

Epilogue

John Bright, a member of the House of Commons, using Biblical context during the debate over the 1853-1856 Crimean War, said, “An angel of death has been abroad throughout the land, you may almost hear the beating of his wings;...We looked for peace, but no good came.” It has been no better on this side of the pond.

Concerning War chronicles many—but not all—of the conflicts on American soil and overseas in tandem with other nations. How many times have we truly said, “We looked for peace”? How many times have we had to admit of our actions, “No good came.” Still, war has enticed the human race again and again.

The work below is backstory from an orchestral and choir piece “Dona Nobis Pacem” [“Lord, Grant Us Peace”] by Ralph Vaughn Williams with words by Walt Whitman. The author attended a concert featuring the piece while completing Concerning War - Book 1.

Dona 1861

A Civil War volunteer, age 42,
In the military hospitals outside Washington,
Walt Whitman¹ served as unofficial nurse
But majored as morale officer,
His bedside manner didn't matter
Which side that bed was on;

Tenderly visiting torn men
Penning words home to worried folk.
The wounded came in and
The dead left on a road scored by ruts.
Those times found their way into him
Pierced through him

Brought cadenced ranks of words
To the fronts of pages,
Pealed warnings to lovers of wars,
Whispered condolence to widows with tears.
Yet, through other darker memory, he recalled
Its halls of sulfurous smoke,

Scorched leaves of grass;
Its gagging butchery,
Scarred carnage;
'Twas then he grasped
For wisps of words
Vaporous.

Nobis 1914

Half a century away and a continent apart, another war,
Hardly civil. Full of vibrato, altruism, wanting to save his
English speaking world from clash and crush,
Ralph Vaughn Williams² volunteered for The Great War,
Wearing 42 long years under his uniform

Courage driving
Ambulance managing
Faith locating shed blood triaging
Through craters of suffering.
They watched. They saw. They made

The measured leader in him³
An orchestrator of armament, *their* score
Written for a timpani of artillery,
A cacophony of cannon
Fodder. The Score, barely kept.⁴

Pacem 1937

Few note nor long remember
Past a score of years. But
After his music fell
Silent, but as ideology shook,
Sympathetic memory reverberated

Then came to attention as
The stage was set again.⁵
The composer with the poet's heart⁶
In rotary rhythm
Moved himself and a generation

Stanza to stanza toward an idea. He penned
And penned 'til his tears ran dry,
While Brass warmed by degrees
For a reprise of the same worn tune:
“Even the score”.

The powers that be moved
In a thrombosis of political lockstep;
His response: thunderous trombones
A choir in potent harmonious discord
Beautiful ominous sorrowful words
Tremulous frightening trenchant⁷ healing music.

¹Poet Walt Whitman was 42 when the American Civil War broke out. Though he was against slavery and for free soil states, he was even more against war, so he chose to volunteer in hospitals on both sides of the conflict. He wrote Leaves of Grass in 1885 and added to it throughout his lifetime. It became the 1891-92 “Death-bed” Edition with 697 pages.

²Ralph Vaughn Williams enlisted as an ambulance driver in WWI, also at age 42. War was declared in 1914, armistice signed in 1917, but there were continued confrontations in Eastern Europe, Balkans, and Romania through 1922. —The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End by Robert Gerwarth, 1964, 2016. ISBN 0374282455.

The war was a profound disillusionment to those who thought to find something noble or heroic in personal combat. What they found instead was a use of technology whose sole purpose was mass killing: the manufacture of poison gas, aerial surveillance, distance bombardment (artillery, tanks, machine guns, flame throwers, mortars), and automatic weapons. We cannot congratulate ourselves for advancing so very far from WWI, can we?

—Inspired by Program Notes for Ralph Vaughan Williams: *Dona Nobis Pacem* by Michael Moore, Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia. Reprinted by permission for “A Concert for Peace” by the Wayzata Community Church, Chancel Choir and Friends with the Wayzata Symphony Orchestra, Sunday, 3/19/2017.

³Vaughn Williams served the injured because he didn't want to shoot a gun. The strategies he used for efficiency & safety caused his "promotion" as an artillery officer. That moral wounding blocked musical composing for years to come.

⁴An estimated 8.5 million people were killed, but no country has absolutely exact figures.

⁵William's symphonic and choral work “*Dona Nobis Pacem*” was composed in 1937 while Europe was surrounded by the rise of Nazism and Fascism, civil war in Spain and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. His opus was courageously meant as a clarion warning against war and a call toward peace.

⁶Vaughn Williams used Walt Whitman's poetry as well as scripture for his choral text.

⁷Trenchant: penetrating, keen, biting, deep feeling.

Dona Nobis Pacem

“Nation shall not lift up a sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war any more.
And nothing shall make them afraid,
Neither the sword go through their land.
Mercy and truth are met together;
Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Truth shall spring out of the earth,
And righteousness shall look down from heaven.
Open to me the gates of righteousness, I will go into them.
Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled
And let them hear, and say,
 It is the truth.

And it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues,
And they shall come and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them,
And they shall declare my glory among the nations...
Dona Nobis Pacem
 God grant us peace.

—Adapted from Micah 4:3, Leviticus 26:6, Psalm 118:19, Isaiah 43:9, Isaiah 66:18-22, and Luke 2:14.

Coming in Volume 2:

There will be at least 22 more personal veteran and vet-family stories in **Concerning War - Volume 2**. Here is the list of topics that will be covered:

Volume 2: Current Issues: Abroad & At Home 2015–Present

Section 1: Foreign Policy:

- 1.1 Sovereignty
- 1.2 Cold War
- 1.3 NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)
- 1.4 Ukraine/Crimea
- 1.5 Balkan War
- 1.6 North Korea
- 1.7 Terrorism & Ethnic Cleansing
- 1.8 Syria

Section 2: Domestic Policy:

- 2.1 Immigration
- 2.2 Right to Privacy
- 2.3 Native American Issues
- 2.4 African American Issues
- 2.5 Fake News
- 2.6 A Call to Prayer

Coming in Volume 3:

There will be still more personal veteran and vet-family stories in **Concerning War - Volume 3**. Here is the list of topics that will be covered:

Volume 3: Resources for Returning Vets and Their Families:

- 3.1 Relationships
- 3.2 PTSD
- 3.3 Moral Injury
- 3.4 Society
- 3.5 Suicide
- 3.6 Conscientious Objectors
- 3.7 Solutions
- 3.8 Devotions with One Vietnam Vet
- 3.9 Epilogue
- 3.10 Resources
- 3.11 Bibliography

