



“Hail to the Chief”

*An Editorial by Edward L. Wheeler, President
Interdenominational Theological Center*

The Office of the President of the United States of America is a coveted position. The fact that so many people seek the office masks the reality that once in the office the men who have served have aged under the weight of the indescribable responsibilities that are inherent in the position. Added to that is the unimaginable scrutiny that is part of the job. It is therefore understandable that when presidents leave office, they are careful in their selection of activities and especially in their proclamations about controversial issues such as their faith. That has not been and never was the case with the 39th President of the United States.

James Earl Carter, Jr. has not often been listed among America’s most effective presidents. The Iranian hostage situation, a Middle East crisis that caused long gas lines in America and other issues outside the control of any President helped diminish his presidential legacy. However, few would argue with the fact that he remains one of the most intellectually gifted men to serve as president nor are there many people who would contest the suggestion that throughout his term as president, James Earl Carter, Jr. exhibited a commitment to his Christian faith that is rare.

However, after failing to be elected for a second term, few presidents have ever been more effective in living out their faith than James Earl Carter, Jr. Whether speaking out about peace and justice at home and abroad; monitoring elections around the globe; breaking with the Southern Baptist Convention over some of its most conservative positions, including the role of women in the faith; or critiquing the government of Israel’s West Bank settlement policies, President Carter has deployed a consistency that is rooted and grounded in his faith perspective. That perspective calls for reconciliation over isolation, peace over war, understanding over ignorance, justice over injustice and inclusion over alienation. To be sure, not everyone will agree with his perspectives, but that should not cloud the fact that the motive behind his actions emerge out of a deep and abiding commitment to be a citizen of the world who is informed by his faith.

President Carter, Jr., now 90 years old, held a press conference a few weeks ago to announce that he had been diagnosed with cancer, and that the cancer has spread throughout parts of his body. He will receive treatment at Emory University Hospital and will no doubt get the best care possible. But in that familiar “Jimmy” Carter-style, he expressed his gratitude to God for the life he has lived. Once again his faith was evident.

Since the announcement, for the past three Sundays, Carter has continued to teach his Sunday school class in Plains, Georgia – something he had done for decades. That is an act of faith that demonstrates the character of the man. Hail to the Chief is usually played when the president arrives at certain important functions. It is a tune played out of respect for that high and noble office. It is a tune that should be played for James Earl Carter, Jr. whose dignity and character merit a “Hail to the Chief.” May it be played for him a long time.

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