

THE GOLDEN RULE AS A POLITICAL IMPERATIVE FOR THE WORLD PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA'S PROVERBIAL MESSAGES ABROAD

**Dünya İçin Siyasi Bir Gereklilik Olarak Altın Kural: Başkan Obama'nın
Yurtdışındaki Atasözü İçerikli Mesajları**

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang MIEDER*

ABSTRACT

The political rhetoric of President Barack Obama of the United States is informed to a considerable degree by proverbs and proverbial expressions. This is true in particular when he addresses native English speakers at home, but he also draws on this folk wisdom when speaking to audiences abroad. The use of proverbial language gives his speeches a colloquial and metaphorical expressiveness that enables him to communicate effectively with people of different ethnic and social backgrounds. This was certainly the case when he delivered major speeches at Berlin, Ankara, Cairo, and Oslo. Stressing the common humanity of people in Europe and throughout the world, Obama used a number of national and international proverbs to bring his message of hope and moral values across in a world where globalization draws humanity ever closer together. As he strives for peace and for the eradication of war, deprivation, and disease, he sees his guiding moral principle in the universal proverb "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" that is known throughout the world by all religions and philosophies as the golden rule of humankind.

Key Words

Communication, folklore, globalization, golden rule, metaphor, morality, politics, proverb, religion, rhetoric, speech, wisdom

ÖZ

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri Başkanı Barack Obama'nın siyasi hitabeti, çok sayıda atasözü ve atasözü ifadeleriyle zenginleştirilmiştir. Bu, özellikle Amerika'da anadili İngilizce olanlara hitap ettiğinde göze çarpar, ancak yurtdışındaki dinleyicilere hitap ettiğinde de bu halk bilgeliğine dikkati çeker. Atasözleri ile dolu bir dilin kullanımı, Obama'nın söylemlerine konuşma diline özgü ve mecazi bir etkileycilik katar ki bu, farklı etnik ve sosyal altyapılardan insanlarla etkili bir biçimde iletişim kurmasını sağlar. Berlin, Ankara, Kahire ve Oslo'da yaptığı önemli konuşmalar tam da bu özellikleri yansıtır. Avrupa'daki ve Dünya'daki halkların ortak insanlık hikâyesini vurgularken Obama, küreselleşmenin insanlığı daha da yakınlaştırdığı bu dünyada umuda ve ahlaki değerlere yönelik mesajlarını vermek için birçok ulusal ve uluslararası atasözünden faydalandı. Savaş, yoksunluk ve felaketi yok edip barış için gayret ederken Obama, yol gösterici, ahlaki ilkesini şu evrensel atasözünde bulur: "sana nasıl davranılmasını istiyorsan öyle davran" ki, bu ilke dünyadaki bütün dinler ve felsefelerce tanınan, insanlığın altın kuralıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

İletişim, folklor, küreselleşme, altın kural, metafor, ahlak, siyaset, atasözü, din, hitabet, konuşma, bilgelik.

As many presidents before him, notably Abraham Lincoln and Harry S. Truman, Barack Obama makes frequent use of proverbs and proverbial expressions in his speeches (see Mieder 2000 and 2009b; Mieder and Bryan 1997). Such proverbial language adds metaphorical and emotive expressiveness to his addresses as he tries to communicate with the American people as well as citizens from around the world. Proverbs

as traditional bits of folk wisdom and proverbial phrases as colorful linguistic formulas add considerable communicative imagery to his at times rather complex rhetoric. In other words, proverbial language gives a politician the opportunity to speak to people in a way that combines colloquial language with the cut-and-dry pragmatism of political messages. Proverbs in particular provide a solid dose of experiential wisdom,

* University of Vermont, wolfgang.mieder@uvm.edu

common sense, and practical knowledge to proverbial rhetoric, making such speeches accessible to the broadest possible spectrum of the population (Nichols 1996; Louis 2000). When Obama presents a speech, he must by necessity be aware of the cultural and linguistic background of his audience, i.e., he has to find a solid common denominator that binds his audience together. Even if he addresses only people within the United States, he has to realize that there are numerous citizens and aliens who might have considerable difficulty in following his remarks. This is also the case when he speaks more generally to the entire world, in which case he has to be especially careful to couch his thoughts into English words and phrases that people who speak and understand English as a second language can comprehend. From the way Obama does relate linguistically to Americans and peoples of the world at large, it appears that he is very much aware of the necessity to be cognizant of the cultural literacy of the people he happens to be addressing at any given time (Mieder 1992). And since proverbs in particular and proverbial expressions and proverbial comparisons in general are without doubt part of this general knowledge, such language serves him extremely well in bringing across his political, social, and ethical points. By now he has certainly proven himself to be a magisterial communicator, elevating the American political discourse to new rhetorical heights after it had declined considerably since John F. Kennedy's pride in language (Denton and Woodward 1998; Campbell and Jamieson 2008; Lim 2008).

