

Should "The Star-Spangled Banner" be America's National Anthem?

(An Essay Based on "The Star-Spangled Banner Medley,"
Music Arr. by Lawrence Johnson)

INTRODUCTION On January 17, 1961, in his final address to the nation, President Dwight D. Eisenhower prophetically said the following: "we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex ... Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together."

In the recent past, we can see that we have failed miserably to heed President Eisenhower's warning. I feel that this is mostly because Americans have been so preoccupied with the highly funded "gotcha" politics of fear and personal destruction that we have elected many people who are threatening to usurp some of our most basic freedoms. Seemingly, these politicians are only watching out for their wealthy financial supporters in the corrupt high places of corporate greed. Now, more than ever, we must become that alert and knowledgeable citizenry that President Eisenhower spoke of. But, of even greater importance, we must come to these "peaceful methods and goals" within OUR OWN borders and respect each other whether we are "White" European-Americans, African-Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic-Americans or even of different sexual gender etc. Whether we like it or not, *ALL* Americans are in the same sinking ship and we must help one another into lifeboats and swim together in order to survive this incipient storm.

Especially disturbing to me as a Christian, is that somehow Jesus' ministry of peace and agape love seems to elude so many of my American Christian brethren. They seem so ready and willing to follow and support the most divisive and militaristic politicians so long as these same politicians speak against stem-cell research and other "Christian" issues and loudly and repeatedly proclaim their "born again Christian" beliefs and "family" values. Indeed Jesus warns us against such apparent "wolves in sheep's clothing." We must remember that while He readily offered forgiveness and salvation to criminals, adulterers, tax collectors and other sinners, he had very little tolerance for the religiously hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees of His day!

(In saying this I recognize that those of other major religions as well as some self-declared atheists and humanists often have similar ideals of peace and love. A central thesis of Jesus' teaching is always voluntary, and never forced conversion. Thus the advice to His missionaries "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Mt. 10:16). I therefore strongly condemn the recent declarations by some "fundamentalist" Christian spokesmen that America should ultimately become some sort of legalistic and judgmental Christian theocracy. I feel that non-judgmental respect and agape love for those who are of different faiths, persuasions, ethnicity, gender etc. are essential to my understanding of the real meaning of scripture and Christian teachings as well as to my understanding of how our democracy should function at its best. Indeed, with great wisdom, our constitution DOES guarantee us freedom of religion)

Equally disturbing to me as an American who loves his country is that somehow many Americans are convinced that they can only be considered patriotic if they support the above-mentioned militaristic and divisive "family values" politicians and their goals.

(We must also remember that before becoming president, Dwight Eisenhower was one of our greatest generals and a military man to the core. Yet as president, he seemed to regard war as an earthly hell and mostly evil, which should only be waged when absolutely necessary, in the extreme condition when all other possible peaceful and diplomatic options have failed.)

I believe that what we need in America today is a new idealistic, non-militaristic mind-set. A mind-set that not only *rejects* unnecessary wars, often instigated for secretive and corrupt reasons, but also *renews* the possibilities of truly and finally achieving the ideals and visions of equality and the pursuit of happiness our founding fathers set down, but did not achieve or even necessarily follow, in our Declaration of Independence.

Despite President Obama's message of hope, change and unity of **all** Americans, and his recent inauguration, I firmly believe that our hearts must change before we can expect our currently divided culture and politics to permanently change. Indeed music often has a powerful and subliminally persuasive way of changing hearts. Therefore as a musician, I ask the question: How might I musically express this new mind-set? With these thoughts in mind, I present the following:

**"The Star-Spangled Banner Medley" (or Medley of American Patriotic Music)
Lawrence Johnson, Guitarist**

I am an American.

And I am a Christian.

As an American, I am appalled at the relatively recent moral, military and political direction of my beloved nation.

As a Christian I am equally appalled by the so-called "Christian" rationalizations and support for this direction.

