

erotic lives themselves are so persistently held under erasure. Nor did the subsequent essays take up the gauntlet thrown down here; given pride of place by the editors, this potentially productive theory, spelling a way in to a discussion that needed to take place, was simply left dangling.

This was not the only problem besetting *eros.usa*. Readers will face a number of, at times, glaring typographical errors. A couple of the essays in this volume lack polish, appearing more as drafts than finished products. This, unfortunately, leads to an overall impression of *eros.usa* as an uneven book. It taunts and it teases, it coaxes, cajoles, but its readers will be left wanting more.

Colin Haines

Uppsala University

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Jimmy Carter, *Our Endangered Values: America's Moral Crisis*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005. 212 pp. ISBN: 0743284577; \$25.00, hardcover.

Jimmy Carter did not go quietly. During the quarter century since his defeat in the 1980 presidential election, he has continued to make a mark on the political process through visits to world leaders, attempts at conflict mediation, and pleas for international cooperation. His efforts have garnered praise and acclaim particularly among Europeans. In an era defined by the use of pre-emptive might, his commitment to negotiation, incremental change and stress on human rights have served as a reminder of a kinder, gentler age. Furthermore, Carter and the Atlanta-based Center through which his work is carried out have embraced social-democratic representations of rights. They are not mere constraints upon the powers of government (a conception of liberty spelt out in the Bill of Rights) but instead encompass positive, social "rights" such as a guarantee of access to food and healthcare.

Others are markedly less generous in their comments. A failed presidency has, they assert, given way to a failed ex-presidency. They point to the former president's 'meddling' which, as they record, has irritated and at times infuriated his successors. Furthermore, some have noted, there is a tension between Carter's commitment to rights and his faith in diplomacy. Despite the rhetoric of rights, Carter's politics often seem to owe more to a leftist *realpolitik*. Conservative periodicals such as *National Review* point to his 'apologetics' for figures such as Yasir Arafat, Fidel Castro, Hafez al-Assad, Mengistu Haile Mariam, and Kim Il Sung.

Whatever the merits of these claims and counter-claims, few would however fail to acknowledge the prolific character of Carter's writing. *Our Endangered Values* is his twentieth book. While four of the chapters are directed towards the foreign policy themes with which Carter is most closely associated, much of the book engages with the arguments put forward by the contemporary Christian conservatives. Carter is well-qualified to take on the Christian right. The "discovery" during the 1976 presidential election campaign that Carter was "born again" led to spasm of press interest in the Baptist churches and evangelical forms of faith. Although much of the coverage was laced with condescension, and sought to dismiss evangelical Protestantism as an expression of southern rural backwardness, Carter's faith was tied to a chain of events, developments and processes that contributed to a fundamental and far-reaching shift in long-established patterns of partisan support leading some observers to talk in terms of *realignment*.

There had been a foretaste of this during the 1950s and 1960s when mass evangelists, most notably Billy Graham, represented the US as an expression of Christ's purpose and tied themselves to the global fight against communism. However, the relationship between politics and religion was transformed in the 1970s. Carter's election victory depended, at least in part, upon white evangelical votes (56 per cent of white evangelical Protestants who cast a vote in the 1976 contest backed Carter). His character and faith transcended traditional evangelical disdain for a "worldly" political process. Their subsequent disappointment with the Carter administration led some to talk of betrayal and contributed to the emergence and evolution of the Christian right as a structured movement (or "counter-movement" insofar as it was a reaction to the movements of the 1960s and 1970s) resting upon organizations such as the Moral Majority and a political commitment, born of faith, to the rebuilding of a Christian America that would end the "murder of the unborn," permit worship in schools, restore the family to its rightful place, and confront "militant homosexuals." In the 1980 presidential election, the 1976 results were turned around and 56 per cent of the evangelical vote was given to Reagan compared with just 34 per cent for Jimmy Carter.<sup>1</sup> During the 1980s and 1990s, the Christian right played a pivotal role in shaping and structuring Republican Party politics. Its leaders sought to act as "king-makers" in both presidential and Congressional contests.

Carter's critique of the Christian right treads a very familiar path.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, many of the themes considered in *Our Endangered Values* have been surveyed in numerous press commentaries, documentaries, and news reports in both the US and Europe:

fundamentalists have become increasingly influential in both religion and government, and have managed to change the nuances and subtleties of historic debate into black-and-white rigidities and the personal derogation of those who dare to disagree ... The influence of these

1. Clyde Wilcox, *Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996) 63-64.

2. While the book is primarily directed towards the theology and politics of the Christian right, Carter also takes aim at the "neoconservatives" whose commitment to the export of democracy and the market order is said to have led US troops to the gates of Baghdad and the Sunni triangle.

various trends poses a threat to many of our nation's historic customs and moral commitments, both in government and in houses of worship. Narrowly defined theological beliefs have been adopted as the rigid agenda of a political party. (3)

Who are the "fundamentalists" of the Christian right? Carter asserts that they are led by "authoritarian males" who seek the subjugation of women, are hostile to those outside of their ranks, and "resort to verbal or even physical abuse against those who interfere with the implementation of their agenda." In short, the Christian right is characterized by "rigidity, domination, and exclusion" (34-35). Carter points to the Christian right's advocacy of abstinence-only sex education programs (which do not offer instruction in the use of contraception), the teaching of "intelligent design," opposition to embryonic stem-cell research, backing for the death penalty, and commitment to rigidly traditionalist definitions of morality.