In my book *"Yes We Can": Barack Obama's Proverbial Rhetoric* (2009b) I have shown that this modern politician knows how to engage all the registers of the rich English language and that he is especially gifted in adding a folkloric touch to his political rhetoric that

helps to make his utterances so appealing to people everywhere. His two books *Dreams from My Father* (1995) and *The Audacity of Hope* (2006) are filled with proverbial language, and his approximately three hundred speeches during his steady move towards the presidency of the United States bear convincing witness to his proverbial prowess. There can be no doubt that Obama's ability to find a linguistic common ground with a broad spectrum of the American population helped him get the nomination to become a presidential candidate and subsequently to be elected to that coveted office. Naturally, of course, it is now also of considerable interest to take a look at how Barack Obama as president of the United States is communicating with the world at large. After all, as the head of one of the world powers, he is in constant communication with the leaders and the people of countries throughout the world.

The question then arises how his proverbial arsenal serves him to communicate on the world stage of international politics? The quick and superficial answer is that he uses proverbial language less frequently when he speaks to audiences abroad, and that does in fact make perfect sense. After all, people who have learned English as a second language are not as fluent in proverbial language as native speakers would be. In order to be understood by foreign audiences, Obama does well in avoiding highly metaphorical or idiomatic language. But that does not mean that he excludes proverbs and proverbial expressions completely. Linguistically aware as he happens to be, Obama is, however, careful in choosing such internationally disseminated proverbs and proverbial phrases where he can basically count on the fact that his audience will know them by way of their native languages. Or he chooses such preformulated phrases whose metaphors are relatively accessible, thus assuring

solid communication while adding some expressive flavor to his speeches in foreign countries.

In his political and personal manifest *The Audacity of Hope* Obama states unequivocally that he is guided by the proverb “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matthew 7:12) that is commonly referred to as the “golden rule” for human conduct. In fact, he can rest assured that people everywhere and no matter of what faith will know what this moral code signifies, since it is part of all religions and has found its philosophical expression in Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative “Act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law” (Hertzler 1933-1934). The various ways in which this fundamental law of humanity is expressed in the holy books of the world’s religions have been conveniently listed in a special section on the “Golden Rule” in Albert K. Griffin’s *Religious Proverbs. Over 1600 Adages from 18 Faiths Worldwide* (1991: 67-69; see also Champion 1945: xviii; Burrell 1997: 13-27; Templeton 1997: 8-12). Being well aware of the general knowledge and currency of the law of life expressed either in its longer proverbial form or simply its “golden rule” designation, Barack Obama can assume that his readers or audience will be able to understand and hopefully identify with his subjective statement that “a sense of empathy [...] is at the heart of my moral code, and it is how I understand the Golden Rule – not simply as a call to sympathy or charity, but as something more demanding, a call to stand in somebody else’s shoes and see through their eyes” (2006: 66). Always the proverbialist, he is quick to add the two proverbial expressions “to put oneself into somebody else’s shoes” and “to see through someone else’s eyes” to the not directly stated proverbial law, thereby stressing that this golden rule will only be fulfilled if people have understanding

and compassion for each other. Later on in this book, he reiterates his personal commitment to this high moral principle: “There are some things that I’m absolutely sure about – the Golden Rule, the need to battle cruelty in all its forms, the value of love and charity, humility and grace” (2006: 224).

