

RONALD REAGAN

A P R E S I D E N T ' S V I S I O N

PRIMARY SOURCE WORKSHEET

EXCERPT FROM REAGAN'S SPEECH TO THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EVANGELICALS, MARCH 8, 1983.

Full text is available online at <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3409>

On March 8, 1983, President Reagan spoke to a meeting of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida. Reagan referred to communism as "the focus of evil in the modern world," and his address quickly became known as the "Evil Empire Speech." The speech is now recognized as one of Reagan's most influential.

. . . Whatever sad episodes exist in our past, any objective observer must hold a positive view of American history, a history that has been the story of hopes fulfilled and dreams made into reality. Especially in this century, America has kept alight the torch of freedom, but not just for ourselves but for millions of others around the world.

And this brings me to my final point today. During my first press conference as President, in answer to a direct question, I pointed out that, as good Marxist-Leninists, the Soviet leaders have openly and publicly declared that the only morality they recognize is that which will further their cause, which is world revolution. I think I should point out I was only quoting Lenin, their guiding spirit, who said in 1920 that they repudiate all morality that proceeds from supernatural ideas—that's their name for religion—or ideas that are outside class conceptions. Morality is entirely subordinate to the interests of class war. And everything is moral that is necessary for the annihilation of the old, exploiting social order and for uniting the proletariat.

Well, I think the refusal of many influential people to accept this elementary fact of Soviet doctrine illustrates an historical reluctance to see totalitarian powers for what they are. We saw this phenomenon in the 1930s. We see it too often today.

This doesn't mean we should isolate ourselves and refuse to seek an understanding with them. I intend to do everything I can to persuade them of our peaceful intent, to remind them that it was the West that refused to use its nuclear monopoly in the forties and fifties for territorial gain and which now proposes [a] 50 percent cut in strategic ballistic missiles and the elimination of an entire class of land-based, intermediate-range nuclear missiles.

At the same time, however, they must be made to understand we will never compromise our principles and standards. We will never give away our freedom. We will never abandon our belief in God. And we will never stop searching for a genuine peace. But we can assure none of these things America stands for through the so-called nuclear freeze solutions proposed by some.

The truth is that a freeze now would be a very dangerous fraud, for that is merely the illusion of peace. The reality is that we must find peace through strength.

I would agree to a freeze if only we could freeze the Soviets' global desires. A freeze at current levels of weapons would remove any incentive for the Soviets to negotiate seriously in Geneva and virtually end our chances to achieve the major arms reductions which we have proposed. Instead, they would achieve their objectives through the freeze.

For related educational resources, visit www.presidentsvision.org



Humanities Texas

RONALD REAGAN

A P R E S I D E N T ' S V I S I O N

A freeze would reward the Soviet Union for its enormous and unparalleled military buildup. It would prevent the essential and long overdue modernization of United States and allied defenses and would leave our aging forces increasingly vulnerable. And an honest freeze would require extensive prior negotiations on the systems and numbers to be limited and on the measures to ensure effective verification and compliance. And the kind of a freeze that has been suggested would be virtually impossible to verify. Such a major effort would divert us completely from our current negotiations on achieving substantial reductions.

A number of years ago, I heard a young father, a very prominent young man in the entertainment world, addressing a tremendous gathering in California. It was during the time of the Cold War, and communism and our own way of life were very much on people's minds. And he was speaking to that subject. And suddenly, though, I heard him saying, "I love my little girls more than anything—" And I said to myself, "Oh, no, don't. You can't—don't say that." But I had underestimated him. He went on: "I would rather see my little girls die now, still believing in God, than have them grow up under communism and one day die no longer believing in God."

There were thousands of young people in that audience. They came to their feet with shouts of joy. They had instantly recognized the profound truth in what he had said, with regard to the physical and the soul and what was truly important.

Yes, let us pray for the salvation of all of those who live in that totalitarian darkness—pray they will discover the joy of knowing God. But until they do, let us be aware that while they preach the supremacy of the state, declare its omnipotence over individual man, and predict its eventual domination of all peoples on the Earth, they are the focus of evil in the modern world.

QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Evangelical Christians were an important part of the political coalition Reagan assembled to win the presidency. Use your textbook or online sources to identify some of the issues in the 1970s that supported the political resurgence of evangelical Christians.
2. In this excerpt of his speech, Reagan compared the role of the United States in the world with the role of the Soviet Union, focusing on each nation's morals and values. According to Reagan, how did the Soviet Union define morality?
3. According to Reagan, how is American morality different from Soviet morality?
4. Reagan argued that these differing views of morality were incompatible. He did not, however, suggest that peace between the two nations was impossible. What was the one way, according to Reagan, that the United States could ensure peace with the Soviet Union?
5. This address is also known as the "Evil Empire" speech. According to Reagan, what three things about Soviet communism made it the focus of evil in the world?

For related educational resources, visit www.presidentsvision.org