Near the end of the Vietnam conflict, I arranged "*The Star-Spangled Banner Medley*" in protest of that disastrous and unpopular war. During that time I often played this medley, but after the war was settled, it ceased having any immediate meaning and I therefore stopped playing it. However I recently re-examined it and discovered that today (with some changes) it seemingly has a far more cogent message than it originally had in the Vietnam era.

I begin with "*The Star-Spangled Banner*." The music to this, our national anthem, was originally derived from a popular British drinking song from the mid 1700s. (At that time this tune was considered so difficult to sing that it was often actually used as a sobriety test! That is, those who could sing it passed the test!). In 1814, Francis Scott Key wrote the lyrics during the English-American War of 1812. It seems that these lyrics display thinking more or less related to that war and period, but which, unfortunately, are totally obsolete and disastrous when applied to today's nuclear era. "The rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air." This is a hymn that glorifies war. It equates military superiority and victory with patriotism. Indeed the first 2 1/2 stanzas' essential meaning is that our flag can only proudly fly and therefore, our nation can only thrive through such military victory! I want the reader to understand I am *NOT A PACIFIST*. In today's world we need a strong military to deter various power hungry demagogues and rogue nations, Yet, I feel that in the present global village, our image as a peace loving, ethical nation is far more crucial to having a positive international influence and reputation THAN such military strength.

And later in the 4th stanza "conquer we must, our cause it is just, And this be our motto: In God is our trust." First, who decides when we should wage war because "our cause it is just?" Is it our past president and/or vice president, apparently in direct influence of corporate giants such as Exxon Mobil and/or Halliburton, both of which helped finance their political campaigns and seemingly expected to benefit greatly from the current Iraq conflict? And even if we perceive that we have a "just" cause should we necessarily "conquer" (and ultimately control) our adversaries? Can we use brutal and bullying military force to promote worldwide democracy, as president G. W. Bush suggested was part of his reason for initiating the Iraq War? . Unfortunately since 9-11-01 and our involvement in Iraq, this militaristic image has proven extremely *detrimental* to our reputation. As I mentioned above, I am not against having a strong military for our national security. But I am certainly against the above-mentioned saber-rattling attitude, along with the unprovoked, pre-emptive and unnecessary military aggression that appears to be part of it. Secondly, if we are to label ourselves "Christian," how can our trust for such ventures be in God, as this anthem states, when true Biblical Christian teaching is overwhelmingly unwarlike and peaceful ("turn the other cheek" Mt.5:39), loving ("Love thy neighbor as thyself" Mt.22:39), altruistic (Parable of The Good Samaritan, Lk.10:29-37), and non-materialistic ("You cannot serve God and mammon" Mt.6:24)?

This is also a "period" anthem of 1814, which includes the elitism, and "racism" common to that era! We must remember that in 1814, the only Americans who could legally vote were "aristocratic" people of means, i.e. "white" European-American landowners of the male gender - probably 10-15% of the adult U.S. population of that time. Near the end of the 3rd stanza "No refuge could save the hireling and slave from the terror of flight, or the gloom of the grave." A hireling in 1814 evidently meant a lower-class "poor" person of European descent willing to perform, for very small fees, menial or offensive tasks such as collecting garbage, cleaning streets, stables etc. Basically, such a person would not have the means to own property and therefore would have no vote or "refuge." He would thus lose everything and flee whatever home he had, but at least (according to these lyrics) he would apparently still have life! However our African-American slaves, could not legally own anything, since THEY themselves were property, owned and controlled by their masters, who most likely would not opt to lose their "property" and allow their slaves to leave in some "terror of flight" or go to some elusive and non-existent "refuge." It is also painfully apparent that because of their obviously different appearance, "the terror of flight" was totally impractical - i.e. they would immediately be recognized as runaway slaves. Therefore, it is my opinion that, (again according to these lyrics), a slave's only alternative was "the gloom of the grave."