It should then come as no surprise that Obama returned to this international religious *and* secular wisdom in his significant address “A More Perfect Union” that he delivered in Philadelphia on March 18, 2008. He purposely chose as his motto of this speech on racial issues the first sentence of the American Constitution: “We the people, in order to form a more perfect union”. Of course, his sincere reflections on race led then Senator Barack Obama in the middle of his presidential campaign to expand his remarks to other imperfections of the union. At the end of his moving speech about a unified and compassionate America, he added a second proverb from the Bible to the perfectly appropriate “golden rule” proverbial leitmotif that together form the pillars of his very personality: “In the end then, what is called for is nothing more, and nothing less, than what all the world’s great religions demand – that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us be our brother’s keeper, Scripture tells us. Let us be our sister’s keeper. Let us find that common stake we all have in one another, and let our politics reflect that spirit as well” (for references from Barack Obama’s speeches see <http://www.obamaspeeches.com/>). It is important to realize in this context that Obama very appropriately changes the Biblical interrogative “Am I my brother’s keeper?” to a moral imperative. But there is yet one more intriguing matter to this effective rhetorical masterpiece. By extending the proverb to include the sisters, Obama is inclusive not only as far as race is concerned but also regarding gender differences.

But there is another highly significant word in this statement, one that occupies Barack Obama constantly in his role as the president of the United States. Already as a presidential candidate he was very well aware that this country is but one player on this globe, and that as its possible future leader he must be concerned with the “world” at large. This he was able to show one week after his speech at Philadelphia when he traveled to Europe and gave an unforgettable address on July 24, 2008, at Berlin, Germany, that earned him the respect and good will not only of Europeans but of citizens worldwide. Who would want to forget the excitement that his opening statement “I speak to you not as a candidate for President, but as a citizen – a proud citizen of the United States, and a fellow citizen of the world” had on his large audience at Berlin and the millions of people who watched this dramatic event on television?

Being at Berlin clearly reminded Obama of the Berlin Wall that for many years had served as the symbol of a divided Germany but metaphorically also of the world. Mindful of “the burdens of global citizenship [that] bind us together” now that this wall has ceased to exist, Obama said:

Partnership and cooperation among nations is not a choice; it is the one way, the only way, to protect our common security and advance our common humanity.

That is why the greatest danger of all is to allow new walls to divide us from one another.

The walls between old allies on either side of the Atlantic cannot stand. The walls between the countries with the most and those with the least cannot stand. The walls between races and tribes; natives and immigrants; Christian and Muslim and Jew cannot stand. These now are the walls we must tear down.

There is no doubt that this rhetorical high point is modeled on the Bible proverb “A house divided against itself cannot stand” (Mark 3,25) that Abraham Lincoln used repeatedly as he tried to preserve the American union before and during the Civil War. After all, Obama has stated repeatedly that he turns to such great American leaders as Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass (the 19th century former slave, abolitionist, and civil rights champion), and Martin Luther King for philosophical and rhetorical inspiration. In this particular case it was most likely Lincoln’s famous “House Divided” speech that he delivered on June 16, 1858, at Springfield, Illinois: “In my opinion, it [slavery] will not cease, until a crisis shall have been reached [the subsequent Civil War], and passed. ‘A house divided against itself cannot stand.’ I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved – I do not expect the house to fall – but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other” (Mieder 1998: 64-65).

But there are also a number of proverbial expressions that serve Obama well in adding metaphorical expressiveness to his remarks at Berlin. They are all international images, creating no linguistic problem for his audience capable of understanding English or for translators making the remarks available to people everywhere:

America has no better partner than Europe. Now is the time to build bridges across the globe as strong as the one that bound us across the Atlantic.

This is the moment when we must defeat terror and dry up the well of extremism that supports it.

We need a strong European Union that deepens the security and prosperity of this continent, while extending a hand abroad.

It is in pursuit of these aspirations

that a new generation – our generation – must make our mark on the world.

From his vision for the future mutually beneficial relationship between America and Europe, Obama is quick, as always, to widen the scope of his remarks to include the world as a whole. And it is here, where he repeats the proverbial expression “to give (lend, extend) someone a hand” that has proven itself to be a leitmotif in his many speeches (see Mieder 2009b: 230-231):

Now the world will watch and remember what we do here – what we do with this moment. Will we extend our hand to the people in the forgotten corners of this world who yearn for lives marked by dignity and opportunity; by security and justice? Will we lift the child in Bangladesh from poverty, shelter the refugee in Chad, and banish the scourge of Aids in our time?

