

# HUE AND CRY: Selfish Ambition

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There was something refreshing in the air, as the remains of Gerald R. Ford were spoken over on a day set aside for a national mourning of the thirty-eighth president resident of the United States. Even if one only had a modicum appreciation for the words of the Holy Bible, the liberal amount of Scriptures that were sprinkled throughout his funeral service at the National Cathedral in Washington were illuminating. Perhaps it was these references, and the fact that all in attendance or witnessing via television around the world had to hear what the Word clearly proclaimed, that changed the atmosphere. Despite some distractions that might be attributed to Ford's ties to the Masonic Lodge, or all sorts of political intrigue about conspiracies, the Prophet Isaiah declares the following:

“So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

Certainly, no one listening intently—perhaps considering their own mortality—could overlook the absolute declarations of the Holy Writ. Let us pray that these words of life, like seed cast upon the soil of hearts, will bear some fruit in the lives of all who heard them (Matthew 13).

But beyond the sowing of the seed in the Bible readings, Gospel declarations, homily, and hymns, there were several statements made regarding Ford's ascension to the presidency that brought to mind not only some Scriptural admonitions, but also some historical, political, and constitutional juxtapositions. If you will recall, President Ford was the only president in American history who was not elected to office. Instead, after the resignation of Vice President Agnew, President Nixon appointed Ford as Agnew's replacement. When Nixon resigned from office some eight months later, Ford was sworn in as the only president never elected to this national office.

Remembering those historic events of the early 1970's, while listening to the eloquent eulogies that spoke of Ford's integrity and superb character, sparked some thoughts about former presidents, as compared to current presidential politics already well underway, nearly two years prior to the next election (2008). When it was mentioned that Ford never had presidential ambitions or personally sought the presidency, I was reminded of some of the concerns of the founding fathers of the United States who understood the fallen nature of man. At the time our constitution was written, the very thought of someone ambitiously campaigning for the role of president, or for that matter vice president, was not considered “gentlemanly.” Instead, the recognized axiom was that **“the office should seek the man; the man should not seek the office.”**

This humble model was certainly exemplified by George Washington who was the only unanimously elected president (twice 1789, 1792) by the results of the Electoral College that were established by part of Article II, Section I of the United States Constitution. No doubt, the recognized “father of our country” was a very unique person for the critical roles he played in the founding of the United States. Nevertheless, **Washington's statesmanlike example—and especially his written and spoken warnings about the divisive evil nature of political parties to his fellow Americans—fell on deaf ears.** By the election of 1796, and even more so by the results of the election of 1800 that ended up with a tie for the presidency (Jefferson and Burr) from one party, we see governing conflicts that had to be resolved by heated compromise. In order to avoid future problems, the relative simplicity of the Electoral College had to be altered in order to accommodate the growth of political party ambitions. The Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution, ratified on June 15, 1804, addressed the innate flaws of the Electoral College and led to the rise of a two party system in American politics.

Over time the U.S. political system has developed to the point where those seeking to be president need to have enough selfish ambition in their hearts to have the audacity to believe that they are **not only capable—but should preside**—over the government of the United States. This requires not only a tremendous amount of ego, but an increasing amount of capital in order to—in essence—purchase the opportunity to campaign for the position by astutely controlling either party's nomination process. **The time of a “gentleman” letting the office seek him out apparently ended by the early 1800's.** Instead today, someone who wants to be elected president needs to spend years and millions of dollars pursuing it. **Perhaps George Washington was simply too idealistic!** Or was it possible that those who do not ambitiously seek positions of presidential power upon receiving them, whether by acclamation (Washington) or appointment (Ford), can actually put the good of their country and others ahead of

themselves, even if they are Deist or Episcopalian with connections to Freemasonry? The contrasts and comparisons are too large to ignore!

These thoughts led me to consider a different passage from the practical Epistle of James (one of the Scriptures quoted at the funeral) that addresses the problem of “selfish ambition,” as it contrasts the differences between the wisdom of God from above and Earthly wisdom that is natural and demonic:

“Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in **the gentleness of wisdom**. But if you have bitter jealousy **and selfish ambition in your heart**, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. **For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing**. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:13-18).

Somehow it appears, despite what one might consider bad theology and/or bad choices of companionship in the Masonic Lodge, both George Washington and Gerald Ford demonstrated good behavior in deeds as they sought peace among their contemporaries. Their seeming lack of jealousy and selfish ambition may have been the attributes that allowed each of them to operate in the gentleness of wisdom from above.

**Would it not be refreshing if our current political landscapes were littered with men and women like these?**

However, when you go back and read the context of what James says, you will readily recognize that he is not speaking to those operating in the political realm, but rather those who were called to teach in the spiritual arena where quarrels and conflicts were erupting. If you take the time to read the balance of the epistle, you will note among all of the excellent counsel that the passage ends with this admonition:

“My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way **will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins**” (James 5:19-20).

**Can you imagine conducting your life and ministry in such a way that you are used to turn others who might have strayed from the truth back to it—saving his or her soul from death and covering a multitude of sins?**

In the last few days, it was noted several times that Gerald Ford was intimately involved in the details of his funeral. Whether or not this included the various Scriptures read or hymns sung does not matter. After all, in the James passage we are told the following:

“Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge *of it*. There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; **but who are you who judge your neighbor?**” (James 4:11-12).

Personally, I was blessed by what I have heard over the past few days, and pray that those of you who also heard the Word have been blessed. We all have a long way to go in our own personal walks. I pray that if the Lord tarries, we are all given some more time to direct people to the Messiah through His Word. What a privilege to help people recognize the error of their ways and save their souls from!

I believe in a unique way, Gerald Ford has perhaps done this in his life, but also most certainly in the remembrances and words spoken surrounding his death. Remarkably, he did it all without any apparent selfish ambition. **This is not a bad way to be remembered!**

Perhaps we should all ask ourselves this question: **How do we want to be remembered?**

Until the restoration of all things...

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