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# Biblically Speaking: A Day of Politics at Cedarville University

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# Biblically SPEAKING

A Day of Politics at Cedarville University

by Mark Caleb Smith

# September 17, 2015

## 9:00 a.m.

The lights were searing. The chairs were stiff and uncomfortable because their cushions had long ago collapsed. The lapel microphone, like the person wearing it, never felt stable. I kept thinking, “I wonder how this sport coat looks on camera? Hideous? Do I have anything stuck in my teeth?” Some people are born for this. And then there are people like me who find the camera unnerving. But I remembered why I was there: to represent Christ and Cedarville University.

The topic of the day was a proposed Ohio constitutional amendment that would legalize marijuana. I was wedged between a “pro” and a “con” and seated across from two veteran reporters. I was expected to be the unbiased, detached, rational one. For a medium that prefers fireworks and bravado, I long ago learned that rationality doesn’t always make the splash the cameras demand. Reason requires calculation and patience. As the “expert,” I was supposed to provide not just my opinion, but truth and perspective. It is a delicate line to tread.

I also have to keep in mind, to the best of my ability, that I am representing Jesus Christ whenever I speak about marijuana, campaigns and elections, same-sex marriage, or budget deficits. I try, with God’s help, to display the Fruits of the Spirit — peace, patience, kindness, self-control — whether on camera or in print. That’s not always so simple with political issues, which are naturally emotional and divisive.

*WHIO Reports*, the show I was a guest on, lasts a half-hour, but it felt twice that long, mostly because of the tension on set. My favorite part was when Mr. Pro and Mr. Con argued across me while I sat quietly for a minute or two. I was fine with that. After the taping concluded, I chatted briefly with a couple of the reporters and a producer, but I had to get back to campus because my day was actually just beginning. And it wasn’t going to be a normal day at the office for me.

## 3:30 p.m.

I was, once again, uncomfortable, but this time the sunshine was the culprit as opposed to studio incandescent lights. We had reached the bottom of the hour and I had a hall full of students and faculty anxiously awaiting our guest of honor, who was now fashionably delayed. The schedule was pretty relaxed, but there were deadlines built in, and this was one of them. Rob Vaughn, a criminal justice professor at Cedarville, waited outside the building, and we joked about what we might have to do if our guest just decided not to come. “You know any jokes?” I asked.

Momentarily, our guest and his assistant arrived. I had never met Charles Krauthammer, the Fox News analyst, syndicated columnist, and best-selling author, but I was not necessarily worried. After all, we’d had Karl Rove, Mike Huckabee, Michael Gerson, and others on campus, all part of the Center for Political Studies effort to engage the political landscape with a biblical perspective. This event was no different than the others, but I was prepared for the worst. Dr. Krauthammer is not a politician, which means he is not interested in your vote or your money. To put it a little differently, he is not obligated to be “nice.” He is imperious, at least on television, and he does not suffer fools. His dark glasses matched his black

ensemble, and I hoped his wardrobe belied his demeanor. I looked at Rob, who had agreed to accompany Dr. Krauthammer for the day, and shrugged my shoulders as we headed toward the lecture hall. It turned out we had nothing to worry about.

Dr. Krauthammer captivated the audience. His Q-and-A session was aimed mostly at students and faculty from the history and government and communication departments. He was patient and wickedly funny. Most importantly, he gave students some insight into his life as a psychiatrist, a journalist, and a political pundit. Afterward, he did a quick interview with a reporter from *Cedars*, our student newspaper. Dr. Krauthammer told me he was always willing to take time out for students, and it showed. From there, we got him to the green room, where he rested and ate. I, meanwhile, ran around crazily to make sure a thousand tiny details were finalized.

## 5:30 p.m.

I retrieved Dr. Krauthammer for the reception. As we made our way toward the room, he was greeted by dozens of well-wishers. When we finally broached the entrance, Dr. Krauthammer was met by anticipation and then applause. I asked Thomas White, Cedarville’s President, to say a word of prayer, and he obliged. The next hour was a blur as Dr. Krauthammer took the time to meet and take a photograph with our 100 special guests. Some of the faces were familiar, but many were not. I met folks from Dayton, Columbus, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, and Kansas City. They were politicians, pastors, and professors, and I choked down some punch. Time for more details.

I headed toward the chapel, the heart of our University, and saw Christian Townsend ’17, who had volunteered to be an usher for the event. He was checking wristbands to make sure everyone coming through his entrance was a registered guest. Christian is a political science student and one of my advisees. He also works for me as a “Center Scholar,” doing around 10 hours of research every week. He hopes to go to law school, become a prosecuting attorney, and get involved in politics. “What are you, Secret Service?”

He smiled in reply. “Things are going fine, Dr. Smith. This is a pretty easy crowd.” His use of the word “crowd” was a bit of an understatement.

## 7:00 p.m.

I had invited Dr. Krauthammer to campus primarily to help us celebrate Constitution Day. The chapel hummed. Nearly 3,000 people were present, and it was a diverse group of students, faculty, staff, and hundreds of guests from the surrounding area. Cedarville University was the place to be. The lights dimmed and hundreds of conversations quieted, as the Concert Chorale filed onto the stage. Under the direction of Lyle Anderson ’70, the formally clad men and women energized the room with powerhouse renditions of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* and *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

I joined the standing ovation and then headed to the stage, where I introduced our illustrious guest. As soon as I said the words “Dr. Charles Krauthammer,” the audience exploded, and not for the last time.

Dr. Krauthammer was exceptional. Though he was comical, and entertaining, his overview of the current presidential





campaign was penetrating and relevant. No fan of Donald Trump's, Dr. Krauthammer described the billionaire as a demagogue not worthy of the presidency. He lamented the Iran Nuclear Deal. In short, we spent an hour peering into his mind, and whether we agreed or disagreed with him, we learned and we were better for it.


As I got ready to dismiss the audience, I looked over my notes and remembered I had one last announcement to make. Dr. Ben Carson, Republican presidential candidate, was coming to campus for a campaign rally the following week. The crowd hooted in anticipation.

I drove home and reflected on the day. Perhaps God will use Cedarville University to shed His grace on the political world,

which is in desperate need of it. Perhaps our students, trained in a biblical worldview and ready to be salt and light, will preserve and illuminate our culture. But however God chooses to use our labors, we will still labor in His vineyard, because that is our calling.

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