Words like “struggle” and “progress” abound in this address and many others, reminiscent of the vocabulary of Lincoln’s friend Frederick Douglass, who is another hero for Obama and who in his constant fight against slavery had declared on August 3, 1857, at Canandaigua, New York: “If there is no struggle, there is no progress. [...] This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will” (Mieder 2001: 28-29; and 2005a). Obama chose not to cite the golden rule in this particular speech, but one senses its philosophical presence throughout as he argues for an interrelated world grounded in civil and human rights.

When Barack Obama presented his much anticipated inaugural address on January 20, 2009, he was quite naturally primarily addressing the American people, but when he alluded to the famous line long turned proverb “All men are created equal” from the “Declaration

of Independence” (1776), he assuredly had the citizens of the world in mind as well: “The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.” This becomes clearer when he does in fact turn to the world at large in his speech that transcends purely American concerns, for “as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.” Having said this, Obama extends his proverbial hand to the Muslim world in a paragraph that was quoted repeatedly in the media afterwards:

To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society’s ills on the West: Know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you can destroy. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.

Clearly looking to couch some of his arguments into memorable and quotable statements, as all presidents have tried to do in their respective inaugural addresses (see Mieder 2005c: 147-186), a case can be made that “people will judge you on what you can build, not what you can destroy” might well have the expressive and linguistic character that it takes to enter dictionaries of quotations (Harnsberger 1964; Jay 1996, Bartlett 2002; Shapiro 2006). The same might well be true for the second memorable sentence in this short paragraph: “We will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench

your first.” As can be seen. Obama built it around his favorite proverbial phrase “to extend a hand to someone”, indicating that he is looking for cooperation and communication with people everywhere. He summarizes this commitment to an interrelated and global state of affairs by one more quotable utterance: “The world has changed, and we must change with it” (see Mieder 2009a).

Having made his views as possible peace maker and humble servant of humankind known at this inaugural event that was broadcast to every corner of the world, Obama got to work and soon had to realize that his refreshing idealism and courageous hope for a better world would face considerable obstacles at home and abroad. But the youthful and energetic president appears to be unshakable in his vision of carving out a better America and an improved world order. He certainly never tires of repeating his call for steady improvement, ever mindful that progress will only take place by way of struggle. He took the opportunity to repeat this fundamental belief when he traveled to Ankara, Turkey, where he was given the honor to address the Turkish Parliament on April 6, 2009. His hosts obviously were pleased when he said: “Turkey’s democracy is your own achievement. It was not forced upon you by any outside power, nor did it come without struggle and sacrifice. Turkey draws strength from both the successes of the past, and from the efforts of each generation of Turks that makes new progress for your people.” Then, stressing cooperation between Turkey and the United States, he returned to his “lending a hand” proverbial metaphor to underscore the good will among the industrialized nations: “Already, America and Turkey are working with the G20 on an unprecedented response to an unprecedented economic crisis. Now, this past week, we came together to ensure that the world’s largest economies take strong

and coordinated action to stimulate growth and restore the flow of credit; to reject the pressures of protectionism, and to extend a hand to developing countries and the people hit hardest by this downturn; and to dramatically reform our regulatory system so that the world never faces a crisis like this again.” This proverbial leitmotif appears two more times in this important first speech on foreign ground by the new American president. Praising Turkey for its diplomatic role in the Near Eastern conflict, he argues that “We must extend a hand to those Palestinians who are in need, while helping to strengthen their own institutions. We must reject the use of terror, and recognize that Israel’s security concerns are legitimate.” And then, towards the end of his major foreign policy address, he once again used the same proverbial phrase to tell the Turkish Parliament that “Our focus will be on what we can do, in partnership with people across the Muslim world, to advance our common hopes and our common dreams. And when people look back on this time, let it be said that of America that we extended the hand of friendship to all people.”

Following this statement at the end of his speech, Obama with a rhetorical stroke of genius quoted a Turkish proverb in English translation that definitely touched a folkloric nerve in his audience that had listened with obvious delight to the words of the new president who had chosen Turkey for his foreign debut as president:

There’s an old Turkish proverb: “You cannot put out fire with flames.” America knows this. Turkey knows this. There’s some who must be met by force, they will not compromise. But force alone cannot solve our problems, and it is no alternative to extremism. The future must belong to those who create, not those who destroy. That is the future we must work for, and we must work for it together.