These thoughts are more fully confirmed by the beginning of the following fourth stanza: "Oh! Thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand." Again, it is apparent that in 1814, the only ones who could legally vote and therefore the only *true* freemen who would forever "stand" were somewhat aristocratic people of means, i.e. as previously

mentioned, "white" European-American landowners of the male gender. It seems therefore, that the logical question becomes, *WHY ARE WE STILL SINGING ABOUT THIS IN 2010?* Has the abolition of slavery, or the later civil rights achievements and voting rights (including women's suffrage), had no effect on current thinking? Have the vast majority of today's American people somehow been subliminally hoodwinked into thinking that we can and should somehow revert to the racism, sexism, elitism and other inequalities of that past era? If not, *WHAT IS* the relevance of these words today and more importantly ***WHY IS THIS STILL OUR NATIONAL ANTHEM?***

Unfortunately, in my opinion, our present national anthem represents a mind-set, which exudes a completely obsolete and backward military, political and religious morality, which, approximately since 9-11-2001, has largely accelerated and led our nation to its recent state of militarism, division, confusion and economic chaos. We have conquered Iraq in an unnecessary pre-emptive war, waged for apparently deceptive and erroneous reasons. This "conquering" only took several weeks because of our military superiority. But for the last 7 years we still have *no clue* as to how to win over the people of Iraq because in reality our "occupation" has no moral authority. In other words, for trumped up reasons, which are somehow veiled in pseudo "Christian" rationalizations, we can easily militarily conquer a foreign land. Yet many are shocked *because we are viewed by the natives of that land (and much of the rest of the world) as bullies who are attempting to control and occupy their land for our own greed and purposes.* In the meantime, at home the average American suffers and worries incessantly about the vast economic strain this non-evident "war on terror" against vague and elusive Iraqi "terrorists" and "enemies" who stockpile nuclear and other "weapons of mass destruction," and are supposedly allies with Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida, has cost us. (Past estimated spending for the Iraq war is 12 BILLION dollars per month). Indeed we are now in a vast and serious financial meltdown. Unemployment has risen drastically, many banks have failed, the real-estate market has collapsed. And our national debt has ballooned astronomically out of control, all of which has possibly put us in an economic tailspin that we may never fully recover from. There is also an ever-greater economic disparity between wealthy and poorer Americans (which tends to eliminate our so-called middle class) - thus making a mockery of our beliefs and ideals of basic equalities and opportunities among all Americans. We also have recent legislation, which seriously threatens to curtail some of our most basic democratic rights and freedoms of privacy (both financial and otherwise), search and seizure, etc. (e.g. The Patriot Act). **Is this the legacy we desire to leave to our children?**

I PLAY "THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER" TO THE POINT IN THE ANTHEM WHERE THE "BOMBS ARE BURSTING IN THE AIR." I THEN PLAY AN INTERLUDE OF MY OWN ENTITLED "FLIGHT OF THE INTERCONTINENTAL BALLISTIC MISSILE."

I FOLLOW THIS WITH "TWINKLE, TWINKLE LITTLE STAR," A CHILD'S SONG. THIS SYMBOLIZES THE SUFFERING AND DEATH OF OUR INNOCENT CHILDREN FROM THIS NUCLEAR HOLOCAUST THAT EVENTUALLY MAY BE INEVITABLE SHOULD WE CHOOSE TO CONTINUE TO FOLLOW THIS RECENT MIND-SET.

Next I play "America The Beautiful."

This music is from a hymn written by Samuel A. Ward in 1882. Katharine Lee Bates wrote the lyrics in 1895

Stanza 1

O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!

"O beautiful for spacious skies" In this statement our poet gives us a prophetic vision of the respect, value and importance we should give toward the air we breathe. God has indeed given us clean, pure air yet unfortunately today our atmosphere is on the brink of becoming so polluted that the health of all life may already be irreversibly in jeopardy. We now know that some species are in imminent danger of extinction because of the global warming caused by this pollution. (This change will ultimately also apply to humans - it may well cause drought in present fertile areas and excessive rainfall, hurricanes, flooding in other areas, thus threatening our own survival. (Also, if the present rate of global warming continues for another 60+ years, rising sea level caused by melting polar ice may annihilate coastal areas including many great cities.) Also humanity is in ever-greater risk of various serious respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses because of other air pollution.

