



The Quick and the Dead by Stephen Andrews. Show during offering

War and Peace

Roy Blake, Nov. 10, 2019

I've always felt a little uncomfortable during remembrance day services and i've never really understood why until recently. My father was a private soldier in WWII. He fought his way from North Africa, up through Italy and into France. He didn't die, lucky for me, and he didn't seem to be particularly traumatized. He was quietly proud of his war service, and I'm proud of him. Nonetheless, I always felt a little uncomfortable. I think it had something to do with this poem, which is always read at Canadian remembrance day services, and this one will be no exception. I'll let Leonard Cohen read it, his voice has more weight than mine.

World War I

Approximately 20 Million Dead



In Flanders Fields: The first two verses are fine, though a bit abstract. It's the third one that gets me. It's about WWI, which is generally considered not to be a battle for freedom and peace, but rather a clash of dying old empires. The peace treaty of WWI quite likely paved the way for WWII. So the last verse rankles, in its blatant attempt to rally the populace to a suspect cause. In fact, it was used in ads for war bonds.

John McRae died Jan. 28, 1918 of meningitis in a military hospital, age 45. He was a medical officer and major.

*"If ye break faith —
we shall not sleep"*



BUY VICTORY BONDS



Last February I was at the McMichael Gallery in Kleinberg. There I saw an exhibition called *Aftermath*, by Stephen Andrews. The film loop I showed during the offering, called *The Quick and The Dead*, was part of the exhibit. Also part of it was a reproduction of the manuscript of a poem, complete with crossing out and edits, by the British poet Wilfred Owen, who, like McCrae, served and died in WWI. Like him he survived a gas attack. It's a staple of British remembrance services, and has a very different feeling from our own WWI poem. The last line, *Dulce et Decorum est pro Patria Mori*, Latin for "It is sweet and proper to die for one's country", is from one of Horace's odes in which he tries to rally the troops to advance the Roman Empire. Read by Christopher Eccleston, who has a better voice for it than I do.

Owen, a second lieutenant, was killed in combat on Nov. 4, 1918, age 25. He was posthumously promoted to Lieutenant and awarded the Military Cross. Benjamin Britten incorporated eight of his poems in his *War Requiem*.

Welland War Memorial



I think most Unitarians share this disgust with war and those who promote it. We've seen an almost endless series of wars since the War to End War. The Welland memorial to the First World War was dedicated one day after the start of WWII. It lists the names of the dead in both wars, but has run out of room for anything but the names of the wars after that. It's also one of the few memorials to show the suffering of the civilian population.

