

After the Republican Debate: Why This Isn't Politics as Usual

It was interesting to attend the Republican presidential debate in Orlando, Fla., last night as a member of the media. *Charisma* doesn't usually cover debates like this, and I wouldn't have attended had it not been in my hometown. It was broadcast live on Fox News and, truth be told, I could've seen it better on TV at home.

Even though I took notes on what the candidates said, I knew my readers either watched the debate or could read more extensive articles elsewhere. The question I had to ask was: "Where is God in all this? How does this affect the Spirit-filled community? And how do I cover it in *Charisma*?"

The most interesting experience for me was after the debate when Doug Wead, who is a "senior adviser" with candidate Ron Paul, approached me in the "spin room" as hundreds of media people milled around interviewing whoever they could find. I've known Doug since I was a teenager. He's been a political gadfly for years, serving in various campaigns and once working in the White House for George H.W. Bush as a liaison to the evangelical community. In that role Doug arranged a couple of appointments for me with President Bush. He also worked closely with the president's son and had some sort of falling out that resulted in his being persona non grata later when George W. Bush became president.

Now Doug has resurfaced in the political world working for Ron Paul, even though historically he has not been a libertarian. This is after an unsuccessful campaign for Congress, a stint in Amway, writing books and who knows what else.

Like me, Doug has a Pentecostal background, and over the years

he has told me many conspiracy theories about all the behind-the-scenes things in politics where Pentecostals are marginalized or persecuted—if not by the liberals, then by the non-charismatic evangelicals. I find his theories interesting because some of what he says is probably right—I just never know which part.

First, he told me about all the born-again Christians who now work for Paul, as if that would make it easier for me to support Paul (which I don't). He said they like Paul's libertarian stance of keeping the government out of people's lives, even though that means things like giving Muslims the right to build a mosque at Ground Zero. That's because if the government can keep Muslims from building a mosque, the government can prevent Christians from building churches.

He also speculated about how the conservative Christian power brokers are jockeying this political season to "have a seat at the table." I listened as Doug theorized that some of these evangelicals are so anti-Pentecostal that they'll refuse to back a candidate like Michele Bachmann just because she graduated from Oral Roberts University. He said they like having "their own candidate" so they recruited Rick Perry, a former Methodist turned Southern Baptist, to run for president.

I don't necessarily agree with Doug's assessment. But my own involvement in former Gov. Mike Huckabee's campaign in 2008 let me see some of these dynamics at work. I'm glad Christians are getting involved. For years Pentecostals were passive and quiet when it came to politics. But with the direction our country is going, it's not just a political issue any more. There is a moral issue of getting leaders into office who share our values and legislate and lead accordingly.

Thankfully, good people are running for office. I believe George W. Bush was a sincere evangelical, as we documented in a book we published in 2003 called *The Faith of George W.*

Bush. (Wead tried to make me think last night that Bush only pretended to be an evangelical.)

The reason I supported Huckabee was because of his character, his motivation to get this country on the right track and because he seemed to appreciate support from Christians rather than take it for granted, as many do. It wasn't until evangelicals supported him that he rose from being an asterisk in the polls to winning the important Iowa Caucus in 2008. Alas, he lost that early momentum to John McCain and as a result Barack Obama is in the White House today.

With Huckabee's decision not to run I'm in a quandary of who to support. I have my personal favorites, but that's not necessarily a reason to support someone—just because you like them.

Interestingly, the debate came about the same time we are finishing a *Charisma* cover story for November called "Pentecostals, Politics and a Crash Course That Could Change a Nation." John Stemberger, the attorney who led the campaign to put a marriage amendment in the Florida constitution, is writing it. He looks at many of these issues, including how politicians—especially the left—attack any candidate who has a Pentecostal connection, such as John Ashcroft, Sarah Palin or Michele Bachmann. It isn't your typical "political issue" and we don't endorse anyone. But I think you'll find it interesting.

There is a battle for the soul of this nation that goes deeper than just "politics." Since America stands for freedom around the world, what happens here has ramifications around the world. This isn't the place to discuss in depth the terrible condition of the nation nor how President Obama seems to be leading in the wrong direction. With him going down in the polls almost daily—even with his core constituencies—it's as if the country is waking up to this. But it's more than just replacing him with someone with a more conservative approach

to governing. There is a spiritual dynamic involved. Remember, “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers” (Ephesians 6:12).

The Bible tells us to pray for righteous leaders who we can live a peaceable life (See 1 Tim. 2:1-2). So my takeaway after being immersed in the political world for a few hours: *Pray!* For all intercessors, pray that God will give us leaders both in government, business and in other areas, who will get this nation on the right path.