O beautiful "For amber waves of grain," and "Above the fruited plain!" Here our poet celebrates and praises the gift of our land with its rich fertility to feed us. Furthermore she understands that "Man shall not live by bread alone," but also by a higher spiritual perception. "O beautiful for purple mountain majesties." Not only has God given us sustenance for our physical needs but also a land of incredible beauty and majesty to bolster our fundamentally spiritual nature with earthly evidence of the awesome power and grandeur of Our Creator. And finally "America! America! God shed his grace on thee and crown thy good with brotherhood From sea to shining sea!" This exhorts us on loving and thanking our Creator for His GRACE by behaving toward EACH OTHER with grace, love and brotherhood, thus finally rejecting the historic elitism, racism and sexism of our past.

Stanza 2

O beautiful for pilgrim feet
Whose stern impassioned stress
A thoroughfare of freedom beat
Across the wilderness!
America! America!
God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control,
Thy liberty in law!

Our poet singles out the pilgrims of 1620 as examples of both the best of Christian behavior and how "White" European-Americans and Americans of other "races" and cultures should respond to each other in brotherhood. Upon arriving at Plymouth Rock, the pilgrims found two vacant Native American houses with much needed food inside. To prevent their own starvation, they consumed the food but vowed to repay the natives, which they did six months later when they finally made contact with them. Thus began a trusting and peaceful friendship that was to endure for over 50 years. The stories of the first Thanksgiving and how these pilgrims were taught fishing and planting corn by these natives (especially by Squanto) and the reciprocal protection by the pilgrims of our American natives, are supreme examples of how the people of widely divergent cultures and "races" that now make up our land can and should create a "thoroughfare of freedom beat" across the wilderness of fear and ignorance that currently seems to occupy much of the American psyche or mind-set.

America! America!
God mend thine every flaw,

This prayer is especially cogent today when our nation seems so intent on destroying our earth by pollution and global warming and dividing us by haves and has nots, race, ethnicity and gender. Indeed, if America is to truly become a Christian oriented nation we must do a far better job of following the greatest of Christian commandments:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

In light of the above, how can we truly love the Lord "with all thy heart, soul, and mind" while we, with blind ignorance and arrogance, destroy his creation - this wondrous earth that He has so graciously given us? And how can we "love thy neighbor as thyself" while many Americans so willingly and ignorantly continue to follow the malicious propaganda of certain media commentators, writers and politicians who continue to engage in the politics of fear and demagoguery to schizophrenically divide Americans into isolated and suspicious subgroups of "race" and class. This brings us to the following exhortation in the next verse of this stanza:

"Confirm thy soul in self-control,"

Our constitution's first amendment guarantees us freedom of speech and press. I feel that our founding fathers believed that this freedom would lead to a reasonable discussion of issues and injustices and ultimately to a more just and superior democratic republic. Indeed the ideals of equality and "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," set out in our Declaration of Independence were *ONLY IDEALS* when our nation was founded and when slavery was allowed and only aristocratic "white" male landowners could vote. Indeed, today it is EVERY ADULT CITIZEN'S responsibility to take the time and effort to thoughtfully, calmly and logically sort out the blaring din and screaming voices of modern politics. In doing so he must weed out those whose message is fear that is subliminally aimed toward "other" ethnic groups, alleged "terrorists" etc. Also he must weed out those who flagrantly use the politics of personal destruction and other forms of demagoguery. On the other hand it is his RESPONSIBILITY to vote, work for and support those candidates who best represent the ideals our nation was founded upon. In doing so we will indeed confirm our collective American "soul in self-control." Thus we should

have an ever-greater realization of our founding fathers' initial ideals. In short, an America where traditional class, "racial," religious and gender barriers become ever more insignificant and, at least within our borders, we progressively fulfill the great Christian commandment to "love thy neighbor as thyself." This brings us to the ultimate conclusion of this stanza with the following verse:

"Thy liberty in law!"

To me it is obvious that if we become an America that follows the above precepts of agape love and respect for ALL AMERICANS, that we will ultimately elect those who will create laws that promote liberty and justice for all. In doing so we will become an ever greater democracy which will shine like a beacon of light for the entire world and which will regain the respect and trust we have, in recent years, so egregiously and shamefully lost.