All this has however been said by others. *Our Endangered Values* adds little to contemporary polemics about either the character of domestic policy or, in its foreign policy sections, the pursuit of pre-emptive war. The arguments and, for that matter, the evidence that is used to support them will be well-known to those on both sides of the Atlantic who have followed the course of recent US history.

The book is however significant for a very different reason. Jimmy Carter's thinking is a powerful reminder that not all white evangelical Protestants who, according to many commentaries, ensured George W. Bush's 2004 re-election victory, are foot soldiers for the preachers and pundits of the Christian right. Indeed, there are significant cleavages within the ranks of American evangelicals.

Although most churchgoing liberals are to be found in the Episcopalian and other "mainline" denominations, there are some evangelicals who, like Carter, distance themselves from the Christian right and define themselves as "progressives." Carter rightly makes reference to *Sojourners* magazine and the writings of its editor, Jim Wallis. In contrast with organizations such as the Christian Coalition, the Family Research Council, and Concerned Women for America, Wallis and other evangelical progressives stress the Bible's references to the poor and the public policy implications of this. For its part, *Sojourners* is "a Christian ministry whose mission is to proclaim and practice the biblical call to integrate spiritual renewal and social justice."<sup>3</sup> There is an emphasis upon the redistribution of income and wealth. As Carter notes:

When we recite the Lord's Prayer and pray for God's kingdom to come on earth, we are asking for an end to political and economic injustice within worldly regimes – references he said the Republicans appeared to have overlooked ... It is clear that proper treatment of the poor should be an extremely high priority among those who shape American politics. (178-79)

3. *Sojourners* (2006), *About Us*, [www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=about\\_us.mission](http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=about_us.mission)

The differences between the evangelical progressives and the Christian right go further. Progressives reject the premillennial dispensationalism that underpins the thinking of many of those associated with the Christian right. While all committed evangelicals look ahead to the second coming of Christ, Carter distances himself from the apocalyptic dramas of “end times,” notions of “Rapture” (when believers will be raised to heaven) and a period of “tribulation.” As Carter notes:

There are literally millions of my fellow Baptists and others who believe every word of this vision, based on self-exaltation of the chosen few along with the condemnation and abandonment, during a period of “tribulation,” of family members, friends, and neighbors who have not been chosen for salvation. (113-14)

Notions of “rapture” and “tribulation” underpin Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins’s popular *Left Behind* series. They also inform the Christian right’s commitment to Israel, its support for US intervention in Iraq, and stress upon a rigid judgmental code that seems to promise retribution for those who morally transgress. While Jimmy Carter continues to serve as a deacon in the Maranatha Baptist Church of Plains, all of this has led both Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter to sever their connections with Southern Baptist Convention which shares many of the perceptions and priorities of the Christian right.

It is tempting to dismiss Carter and figures such as Jim Wallis as isolated and unrepresentative figures. After all, eighty per cent of white evangelical voters backed the Bush-Cheney ticket in November 2004. They appear to be a solidly conservative bloc. Nonetheless, there are others within evangelical ranks who recoil away from what they see as the posturing of Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, James Dobson and the others who have built and shaped the Christian right. Johnny Cash, the subject of the recent film, *Walk the Line*, tied his evangelical faith to an empathy with the dispossessed. He was, he said, the “man in black” because of the “poor and the beaten-down, living in hopeless hungry side of town.” More importantly, survey data suggests that while an overwhelming proportion of white evangelical voters have supported the Republicans in elections from 1980 onwards, about half those who define themselves as evangelical do not vote and a substantial minority are “in play” between the parties. Furthermore, a proportion of those who backed Bush in 2000 and 2004 had significant doubts. As Steven Waldman and John C Green note, about a third of white evangelicals voted for Bill Clinton in 1996. As a grouping, therefore, they are not as solidly partisan as Jews, black Protestants, Hispanic Catholics, or Mormons.

What can be said about these “freestyle evangelicals” (as Waldman and Green dub them)? They are concerned about the prospects for their children and the future of the nation. They celebrate family relationships and fear that their sons and daughters gain little moral guidance from the media or the public schools. “Moral pollution” and the “sexualization” of young adolescents and the pre-pubescent through commercial advertising and networks such as MTV have provoked particular disquiet. Many look back with affection and respect to an age when behavior was regulated in more

defined and less uncertain ways. At the same time, however, there is something less than enthusiasm for unrestrained market economics. Their deep anxiety about their children and communities leads to a concern with education, health care, and the environment.<sup>7</sup> Alongside this, there are growing doubts about the foreign policy being pursued by the Bush administration and, more recently, the ethics of those holding public office.

Jimmy Carter has long been detached from established constituencies within the Democratic Party. His brief foray into party politics at the end of 2003 when he seemed to more or less confer his blessing on former Vermont Governor, Howard Dean, as the party's presidential candidate, will not have encouraged him to make others. There are certainly few references to the party in *Our Endangered Values*. Nonetheless, although Carter may have lost interest in the Democrats, the party and its presidential heir presumptive cannot afford to disregard those who share his faith.

Edward Ashbee

Copenhagen Business School

4. Steven Waldman and John C Green Freestyle Evangelicals: The surprise swing vote – could the next president be the candidate who appeals to the evangelical soccer moms?', *Beliefnet*, [www.beliefnet.com/story/129/story\\_12995\\_1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/129/story_12995_1.html)