It is not clear where President Obama, most likely with the help of his young speech writer Jon Favreau, found this proverb, but I assume the Turkish original is “Ates atesle söndürülmez” which usually is rendered into English as “Fire cannot be extinguished with fire”, with a possible English equivalent being “Revenge is a dish that should be eaten cold” (Yurtbasi 1993: 313). In any case, while Obama states that at times force might be necessary to solve a particular conflict (in his Nobel Prize speech discussed below he speaks of a “just war”), he wants to emphasize with this proverbial wisdom from Turkey that it is best to deal with the problems of the world by negotiation and bridge-building rather than armed conflict. As he had observed in his inaugural address in a pseudo-proverbial way, “People will judge you on what you can build, not what you can destroy”, he now states quite similarly “The future must belong to those who create, not those who destroy.” From a paremiologist point of view I might comment here that Obama might want to zero in on the most quotable form of this observation and then stick to it. With his exposure to the mass media of the world, he might just get his utterance into quotation dictionaries and ultimately perhaps even into proverb dictionaries.

Two months later President Obama undertook his second trip abroad, this time to Egypt, Germany, and France. It was on June 4, 2009, at Cairo University, where he gave his major address reaching out to the Muslim world as no modern American president had done before. Arguing for a better understanding among people of different religions, he cited proverbial wisdom from the Koran, with the audience applauding his willingness to quote from this holy book:

There must be sustained effort to listen to each other; to learn from each other; to respect one another; and to seek common ground. As the Holy Koran tells us, “Be conscious of God and speak always the truth.” (Applause.) That is

what I will try to do today – to speak the truth as best I can, humbled by the task before us, and firm in my belief that the interests we share as human beings are far more powerful than the forces that drive us apart.

The Holy Koran teaches that whoever kills an innocent is as – it is as if he has killed all mankind (Applause.) And the Holy Koran also says whoever saves a person, it is as if he has saved all mankind. (Applause.) The enduring faith of over a billion people is so much bigger than the narrow hatred of a few. Islam is not part of the problem in combating violent extremism – it is an important part of promoting peace.

Throughout the speech Obama stressed “our common humanity”, claiming the “simple truth: that violence is a dead end.” I have not been able to establish the proverbiality of this statement, but certainly the idea that “Violence is a dead end” could well advance from the status of a pseudo-proverb to an actual proverb.

During this speech Obama argued forcefully “against negative stereotypes of Islam”, but he was quick to point out that eradicating the world of stereotypes must involve people everywhere, who, after all, were all created equal, as Obama never tires to point out proverbially:

Just as Muslims do not fit a crude stereotype, America is not the crude stereotype of a self-interested empire. The United States has been one of the greatest sources of progress that the world has ever known. We were born out of revolution against an empire. We were founded upon the ideal that all are created equal, and we have shed blood and struggled for centuries to give meaning to those words – within our borders, and around the world. We are shaped by every culture, drawn from every end of the Earth, and dedicated to a simple concept: *E pluribus unum* – “Out of many, one”.

The old classical proverb “*E pluri-*

bus unum” which is part of the American seal embodies Obama’s vision of a world in which people emphasize their similarities rather than stress their differences (Fields 1996: 1-25; Aron 2008: 23-25). And this view includes a democratic form of government, of course, as Obama stresses by citing part of the proverbial triad of a “government of the people, by the people, for the people” that was popularized as the shortest definition of democracy by way of Abraham Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address” of November 19, 1863, when he had said at the end of his oration: “[...] that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth” (Mieder 2005b: 29). But here is what Obama said about democracy at Cairo:

There are some who advocate for democracy only when they’re out of power; once in power, they are ruthless in suppressing the rights of others. (Applause.) So no matter where it takes hold, government of the people and by the people sets a single standard for all who would hold power: You must maintain your power through consent, not coercion; you must respect the rights of minorities, and participate with a spirit of tolerance and compromise; you must place the interests of your people and the legitimate workings of the political process above your party. Without these ingredients, elections alone do not make a true democracy.

It is not clear why Obama does not cite the third element “for the people” of this proverbial definition, but what he does say surely refers to the fact that the government is there for the people whom it serves! And then, very close to the end of this moving and inspiring speech to thousands of Arabic students, he asked them “to reimagine the world, to remake this world.” Little wonder that there were repeated applause and calls of the

type “Barack Obama, we love you!” during the speech. The climax of the speech was reached when the President called for a new world of brother- and sisterhood informed by empathy and mutual respect, with the center of his powerful statement being occupied by the proverbial golden rule once again:

All of us share this world for but a brief moment in time. The question is whether we spend that time focused on what pushes us apart, or whether we commit ourselves to an effort – a sustained effort – to find common ground, to focus on the future we seek for our children, and to respect the dignity of all human beings.