WWI 20 million dead

WWII 80 million dead

World War II

Approximately 80 Million Dead

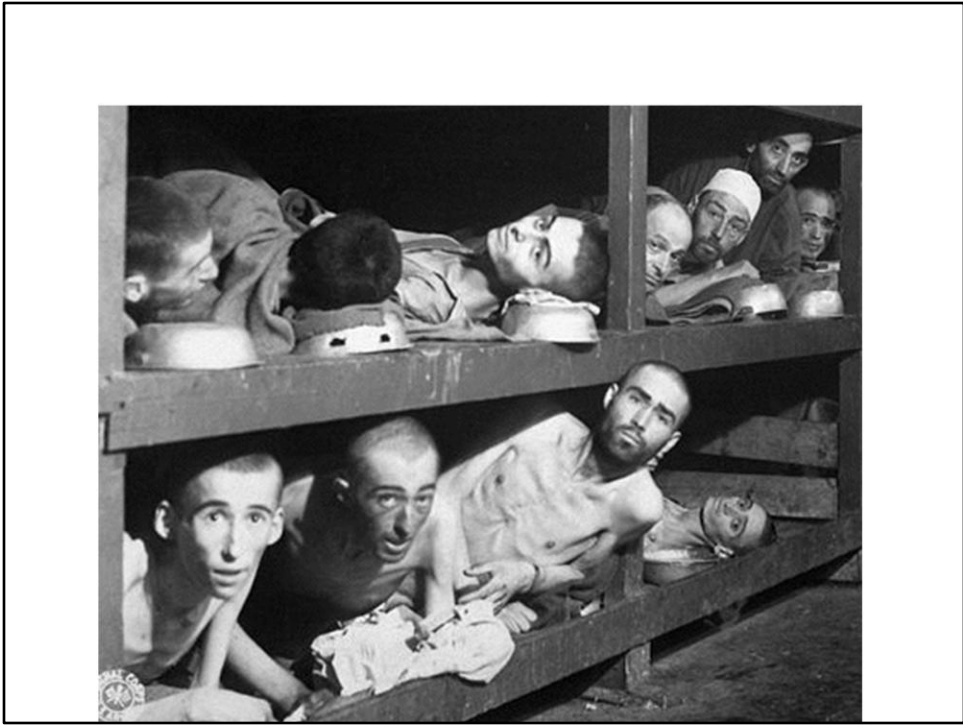


Hitler and the Nazis were so evil that from that time on, the ultimate insult toward anyone who's actions you dislike is to call them a Nazi. It's hard to see how, once the war started, there was any possible outcome but to fight and try as hard as possible to win. That's the war I remember through my Dad, and I think many of us are in a similar position.

Auschwitz



We all know and are sorry for our culture's failings. But the Nazis were NOT sorry for being racists, for favoring the strong over the weak, for wanting to invade others' countries. It seems that once WWII began it had to be fought and won.



London Blitz



I even have some sympathy for some of the horrors that our side inflicted. If I had lived through the blitz, I probably wouldn't have cared much about the civilians killed in the Dresden firestorm and perhaps not even for those killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Dresden Firestorm Aftermath



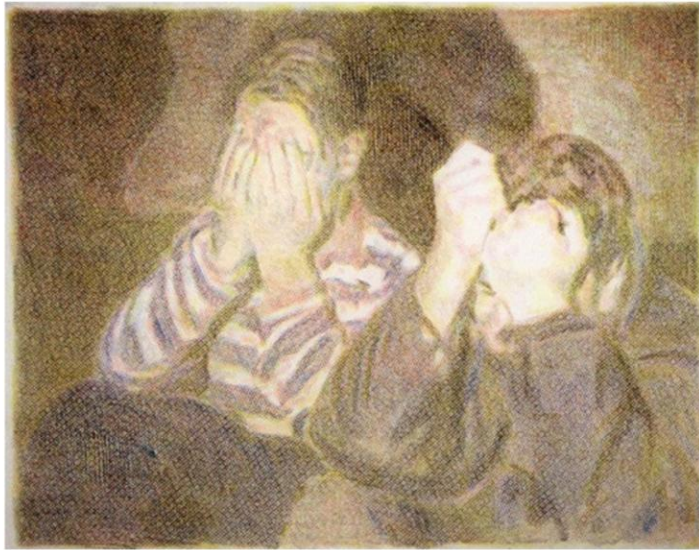
Dresden

Hiroshima after Atomic Bomb



So what can we do? Of course we lament war and remember the death and suffering and the heroism of those who fought. But what can we say about the wars that followed?

Aftermath



See stevenandrewsartist.com

At about this time in a typical remembrance day service we have a minute of silence. Instead, I'd like to do something I first experienced in the Jewish Passover seder. The leader reads, slowly, a list of the 10 plaques said to be visited on Egypt before the exodus. In some modern Reform versions, he or she also reads a list of 10 concentration camps from WWII. As this is the last day of Holocaust Education week, I'll follow the tradition but do something a little different, and read the names of 10 wars since WWII, with the approximate number of deaths in each. Some are ongoing, so the final toll is not known. And of course there are others.

