

Patriotic Music

R. David Pogge
June 30, 2013

Patriotic music acknowledges God's role in the founding of this country.

Part 1

Independence week is an excellent time to ponder God's role in the founding and blessing of our country. So, let's set the mood for our broadcast as Becky Richardson and JoAn Witzel perform "America."

[music – Becky Richardson and JoAn Witzel, "America"]

Part 2

Our country was founded by men of great faith. Carved in the walls of the Jefferson Memorial are the words, "God, who gave us life, gave us liberty." In the capitol building is a stained glass window portraying George Washington, along with the words, "Preserve me, O God, for in Thee do I put my trust."

America was founded by people with great faith in God. It took faith to make the hazardous Atlantic Ocean crossing, knowing they would arrive some place where homes and grocery stores had not yet been built.

It took faith to bear arms against Great Britain, which was, at that time, the world's superpower, in order to gain economic and religious freedom. During the Revolutionary War, faith in God kept our soldiers from giving up.

One month after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Samuel Adams gave a famous speech from the steps of the State House in Philadelphia.¹ In that speech Adams said, "We have this day restored the Sovereign, to whom alone men ought to be obedient." In other words, he was saying that the Declaration of Independence made us one nation under God, not under King George.

At the time there were some who felt the colonies should remain loyal to the king because the king had protected them. Adams' response was that the king only protected the colonies from selfish motives. Britain was making a good profit trading the produce of the colonies with the rest of the world, and wanted to keep it that way. Adams encouraged American to trust in an unselfish God, rather than a selfish king.

Adams didn't think America needed the protection of Britain because he believed America was under the protection of God. He expected God to give the military victory to America because God believed in America as strongly as America believed in God.

Adams was confident in victory. The basis for his confidence was his recognition of how God had already blessed America. He gave examples of the agricultural and industrial prosperity that God had already

¹ <http://www.revolutionary-war-and-beyond.com/american-independence-speech-by-samuel-adams-august-1-1776.html#ixzz2VwU0hvt3>

granted to America. From a military point of view, America was clearly the underdog; but he expected God to give the victory to the underdog because the underdog was under God.

At that time, America was the only nation where pure Protestant Christianity still existed. Other nations, like France, were officially atheistic. The Church of England was concerned more with political power than the pure religion of the gospel. And professors of religion in other countries were so obsessed with examining new interpretations, traditions, and human rules, that they had lost sight of Christianity completely.

Adams expected God to bless America because America was the only place in the world where men could worship God as their conscience dictated. Adams was right. God did bless America as a reward for her pure faith.

Samuel Adams' speech was inspiring. We don't hear many politicians giving speeches like that today. Instead, filling the patriotic vacuum are songs written and sung by ordinary patriotic Americans. That's why our broadcast today will feature local musicians singing and playing patriotic songs.

You, of course, know the song "God Bless America." But do you know the story behind it?

[Irving] Berlin wrote the song in 1918 while serving the U.S. Army at Camp Upton in Yaphank, New York, but decided that it did not fit in a revue called Yip Yip Yaphank, so he set it aside [for 20 years]. ...

In 1938, with the rise of Hitler, Berlin, who was Jewish and a first-generation European immigrant, felt it was time to revive it as a "peace song," and it was introduced on an Armistice Day broadcast in 1938, sung by Kate Smith on her radio show. Berlin had made some minor changes; by this time, "to the right" might have been considered a call to the political right, so he substituted "through the night" instead. He also provided an introduction that is now rarely heard but which Smith always used: "While the storm clouds gather far across the sea / Let us swear allegiance to a land that's free / Let us all be grateful for a land so fair, / As we raise our voices in a solemn prayer." ²

Let's listen now as the children in grades 1 through 4 of the Adventist Christian School sing "God Bless America."

[music – ACS grades 1-4 and JoAn Witzel, "God Bless America"]

Part 3

The song, "God of Our Fathers," was written 100 years after the founding of our country.

Daniel C. Roberts, the 35 year-old rector of St. Thomas Episcopal Church, a small rural church in Brandon, Vermont, wanted a new hymn for his congregation to celebrate the American Centennial in 1876. He wrote "God of Our Fathers" and his congregation sang it to the tune *Russian Hymn*.

In 1892, he anonymously sent the hymn to the General Convention for consideration by the commission formed to revise the Episcopal hymnal. ... Rev. Dr. Tucker, who was the editor of the *Hymnal*, and George W. Warren, an organist in New York city, were commissioned to choose a hymn for the

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_Bless_America

celebration of the centennial of the United States Constitution. They chose this text and Warren wrote a new tune for it, *National Hymn*, including the trumpet fanfare at the beginning of the hymn. ... *National Hymn* ... is the tune to which "God of Our Fathers" is always sung today.³

Rob Jennings is about to play that song for you today on his valve trombone, accompanied by JoAn Witzel on the organ; but before they do, let me remind you of the words.

