately represents the verse and is relevant to the stance he takes in his speech.

Reagan leads into the conclusion of his Evil Empire Speech by giving a quote from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. This scripture reference comes after the portion of his speech in which he tackles America's relations with the Soviet Union, maintaining his stance against the nuclear freeze solution, proposing a reduction of certain types of missiles, and declaring the

Soviet Union's evilness that results from their lack of knowledge of God. Reagan quotes Isaiah 40:29 and 31, which state, "He gives power to the faint, abundant strength to the weak...they that hope in the LORD will renew their strength, they will soar on eagles' wings; they will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint" (Isaiah 40:29,31). Leading up to these verses, the anonymous prophet who authored this portion of the Book of Isaiah attempts to encourage Judean exiles in Babylon by reminding them of the measure of God's power, the insignificance of nations in relation to God, and the futility of idols. He urges them to remember that nothing compares to God, the creator of the universe who never fails, and that God will accompany those who believe in him through their struggles. This context aligns nicely with how Reagan wraps up his ideas at the end of his speech. He does not want his audience to be discouraged by the conflict between America and communist powers but rather to believe that they will "ultimately triumph over those who would enslave their fellow man" because of their faith in God (Reagan 53). This ties in with the overarching theme of the speech that the morality and religious beliefs of Americans will ultimately maintain the greatness of this country. Ergo, Reagan's use of Isaiah 40:29 and 31 represents the verses accurately and stays relevant to the main points of his speech.

To conclude, even by analyzing only two of the direct quotes from the Bible that Reagan includes in his Evil Empire Speech, it is clear that his use of scripture is effective. His incorporation of these verses stays true to the original meaning while furthering his arguments.

Works Cited

The Bible. New American Bible Revised Edition, 2011.

Reagan, Ronald. "Evil Empire Speech." National Association of Evangelicals, 8 Mar. 1983,
Orlando, FL.