

Peter Robinson:

Thank you, Your Excellency.

Lee Edwards. Lee was a founding member of the Young Americans for Freedom back in 1960, and he's remained a central figure in the conservative movement ever since. Working in the Goldwater Campaign advising President Reagan, serving as a fellow at the Heritage Foundation, and writing more than two dozen books, including *A Brief History of the Cold War* —which I recommend particularly to those who don't remember the Cold War (your nieces, nephews, children, grandchildren)— and his most recent volume, his memoir of his own life: *Just Right: A Life in Pursuit of Liberty*. If you'll indulge me on a personal note, when I lived in this town during the 1980s, Lee and I attended the same church.

Lee Edwards sang in the choir and in the choir, he stood next to a liberal journalist. A very liberal journalist. For that decade, I would look at Lee every Sunday. That's a decade of Sundays. That's almost 500 Sundays. Do you know that his face never betrayed any expression other than forgiveness?

A patriot, a loyal son of the church, a historian, and a figure important to history in his own right. Ladies and gentlemen, Lee Edwards.

Lee Edwards:

I'm almost tempted to start singing, but no. This relationship between Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II is really extraordinary. There are so many parallels and I'm going to draw upon the one writer, the one author who knows more about them than anybody else —who could not be here with us— and that is George Weigel. What I'm going to present to you (and I'm going to be very open about it), is sort of a digest of George's look at these two men. So, to begin: both were orphans. John Paul truly and Ronald Reagan in effect with his alcoholic father. Both men were of the theater, believing in the power of words. I learned just a few minutes ago that the Holy Father had written nine plays. Both took unconventional paths to positions of eminence that conventional wisdom said they would never hold.

You think about it: a Polish pope? Impossible. A Hollywood president? Impossible. Both were so called “positive anticommunists” in that freedom and human rights where they are contexts for criticism of communism. They both understood that this was a struggle, not of economic systems or political systems, but a moral struggle between good and evil. Neither practiced realpolitik as did old-school American anticommunists, liberals, and many senior Vatican diplomats. Both were unafraid, absolutely unafraid, to challenge conventional wisdom of their advisors. For Ronald Reagan, that was to stand for disarmament and to do away with nuclear weapons. Of course, for John Paul II, it was his open support for Solidarity. The bottom line for both: communism was to be defeated, not simply contained or managed. Of course, both shared the experience of near assassination.

A third actor in all of this during this period was Mikhail Gorbachev. Now, John Paul II acknowledged that Gorbachev was of a new generation who wanted to

save communism with "a human face," but that was impossible. That was impossible. The fundamental errors of communism, especially its misunderstanding of human nature, were not repairable by patchwork fixes of perestroika and glasnost. Communism would have to go and the human yearning for freedom would have to be realized. The division of Europe into competing hostile camps would be repaired — extraordinary that all of this happened — and it would not have happened without the alliance between these two men. Early on, Ronald Reagan was smitten with Poland, with Polish courage, and the Polish pope. It was recounted last night that Ronald Reagan in late '70s when John Paul II went to Poland and made that fabulous visit, that watching it on television (this is before he was president), Ronald Reagan was crying. Tears streaming down his face.

Ronald Reagan saw his work and what the pope said proceeding on parallel tracks toward the defeat of communism and the victory of freedom. Both men were not conservative the way that word is sometimes used with them, but they were radical. They were radical. They dismissed liberal shibboleths like stability, detente, and arms control. Instead, they sought change, liberation, and real disarmament. They were true architects of the end of the Cold War, while Mr. Gorbachev held firm to the possibility of reform communism, something that Ronald Reagan and His Holiness deemed impossible. You know, it simply did not occur to Gorbachev that he might be opening the way to the end of the communist era in Eastern Europe. He expected hard liners to be succeeded by mini Gorbachev's. He did not understand that the people — that the people of Eastern and central Europe — wanted an end to communism not as perpetuation.

In summary, John Paul II brought to the papacy, in George's words: "a unique and formidable combination of insight, experience, and courage. These qualities made him the pivotal figure in the defeat of European communism. Much the same thing can be said of Ronald Reagan." Now, drawing on my own words: it was courage, wisdom, and prudence that made him the central leader that ended the Cold War at the bargaining table, and not on the battlefield. Thank you all very much.