It’s easier to start wars than to end them. It’s easier to blame others than to look inward. It’s easier to see what is different about someone than to find the things we share. But we should choose the right path, not just the easy path. There’s one rule that lies at the heart of every religion – that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. (Applause.) This truth transcends nations and peoples – a belief that isn’t new; that isn’t black or white or brown; that isn’t Christian or Muslim or Jew. It’s a belief that pulsed in the cradle of civilization, and that still beats in the hearts of billions around the world. It’s a faith in other people, and it’s what brought me here today.

That is rational and emotional rhetoric, coming both from the mind and the heart, as it calls for a new world based on ethical values that bind humankind together. One certainly can hear echoes of Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, and Martin Luther King in this deeply moral worldview.

Of course, as one would expect, Barack Obama conjured up the spirit of non-violence espoused by Martin Luther King when he recently followed in the footsteps of this great preacher and civil rights champion who had received

the Nobel Peace Prize before him in 1964 for his valiant efforts. Who would have thought that forty-five years later an African-American president of the United States would travel to Oslo, Norway, to receive the same coveted prize on December 10, 2009? The acceptance speech was no easy task for Barack Obama, as he is trying to wind down the war in Iraq while escalating the war in Afghanistan. As he received the prize for peace, he waged war, a “just war”, as he tried to explain. There were plenty of critics, not just about some parts of this well-crafted speech, but also because of a general feeling – shared by Obama himself – that he was being honored too early. But the prize committee wanted to recognize him for his sincere attempt of changing the status quo of the world order, for his vision of creating a better world, and for his sincere conviction that humankind can find peace on this earth. In his acceptance speech he emphasized the fact that in a world that constantly grows smaller people should realize that they are actually quite similar and basically want the same things out of life. And yet, at times they appear to be moving backwards into religious and sectarian confrontation. This unfortunate situation is visible especially in the misguided use and interpretation of religion, even though they all preach the golden rule, as Obama once again points out with this basic law of life:

Most dangerously, we see it [the political and social disintegration] in the way that religion is used to justify the murder of innocents by those who have distorted and defiled the great religion of Islam, and who attacked my country from Afghanistan. These extremists are not the first to kill in the name of God; the cruelties of the Crusades are amply recoded. But they remind us that no Holy War can ever be a just war. For if you truly believe that you are carrying out divine will, then there is no need for

restraint – no need to spare the pregnant mother, or the medic, or even a person of one’s own faith. Such a warped view of religion is not just incompatible with the concept of peace, but the purpose of faith – for the one rule that lies at the heart of every major religion is that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

Adhering to this law of love has always been the core struggle of human nature. We are fallible. We make mistakes, and fall victim to the temptation of pride, power, and sometimes evil. Even those of us with the best intentions will at times fail to right the wrongs before us.

But we do not have to think human nature is perfect for us to still believe that the human condition can be perfected. We do not have to live in an idealized world to still reach for those ideals that will make it a better place.

The “moral compass”, as Barack Obama sees it, that can guide us in improving our problematic world riddled by war, disease, poverty, and many other ills, is the very basic law of life that is known as the golden rule. And, as a modern politician and concerned citizen of the world, Barack Obama has the audacity of hope for people everywhere as globalization draws humanity ever closer together. He wants to strive for peace and for the eradication of war, deprivation and disease, and if his guiding principle will remain the proverb “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” he will continue to have his chance to follow in the footsteps of his heroes Lincoln, Douglass, and King (in the Nobel Peace Prize speech he also mentions Albert Schweitzer, Woodrow Wilson, Mahatma Gandhi, George Marshall, and Nelson Mandela), who tried their level best to improve the human condition. His proverbial rhetoric will doubtlessly continue to serve him well in his valiant struggle for progress on all possible fronts.

