

Anthem should be 'beautiful'

WHAT DOES Ray Charles have in common with Katherine Lee Bates? The question may sound as if it were lifted from a game of trivia.

The answer is that they both like the song "America the Beautiful." Bates wrote the song, and Charles thinks that we should adopt it as our national anthem.

The idea is not new. Others agree with Charles, and many before have made the same suggestion. There are, of course, many others who would fight to keep "The Star Spangled Banner" in its place of honor.



perspectives

Rev. Robert Schaden

guessed 1776. The actual date, of course, is 1931. Forever is apparently relative.

ONE DOES not need a master's degree in music to realize the difficulty in singing our present national anthem. Going to a ball game will be sufficient to point out the difficulty in hitting the range notes required. Musical difficulty is not, however, the only consideration. Anthems, like symbols and other rituals, send a message about the people who sing or perform them. They also serve to perpetuate the way a group thinks and believes.

What statement better characterizes our nation as we would like to see it? Might it be a statement which is enthralled with war where death rains from the skies?

Or do we prefer to see ourselves as a people proud of the beauty around us and committed to brotherhood — or sisterhood — from sea to sea?

I would like to think that most of us would vote for the latter.

THE WORDS that Francis Scott Key gave to an English drinking song as he watched the shelling of Fort McHenry during the War of 1812 sing a far different tune. They betray more enchantment with bombs and the fiery death delivered by rockets than with brotherhood or beauty.

But words do not only send messages from those who speak or sing them; they do, indeed, serve to instill in the minds of the singers a way of viewing life.

Perhaps we would become a people more representative of what we claim as our values if we adopted a different song for the official statement of who we are.

MUCH HAS been said lately concerning allegiance to the flag. Flags are symbols and allegiance belongs

more properly to the truth that the symbols attempt to express.

Certainly the flag of our nation deserves a mark of respect, but the grace with which it flies depends far more on our awareness of the beauty and the call to community that we find expressed in "America the Beautiful" than it does on maintaining our present national anthem.

From his present perspective I suspect that even Francis Scott Key might join Mr. Charles and cast his vote for Katherine Lee Bates.

The Rev. Robert Schaden is with Newman House Campus Ministry at Schoolcraft College in Livonia.

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