

In Memory of Michael Cromartie –

Mike used to say that he wanted read at his funeral that account I had given of him in the preface to my book *Natural Rights & the Right to Choose*. I had written that book when I was in residence for a year at Ethics & Public Policy, in the old office on 15<sup>th</sup> Street. Mike was my dearest companion there, and I would join him occasionally on the radio program he did with Michael Novak. Mike was not only a buoying supporter of that work of mine on the book, but he was a source of instruction through the year, for *he read everything*. And I mean *everything*, whether on politics or theology or the “culture.” He had the most remarkable combination—he was joyous and filled with laughter, and yet no one doubted how deeply serious he was on the things that mattered. And never would he let himself get diverted by the laughing banter of the moment.

As I looked back on that thanks I offered in my book, I found that it was, if anything, understated. I had spoken the truth about Mike, in an unguarded way, and yet it was not nearly enough. And one curious thing is that the part we both remembered most clearly—and the part that Mike relished above all—was not actually in the book. I must have mentioned it so often that we both had begun to think it was there. In that passage he recalled, I had drawn on that world of basketball in which Mike had shown his arts while in college. I said that Mike had become “the point guard for the conservative movement in Washington.” And what I meant was that he had a remarkable gift for connecting people and keeping things moving. We used to laugh about Tom Stoppard’s “Reporter Doll”: you wind it up—and it gets it wrong! When it came to religion, and especially Evangelicals, it was an understatement to say that the reporters in the media kept getting it wrong. The world of religion and serious philosophic reflection was simply far beyond the education and wit of most of them. They didn’t have the faintest notion of the way in which serious Christians looked out at the world. That brute fact was enough to stir him into action. He would arrange conferences in the most appealing locales to draw the reporters into a serious conversation. His evident earnestness—and his competence to the task—helped draw the confidence and support of donors. They had the sense that this unpretentious man had the gift for drawing in the right people from the media and showing them that there were levels of reflection here running deep—levels of reflection quite new to them, offered by minds that had to be taken seriously.

What I had said of Mike in that preface to my book was that he had been this uncommon source of energy—and judgment—as he managed to

connect people and projects and find ways of “putting wind in the sails” of so many people. He had that rare combination of political experience, joined to the passion of an academic to read everything in the literature that bears on questions of consequence. “He weaves it all together,” I said, “with a religious sensibility, always affected by humor and playfulness, but always serious at the core.”

One of Mike’s favorite moments was an occasion in which he fell into a “pick up” basketball game with some African-American teenagers. As Mike began to fake and dribble around them, they were clearly caught off guard: They had never seen moves of this kind by a short white man. One older black man, watching the game with fascination, remarked to the kids, “Boys, he’s *schooling* you!” Mike recalled that line with relish, loving the sound of it. But then it occurred us, around the same time, that Mike has really been schooling us all.

But perhaps the surest sign of his appeal, in character and love, was that he attracted the enduring love of Jenny. This was a worldly woman, the daughter of missionaries, and she would not have been drawn to any figure with dash and no substance. They were the perfect partners and brought forth this beautiful family. Our prayers go out to Jenny and the children, and we can tell them that we’ll never stop missing Mike.

Hadley Arkes