

Real Challenges: Faith in the Public Arena

Thank you so much. It is always a joy to be in Grand Rapids, and doubly so to be here to give the Seventh Annual Henry Lecture at Calvin College. To paraphrase the great Senator from Massachusetts, Daniel Webster: “It is sir, as I have said, a small college, and yet there are those who love it.”

I was born and raised in Fort Wayne Indiana, which is just a few hours south of here, so I feel very close to home. To be in the presence of so many fellow Midwesterners adds to that feeling.

And what distinguished Midwesterners you are. President Gaylen

Byker, State Senator Bill Hardiman, Annette Kirk, Dick and Betsy

DeVos, and Elsa Price. Thank you all for being here.

I would like to take a moment to recognize the outstanding work that the Henry Institute has done, and continues to do for the study of the relationship of Christianity and politics. It is indeed a fitting tribute to a great man, an educator, a servant to his community, to his country and to the Lord.

It is also a true honor to be in this company and in the tradition of those who have delivered this address in the past. Someone I used to work for gave the third lecture in this series: former Senator and now Ambassador to Germany, Dan Coats. Like the man for whom this lecture series is named, Ambassador Coats happens to be a graduate of

Wheaton College. Which like Calvin is one of the great Christian liberal arts colleges in America

It has been my great good fortune to work for Dan Coats and George W. Bush. Two men, who, like Paul Henry are both public men and men of God. As with all great teachers, I have learned to love what they love.

In momentous times our leaders have turned to the Almighty. From George Washington praying in the snow at Valley Forge, to Abraham Lincoln leaving the fate of the Civil War and the Union in the hands of God. In the twentieth century Franklin Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan both knew that God would not be impartial through wars against empires built on the godless religions of fascism and communism. George W. Bush realizes that the War on Terrorism is as great a challenge as these other struggles.

It has not only been our Presidents who have had this faith, but public servants from all walks of life. David Bloom was a 39-year-old journalist who died before his time while covering the war for NBC in Iraq. I got to know David at the White House. As we all know, he was a widely respected journalist, but that was not how he wished to be remembered. In his last email he sent to his wife from Iraq, he stated “When the moment comes in my life when you are talking about my last days, I am determined that you and others will say ‘he was devoted to his wife and children, he was admired, he gave every ounce of his being for those whom he cared most about-not himself, but God and his family.” That my friends, is the perfect evocation of the faith in a public life.

And today, whether you live in Grand Rapids Michigan or Washington, DC, it goes without saying that we too are in momentous

times. No doubt these are choppy seas, and in order to navigate them one needs a compass. Not a compass to point you between east and west, north and south. Rather a moral compass that can direct you through humility and shame, ego and honor, and ultimately to truth.

The compass can point you in two very distinct directions. One, to have faith in the future because of your faith in God. The other is to have faith in the future for the sake of progress and let things turn out as they will. G.K. Chesterton was wary of progress. He once stated, “Progress should mean that we are always changing the world to fit our vision. Instead we are always changing the vision.”

There can be no doubt that this is a challenge. How does a person of faith maintain his or her conviction in the marketplace of ideas without compromising these beliefs? There is always an ideal before us,

even if there are times when it cannot be attained. To me the ideal is that of the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude combined with Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity; the need to conform our lives to that of Christ. St. Augustine said “You have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

For me, these are the pillars of what it means to have faith and are a very large part of my daily life. And indeed it is a struggle. Whoever is exalted with pride, whoever is tortured by longings of envy, whoever is relaxed with pleasures of lust, whoever is kindled by burnings of unjust anger, what kind of servant of God is he really?

It is so important to stay grounded and always realize that we are working towards a greater goal: a goal much bigger than any individual’s personal pride. In President Bush’s acceptance speech at

the 2000 Republican Convention, he recalled an incident, which he found moving. He had met a 15-year-old inmate in a juvenile prison. President Bush was startled when the young prisoner looked him in the eye and asked, “What do you think of me?” It was obviously a jarring question. And, it prompted a great deal of soul searching. As the President recalled the story during his address, he stated “His question sprang from the deep doubt of someone who wondered whether there was any hope for him in society...Am I worth anything?” George W. Bush’s answer: “We’re all equal in God’s eyes.” This is a heady remedy to ego. Christian conscience has no social status. There is nothing more indispensable than humility. “Angels fly because they take themselves lightly.”

At work I am Tim Goeglein, “Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of Public Liaison.” Proving that in Washington

the longer the title the lesser the influence. Indeed, this title is secondary to the one I wear at home: Tim Goeglein, “husband, father and follower of Christ.” The secret to maintaining that precious balance of service and love to wife, children, and Lord can be found within that title. All the rest is subservient.

To fulfill these responsibilities, to stay grounded, one must learn daily our Lord’s living example of sacrificial giving, self-negation and generosity of spirit.

There is a great example of this in the life of one of our greatest national leaders. President Ronald Reagan survived death from an assassin’s bullet by literally inches in March of 1981. Everyone knows the quip he lifted from Joe Louis saying, “Honey, I forgot to Duck!” However, he had another, lesser-known but deeper revelation:

“Whatever happens now I owe my life to God and will try to serve him every way I can.”

It is false to think that we can separate thought from action, and reason from emotion. A good education, such as the kind one receives at Calvin College, plays a central role in one’s spiritual and emotional grounding. A great education provides the foundation for a life of faith in the public arena. An education, both of the head and the heart, builds the foundation for the good and examined life. This is the true agent for preparation for life. For real, meaningful success in public service, this is indispensable. The character that such an education will build is essential to public life. It is, I would argue, more essential even than an one’s intellect. Virtue must come before academic achievement; personal integrity before grades. A collection of degrees on one’s wall does not designate a great leader. Recall that an individual lacking any

formal education, but possessing humanity's greatest virtues and guided by faith navigated this nation through a bloody Civil War. In May of 1861, as Abraham Lincoln was leaving Springfield, Illinois for Washington, he faced a greater task than his 15 predecessors had faced. As he departed, he told his friends and neighbors who had gathered to say goodbye: "Without the assistance of the divine being...I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail."