The main themes of "*America The Beautiful*" are contained within the above first two stanzas. The remaining six stanzas are further (and sometimes somewhat repetitive) elaborations of these themes but nonetheless have much wisdom and many illuminating and valuable thoughts:

The glorious third stanza, which speaks of the true American hero as one who strives for liberty, would sacrifice his selfish interests for his country and loves mercy more than life. To my mind, the late Dr. Martin Luther King serves as a supreme example of this hero:

"O beautiful for heroes proved
In liberating strife.
Who more than self their country loved
And mercy more than life!
America! America!
May God thy gold refine
Till all success be nobleness
And every gain divine!"

In the fourth stanza:

O beautiful for patriot dream
That sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam
Undimmed by human tears!

Who or what is a true patriot? The answer is contained in this fourth stanza. It is one who "sees beyond the years." That is one who is a *GOOD STEWARD* and believes and acts in ways that will leave America a more just and humane place than he found it for future generations. One who supports a clean, pollution-free America who's "alabaster cities gleam" and which are "Undimmed by the human tears" of dirt, poverty, drugs, crime, and racism that today seems to be such a large fabric of so many current American cities.

STANZA 7

America! America!
God shed his grace on thee
Till selfish gain no longer stain
The banner of the free!

I am old enough to vividly remember the Vietnam War protests and demonstrations of the 1960s-70s. Many of these demonstrations included flag burnings. I believe that the vast majority of these "burnings" were done to demonstrate the false patriotism, selfish greed and racism that seemed to many to be the true motives for this Asian war of supposedly freeing the South Vietnamese from communist aggression. Yes, the flag-burners were labeled as completely unpatriotic anarchists at the time. But is not this very banner a symbol of America and what it stands for, not only to us, but also to the rest of the world? Today, our flag and America's reputation is even more deeply stained because of the unjustified Iraq War, elitist inequalities at home, our attitudes toward global warming etc., and the "selfish gain" these things seem to represent. Indeed, at this point, I feel that America must make something of a "quantum leap" AWAY from the sort of selfish militarism and elitism of these past years and at least amongst us, leap TOWARD our ideals of equality and the pursuit of happiness or a "more perfect union." Only then will we become the above-mentioned beacon of light and only then will "selfish gain no longer stain the banner of the free!" Finally, it is my feeling that one symbolic start toward this more just and humane American mind-set would be for us to adopt *America the Beautiful* as our official national anthem in place of *The Star-Spangled*

Banner. Of course this would only be a beginning. We need to clean our hearts, and in the process cross those artificial lines which have traditionally kept Americans apart and suspiciously fearful of each other. Today there is simply no excuse for not doing so. We have seen the destruction of America's reputation abroad because of our selfish greed and militarism in Iraq. We must therefore somehow disengage ourselves from this conflict while simultaneously making PEACE in that region. Even more important, we must recognize that all Americans are in the same boat and we must make PEACE amongst ourselves before our boat becomes a sinking ship and we ALL drown. Today, such "PEACE" is rapidly becoming an absolute necessity for our survival as a nation. And this thought of PEACE brings me to the conclusion of this medley. I close with "Taps." This is the traditional bugle call, which signifies "rest in peace." There are no official lyrics as such. But it is most often used at the close of the day to signify peaceful rest or sleep. It is also used at military funerals to signify "rest in eternal peace." And I believe it also suggests a future time when finally we achieve peace on earth and goodwill toward men.

