

## Before Jehovah's Awful Throne

*Isaac Watts (1674–1748)*

Before Jehovah's awful throne,  
Ye nations, bow with sacred joy;  
Know that the Lord is God alone,  
He can create, and He destroy.

His sovereign power, without our aid,  
Made us of clay, and formed us men;  
And when like wandering sheep we strayed,  
He brought us to His fold again.

We are His people, we His care,  
Our souls and all our mortal frame;  
What lasting honors shall we rear,  
Almighty Maker, to Thy Name?

We'll crowd Thy gates with thankful songs,  
High as the heavens our voices raise,  
And earth, with her ten thousand tongues,  
Shall fill Thy courts with sounding praise.

Wide as the world is Thy command,  
Vast as eternity Thy love;  
Firm as a rock Thy truth must stand,  
When rolling years shall cease to move.

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### **Not My President?**

*Kevin T. Bauder*

In my first presidential election—that is, the first one I voted in—my guy lost. Since then, the people I voted for have lost presidential elections more often than they have won them. In the process I have gained decades of practice at living under presidents whom I did not choose.

The first one was Jimmy Carter. I've been told that Carter was one of the most intelligent men ever to occupy the White House. Certainly he was one of the nicest, and he was one of the more ethical. I didn't agree with his Populist politics, but I could respect him as a man. I did not vote for him, but he was my president.

I could not extend the same level of personal respect to William Jefferson Clinton. Some believe that Clinton was even more intelligent than Jimmy Carter, but the ethics that he brought to his presidency disgraced the office and shamed the nation. He introduced policies from which America has yet to recover. But do you know what? Even though I didn't vote for him, agree with him, or approve of him, Bill Clinton was my president.

What makes a person my president is not my vote, my agreement, or my approval. What makes a person my president is winning the election. Through the Electoral College the American people choose an individual to become president, not simply of a segment, a party, or an agenda, but of the nation. When that person swears the oath of office, she or he becomes president of the entire country. Because I am a citizen of the United States of America, any American president is by definition my president.

Because every president is my president, I owe him or her certain duties. The first is to display official respect. Official respect is different from personal respect. Official respect is deference paid to the office, not to the individual. Sometimes an unworthy individual may hold the office. When that happens, I may not be able to respect the person, but I must still respect the office. I may be tempted to weaken the office through disrespect, believing that this weakening will limit the ability of the officeholder to do evil. To the exact extent that I succeed in weakening the office, however, I also limit the ability of future officeholders to do good.



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I owe respect to the office because both the office and the officeholder are ordained by God. Granted, when Paul wrote Romans 13, Nero was not yet incinerating Christians, but we have no reason to suppose that the apostle would have viewed any of the Roman emperors as particularly virtuous. After all, Caligula was a recent memory. Yet Paul clearly teaches that the authority exists by ordinance of God. Even bad rulers restrain chaos to some degree, so they are better than no rulers at all. Nothing is worse than anarchy. As a Christian, I owe tribute, custom, fear, and honor even to unworthy officeholders.

This level of respect will also stop me from slandering any public official, especially my president. Disagreement and debate are allowable. In a republic, opposition to wrongheaded proposals and policies is part of a citizen's responsibility. Those are aspects of a healthy polity. Nevertheless, disagreement and even opposition are different from personal attacks, derision, innuendo, speculations, and the circulation of unconfirmed reports that may well turn out to be false. Slander is the work of Satan, and all who engage in slander are doing his work. There is a time and place to speak the truth about unworthy officials, but there is no place for insulting or abusive speech.

Furthermore, I owe it to my president to pray for him or her (1 Tim. 2:1-3). I cannot claim to be obeying God while I am refusing to offer these prayers. Even unsaved and wicked rulers may help to promote a quiet and tranquil life—the kind of life in which God's people are spared many pressing moral dilemmas. We ought to want that kind of life, and consequently we ought to pray for the officials whose work is to establish it. Sometimes my prayers may be prayers that God will grant repentance, but they will be prayers for the wellbeing of my president.

In short, if the president is my president, then I ought to want him or her to succeed. Granted, success has to be measured against an accurate standard—an influential president who implements ungodly initiatives and policies is not a success. I may wish and work for the failure of a president's policies and programs while simultaneously wishing for the success of the president. What I must never do is to reach a point at which I hope that the president makes such a botch of things that people just stop listening. I should look for ways to encourage a president in the things done well even while I oppose the things that would be wrong.

I did not vote for the current president of the United States. In fact, during the campaign I identified with the "NeverTrump" movement. But he was elected, lawfully, fair-and-square. Donald Trump is the president of the United States, which means that he is my president. He has done some things that I agree with, and some with which I disagree. That does not change the fact that he is my president. It seems to me that the people who are saying, "Not My President" hope to undermine, not just the man or even

the office, but the very fabric of the republic. They want to make the fight as grimly personal as possible. They delight in reviling him, slandering him, mocking him, and undercutting him. They want him to fail as badly as possible, somehow believing that his failure will vindicate the poison that flows from their pens and tongues. I confess that I am afraid of some of the things that I see in my president, but I am far more afraid of the things that I see in his most vocal opponents.

Jimmy Carter was my president. Ronald Reagan was my president. George H. W. Bush was my president. Bill Clinton was my president. George W. Bush was my president. Barack Obama was my president. If Hillary Clinton had won the election, she would have been my president. She did not. Donald Trump was elected. He occupies the presidency by constitutional process and by order of Providence. Donald Trump is my president. He will be until the day he leaves office. As long as he is my president, I intend to fulfill every obligation toward him.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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