As a Christian, public life can offer numerous challenges and pitfalls. I have already discussed the interplay between faith and the public arena. But what of the interplay between faith and the private arena? How does one maintain balance, stability, and happiness in his private life given the strenuous demands of the public arena? How does

one maintain the right Christian temperament not just in the public sphere but also in the domestic?

At the White House, as in any profession, there can be plenty of rough days where things don't always go exactly as planned and the pace is hectic. The average day can look something like this: briefings for 150 people, 100 of whom are still waiting on Pennsylvania Avenue to enter the building 10 minutes before briefing time, while a member of the President's cabinet cools his heels inside. Not to mention 47 phone calls, 200 emails, and on top of that a cancelled Oval Office meeting. And some day things get even more exciting!

During the drive across the placid Potomac from my office in Washington to my house in Alexandria, my great hope is to get home, catch my breath, and do a little decompressing.

Yet, as in the White House, things don't always go as planned or imagined. Sometimes when I stroll through the front door and my energetic seven-year old is dressed like Davy Crockett and my bouncy four-year old like Jim Bowie, that breath may not be so easy to catch. They don't care how my day went. They are not interested in what feedback I received from the President. They are less interested in a retelling of today's Rose Garden event, than they are in the battle for the Alamo; but what they really care about is me being Daddy. If you think the pressures of faith in public life are big, wait till you are recreating the battle for the Alamo after a 14-hour workday. Contrary to conventional wisdom, maintaining your sense of Christian witness in the privacy of your own home can be more difficult than piety in public life. I mean not to be trite on this point: maintaining your faith in private life where the cameras are not clicking and VIPs are not

watching, is more difficult than maintaining it in front of the watching world.

The witness of faith must not just be to one's colleagues, but also to one's family, friends and neighbors. All the virtues that are so indispensable to the person of faith in the public arena, or as my case happens to be, the political world are equally as essential to success in life away from work. The ever-present goals of modesty, patience, and serving a much greater goal are all keys to domestic happiness. The hours away from home can, and often do, pile up. There can be an inevitable string of missed t-ball games, late arrivals for parent teacher meetings and dinners left cold on the table. Of course it is easy to say these are simple sacrifices for the sake of something bigger. In order to manage a life dedicated to serving the public with a life lived for one's family and faith you must multi-task with a vengeance. William F.

Buckley tells a story of his days of school at St. John's in England. Each student was asked to demonstrate in some way an appreciation of God.

One played Rachmaninoff. Another enacted a Shakespearean scene, yet another read poetry and so on and so forth. Finally it was the last boy's turn. He stood in front of the class and proceeded to juggle much to his fellow student's derision. In fact the boy was roundly laughed at and generally thought to be the least talented in the class.

But experience has taught me that keeping Christian perspective often means trying to keep all the pins in the air at once. At some point we are all that boy at the altar juggling before God. Juggling family and work, while striving to maintain those cardinal and Christian virtues is the greatest single challenge in my life. Any Christian, who has a public role, will tell you the same thing. In my case, if I were not routinely carried in the arms of my savior, I would fail every time. Again I defer

to G. K. Chesterton “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and untried.”

It is a great honor to work for President Bush. As he has said, “this is our mission and our moment”, and there is no other place I would be right now.

I never dreamed I would walk in the footsteps of so many of our country’s great leaders. In the buildings where I work there are so many vital decisions made that impact millions of people worldwide.

Daily I walk from the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, through the West Wing and into the White House itself. It is a tremendous honor. Everything I have learned in life as an American and as a follower of Christ, all the qualities I will always carry with me, whether it be in Washington DC or Fort Wayne, Indiana or points in between or

beyond, go with me to work everyday. And at the end of the long days, when I head for home, those qualities are also with me. Yet it is an even greater honor and even more sublime feeling to walk through my own door, to the love my wife, my children, and service to my Lord. What I have come to find is that the secret to happiness is not wealth or the conquest of nature or freedom from pain or self-esteem or justice or peace “no matter how broadly defined”, or sex or victory or honor or even long life. No, I have found the secret of happiness is the living of one’s life in Christ. Not an abstract construct of God, but to be in Jesus’ real presence.

Skve by Samuel Johnson

The deepest seas embrace the Isle of Skve
And give it height and place and form.
Who sees its cliff walls blown with storm,
And hears its rock-shown shores resound
With squalls, knows all that pleases ear and eye;
He sees the cloud-white sky above each bay
And cove, and loves what he has found

And I believe with all my mortal heart

**That insofar as any man
Can cure his soul, on Skye he can.
For rage is banned from all its sites,
And grief's been made an exile kept apart
From this small isle. Peace practices its art
Where quiet respite fears no spite.**

**I know that this is so, and yet...I know
As well that hiding in the caves
Of Skye, or counting starving waves
From crags that carve the sky like prows,
Or climbing hills where nothing ever grows,
And lonely humankind will never go,
Is not enough. I know that now,**

**And tell you this: that man cannot provide
Himself. He cannot make his own
Heart's peace from everything he owns
Inside it. Even in a place
Like Skye, his power has no force; his pride
Will not suffice. The school of Stoics lied
To teach he was his own true grace.**

**No, God the King—our greatest king—commands
In everything that stirs the heart
Of man with storm. No human art
Alone can rule those seas; the will
Of God shall have them surge when He demands.
And as He calms them by His loving hand,
The tempest of the soul lies still.**