1. God of our fathers, Whose almighty hand
Leads forth in beauty all the starry band
Of shining worlds in splendor through the skies
Our grateful songs before Thy throne arise.
2. Thy love divine hath led us in the past,
In this free land by Thee our lot is cast,
Be Thou our Ruler, Guardian, Guide and Stay,
Thy Word our law, Thy paths our chosen way.
3. From war's alarms, from deadly pestilence,
Be Thy strong arm our ever sure defense;
Thy true religion in our hearts increase,
Thy bounteous goodness nourish us in peace.
4. Refresh Thy people on their toilsome way,
Lead us from night to never ending day;
Fill all our lives with love and grace divine,
And glory, laud, and praise be ever Thine.

[music – Rob Jennings and JoAn Witzel, “God of Our Fathers”]

Part 4

Sadly, it often takes a time of trouble to remind us of how much we need God. That's why patriotic songs are often written during times of war. This was the case with “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

It was the midst of the terrible U.S. Civil War.

Deeply anguished at the growing conflict between the two sections of the country, Mrs. Julia Howe watched troops marching off to war singing “John Brown's Body,” a song about a man who had been hanged in his efforts to free the slaves.

Julia felt that the catchy camp meeting tune should have better words. In a desire to phrase her own feelings about the dreadful events of the time, she scrawled the verses almost without looking at the paper.

Before long the entire nation became inspired by her text and united in singing the new words with the old tune. Mrs. Howe's hymn has been acclaimed through the years as one of our finest patriotic songs.

At one time it was sung as a solo at a large rally attended by President Abraham Lincoln. After the audience had responded with loud applause, the President, with tears in his eyes, cried out, “Sing it again!” It was sung again.

And after more than a hundred years, Americans still join often in proclaiming, “Glory! Hallelujah! His truth is marching on!”⁴

³ <http://songsandhymns.org/hymns/detail/god-of-our-fathers>

Here now are Mary Hanson and her brother, Joshua Hanson, accompanied by JoAn Witzel to sing “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

[music – Mary Hanson, Joshua Hanson, and JoAn Witzel, “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”] LM0134

Part 5

It doesn't always take a war to bring us close to God. Sometimes just the splendor of nature can remind us of the love and power of our creator.

It was the early summer of 1893. The Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which celebrated the 400th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America, was in full swing. A group of teachers and professors from Wellesley College stopped off in Chicago enroute to Colorado.

Among them was thirty-four-year-old Katharine Lee Bates, a professor of English. The young women were profoundly impressed by all they saw in and about “The Windy City.”

[They] left Lake Michigan behind them as they continued their journey westward. Once in Colorado, they made the trip up the famous peak which was named for the American general who discovered it about 1806 (Zebulon Montgomery Pike).

While in Colorado, the group compared the Exposition (a man-made spectacle) with the magnificent Rocky Mountains and the view from Pike's Peak (fashioned by the hand of God).

They also discussed about the two stones that played important parts in the nation's history—the Ten Commandments and Plymouth Rock—and agreed that their fellow-citizens could couple the daring of the Pilgrims with the moral teachings of Moses.

Later that night, with the events of the trip vividly in her mind, Miss Bates sat down and expressed her dream of a Christian nation in these words:

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 they good with brotherhood,
From sea to shining sea.

Before she laid her pen down she had written four stanzas, each closing with a prayer for her beloved America.⁵

Let's listen now as Angela and Sue remind us of what a beautiful county America is.

[music – Angela Winters and Sue Pogge, “America, the Beautiful”]

⁴ Kenneth W. Osbeck, http://www.tanbible.com/tol_sng/sng_battlehymnoftherepublic.htm

⁵ Ernest K. Emurian, http://www.tanbible.com/tol_sng/sng_americatebeautiful.htm

Part 6

From time to time, we play country music on *The Word With Us*. That's because many country singers are deeply religious, and like to use their talent to express their love for God in the style of music they perform best. Consider this example.

"God Bless the USA" is an American patriotic song written and recorded by country music artist Lee Greenwood ... in the spring of 1984, and was played at the 1984 Republican National Convention. Greenwood said that he "wanted to write it my whole life. ... I called my producer, and I said I have a need to do this. I've always wanted to write a song about America, and I said we just need to be more united."

The reason behind the cities chosen in the song Greenwood says [was], "... I wanted to mention, the four corners of the United States. It could have been Seattle or Miami but we chose New York City and Los Angeles, and [my producer] suggested Detroit and Houston because they both were economically part of the basis of our economy—Motown and the oil industry, so I just poetically wrote that in the bridge."⁶

Let's listen now as Mike Miller sings, "God Bless the U.S.A."

[music –Mike Miller, "God Bless the U.S.A."]

Part 7

America was founded by people who wanted to worship God freely. Religious freedom has been the cornerstone of American thought. Some would say that economic freedom has been responsible for the growth and success of the United States, and there certainly is a great deal of truth in that; but we must not discount the fact that God has blessed the U.S.A. If not for God's blessings, we would not be the world's superpower that we are today.

When I was in elementary school, two words were added to the Pledge of Allegiance. It now says, "One nation, UNDER GOD." When we pledge allegiance to the United States, we are also pledging allegiance to the God this nation is under. When we pledge allegiance to the flag, we also pledge allegiance to the Lamb of God.

[music – R. David Pogue, "I Pledge Allegiance to the Lamb"]

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_Bless_the_USA