Korea: 3 Million Dead



Vietnam: 3 Million Dead



Nigeria/Biafra: 1 Million Dead



Iran/Iraq 1.5 million Dead



Rwanda: 800,000 Dead



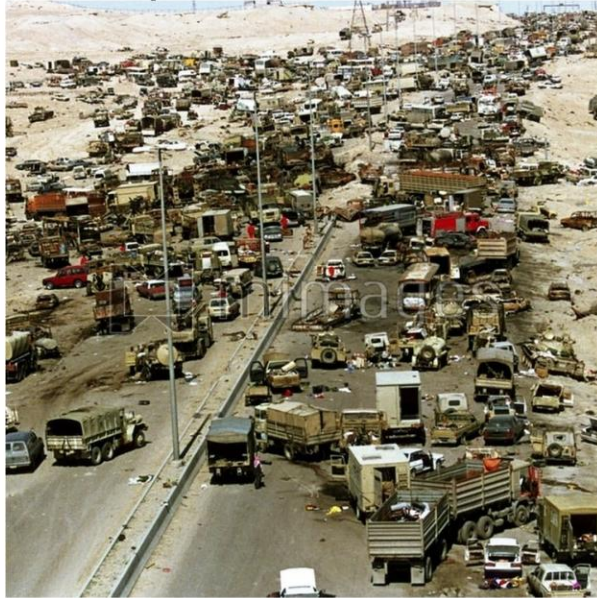
Former Yugoslavia: 140,000 Dead



Afghanistan: 120,000 Dead



Iraq: 200,000 Dead



Syria: 500,000 Dead



Yemen: at least 100,000 dead



Yemen--- especially noteworthy for its use of Canadian light armoured vehicles supplied to Saudi Arabia. Surely one practical thing Canada could do to help end war is to stop selling weapons to the combatants. The usual argument against this – if we don't do it someone else will – is about the weakest argument possible.

What Question Does War Answer?

- We'd like it to tell us
 - Which side has right and justice on its side.
- What it really tells us:
 - Which side has the better-trained army
 - Which side has the bigger economy
 - Which side has the larger population
 - Which side has devoted more resources to war preparation

I mentioned that I'm happy that we won in WWII. But why did we win. I don't think it was because we had right and justice on our side, though in my opinion we did, but because our side had a bigger population base and more resources. And I wonder what would have happened had the Soviet Union remained allied with Germany and had the United States not entered the war.

The Love of War

- Nazism and similar ideologies glorify war.
- Seen as a test of civilizations
- Extreme nationalism requires conflict to prove one's nation is best.
- "Social Darwinism" claims that war refines civilizations and improves them:
 - It has nothing to do with anything Darwin actually said.

The Glory of War

- We all love war stories.
- We all love rooting for the underdog and for heroes.
- We didn't get to the top of the food chain by being non-violent.
 - But now that we are there we can't afford violence to each other and to nature.
- We each have to curb our violent nature.
 - Or shift it to competition in sports, etc.
 - Our army can be used for peacekeeping.

Buffy St.-Marie's song emphasizes our individual responsibility, especially in democracies.

“Just War”

- Idea began in ancient times, formalized by the Catholic church (especially St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas)
 - Rules for engaging in war and fighting war
- Modern version found in international law definitions of war crimes, prohibited weapons.
- Very hard to enforce and in some ways beside the point
 - All wars have atrocities on both sides, the object has to be to prevent war.

I'm not sure I want to take direction on humanity from the folks who gave us the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition.

Pacifist Approaches

- Quaker Peace Testimony (1661):
 - *We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world.*
- Non-violent action (e.g. Gandhi) doesn't aim to prevent conflict, just violence.
 - Gandhi's non-violent achievement of independence led to between 1 and 2 million deaths during partition.

Remembrance

- Continue to honour soldiers for their courage.
- Remember the civilians who suffer and die.
- Remember the medics, providers of food, helpers of refugees, and others who help ease the suffering
- Remember the peacekeepers, negotiators, treaty inspectors who work for peace without any glory.
- Remember the horror of war and work toward peace.