27 centuries ago these prophesies were penned: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14) and later: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6). To me, as a Christian, these utterances directly predict Jesus birth and the character of His mission and earthly ministry. Yes, 700 years after the appearance of the above prophesies, this child, "The Prince of Peace," WAS born and through His life and teachings we are given inspiration, instruction and wisdom on becoming the forgiving, peace-loving people of God. Many (including Christians) today continue to resist these precepts (such as forgiving our enemies, turning the other cheek etc.) with the excuse that they are only ideals and in reality are impractical and impossible to implement. I feel that if these principles WERE thusly impractical and impossible to implement, that Jesus would not have GIVEN them to us. The apparent truth is that one cannot reverse or change the mind-set of others by using threats, violence, blame and non-forgiveness. Usually such tactics only create fear, hatred, the desire for vengeance and ultimately an escalation to more and greater threats and violence. Therefore, to me it is a matter of faith. If we Christians, in faith, trust our Lord in His example and teachings, the Holy Spirit will lead us to PRACTICAL means of implementation. Thus, I believe that our calling as Christians of faith is to progressively believe in and create His Kingdom while on this earth. And this kingdom, by definition, MUST be non-violent, forgiving and peaceful. A magnificent historic example of this faith is the civil rights movement under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King. Indeed from an early age, Dr. King had faith in Christ's inspired teachings, but only after studying Mahatma Gandhi's methods of non-violent civil disobedience as an educated adult, did he have the tools and tactics to lead this movement and thus to peacefully and effectively greatly diminish the scourge of "racial" hatred, inequalities and segregation throughout America.

In conclusion, we Americans pride ourselves on our freedom and that our democracy is government by the people and for the people. But is this concept historically correct? In reality, all too often what we have is majority rule and minority oppression. Certainly our legacy of slavery, segregation and other "racial" inequalities is a clear example of this. Although the majority of Americans consider themselves as Christians, I feel that some Americans that have faith in other religions and persuasions also profess similar beliefs in peace, non-violence and forgiveness. And I believe the ideals of equality and pursuit of happiness will only become a greater reality when we truly apply these universal truths, religious teachings and inspiration to find PEACEFUL solutions to the injustices and oppression that are now blocking this greater reality or "more perfect union." And as we progressively achieve this peace and good will among ourselves, our example and resulting humane international policies should lead to ever-greater world peace with the consequence that eventually Isaiah's glorious prophecy shall finally be fulfilled "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isaiah 2:4) Perhaps then, as the music to "Taps" implies, we shall ultimately be able to sleep peacefully and pass away from this earth believing in, and knowing about the "peace of God which passes all understanding."

Lawrence Johnson

Complete lyrics for *The Star-Spangled Banner* and *America The Beautiful*

The Star-Spangled Banner

1. Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars thru the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming?
And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.
Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

2. On the shore, dimly seen through the mists of the deep,
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,
In full glory reflected now shines in the stream:
'Tis the star-spangled banner! Oh long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

3. And where is that band who so vauntingly swore
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion,
A home and a country should leave us no more!
Their blood has washed out their foul footsteps' pollution.
No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight, or the gloom of the grave:
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

4. Oh! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand
Between their loved home and the war's desolation!
Blest with victory and peace, may the heav'n rescued land
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation.
Then conquer we must, our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust."
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

America The Beautiful

1. O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!

2. O beautiful for pilgrim feet
Whose stern impassioned stress
A thoroughfare of freedom beat
Across the wilderness!
America! America!
God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control,
Thy liberty in law!

3. O beautiful for heroes proved
In liberating strife,
Who more than self their country loved
And mercy more than life!
America! America!
May God thy gold refine
Till all success be nobleness
And every gain divine!

4. O beautiful for patriot dream
That sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam
Undimmed by human tears!
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!

5. O beautiful for halcyon skies,
For amber waves of grain,

For purple mountain majesties
Above the enameled plain!
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee
Till souls wax fair as earth and air
And music-hearted sea!

6. O beautiful for pilgrims feet,
Whose stem impassioned stress
A thoroughfare for freedom beat
Across the wilderness!
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee
Till paths be wrought through
wilds of thought
By pilgrim foot and knee!

7. O beautiful for glory-tale
Of liberating strife
When once and twice,
for man's avail
Men lavished precious life!
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee
Till selfish gain no longer stain
The banner of the free!

8. O beautiful for patriot dream
That sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam
Undimmed by human tears!
America! America
God shed his grace on thee
Till nobler men keep once again
Thy whiter jubilee

**This essay and corresponding music can also be viewed and/or
downloaded in its entirety on my website, www.crgrecordings.com .**