REFERENCES

- Aron, Paul. 2008. *We Hold These Truths ... And Other Words that Made America*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bartlett, John. 2002. *Familiar Quotations*. Ed. Justin Kaplan. 17th ed. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Burrell, Brian. 1997. *The Words We Live By. The Creeds, Mottoes, and Pledges that Have Shaped America*. New York: The Free Press.
- Campbell, Karlyn K., and Kathleen H. Jamieson. 2008. *Presidents Creating the Presidency: Deeds Done in Words*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Champion, Selwyn Gurney. 1945. *The Eleven Religions and Their Proverbial Lore*. New York: E.P. Dutton.
- Denton, Robert E., and Gary C. Woodward. 1998. *Political Communication in America*. 3rd ed. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.
- Fields, Wayne. 1996. *Union of Words. A History of Presidential Eloquence*. New York: The Free Press.
- Griffin, Albert Kirby. 1991. *Religious Proverbs. Over 1600 Adages from 18 Faiths Worldwide*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland.
- Harnsberger, Thomas. 1964. *Treasury of Presidential Quotations*. Chicago: Follett.
- Hertzler, Joyce. 1933-1934. "On Golden Rules." *International Journal of Ethics* 44: 418-436.
- Jay, Antony. 1996. *The Oxford Dictionary of Political Quotations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lim, Elvin T. 2008. *The Anti-Intellectual Presidency: The Decline of Presidential Rhetoric from George Washington to George W. Bush*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Louis, Cameron. 2000. "Proverbs and the Politics of Language." *Proverbium* 17: 173-194. Also in *Cognition, Comprehension, and Communication. A Decade of North American Proverb Studies (1990-2000)*. Ed. Wolfgang Mieder. Baltmannsweiler: Schneider Verlag Hohengehren, 2003. 271-292.
- Mieder, Wolfgang. "Paremiological Minimum and Cultural Literacy." *Creativity and Tradition in Folklore: New Directions*. Ed. Simon J. Bronner. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1992. 185-203. Also in W. Mieder. *Proverbs Are Never Out of Season. Popular Wisdom in the Modern Age*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. 41-57, 1992.
- Mieder, Wolfgang. "A House Divided": *From Biblical Proverb to Lincoln and Beyond*. Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 1998.
- Mieder, Wolfgang. *The Proverbial Abraham Lincoln. An Index to Proverbs in the Works of Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Peter Lang, 2000.
- Mieder, Wolfgang. "No Struggle, No Progress": *Frederick Douglass and His Proverbial Rhetoric for Civil Rights*. New York: Peter Lang, 2001.
- Mieder, Wolfgang. "Do Unto Others as You Would Have them Do Unto You: Frederick Douglass's Proverbial Struggle for Civil Rights." In W. Mieder. *Proverbs Are the Best Policy. Folk Wisdom and American Politics*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press. 118-146, 2005a.
- Mieder, Wolfgang. "Government of the People, by the People, for the People: The Making and Meaning of an American Proverb about Democracy." In W. Mieder. *Proverbs Are the Best Policy. Folk Wisdom and American Politics*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press. 15-55, 2005b.
- Mieder, Wolfgang. "It's Not a President's Business to Catch Flies: Proverbial Rhetoric in Presidential Inaugural Addresses." In W. Mieder. *Proverbs Are the Best Policy. Folk Wisdom and American Politics*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press. 147-186, 2005c.
- Mieder, Wolfgang. "We Must Pick Ourselves Up, Dust Ourselves Off: President Barack Obama's Proverbial Inaugural Address." *Paremia* 18: 31-42, 2009a.
- Mieder, Wolfgang. "Yes We Can": *Barack Obama's Proverbial Rhetoric*. New York: Peter Lang, 2009b.
- Mieder, Wolfgang, and George B. Bryan. *The Proverbial Harry S. Truman. An Index to Proverbs in the Works of Harry S. Truman*. New York: Peter Lang, 1997.
- Nichols, Ray. "Maxims, 'Practical Wisdom,' and the Language of Action." *Political Theory* 24: 687-705, 1996.
- Obama, Barack. *Dreams from My Father. A Story of Race and Inheritance*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995.
- Obama, Barack. 2002-2009. *Speeches* [<http://www.obamaspeeches.com/>].
- Obama, Barack. *The Audacity of Hope. Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006.
- Shapiro, Fred. *The Yale Book of Quotations*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Templeton, John Mark. *Worldwide Laws of Life*. Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 1997.
- Yurtbasi, Metin. *A Dictionary of Turkish Proverbs*. Ankara: Turkish Daily News, 1993.